Negotiating Learning in Distance and Flexible Learning at the University of the South Pacific

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Abstract

Negotiating Learning in Distance and Flexible Learning at the University of the South Pacific

This is a thesis that presents a qualitative mixed method study of 30 students engaged in distance and flexible learning (DFL) courses of study across two campuses of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. The goals of this research were to develop an account of the personal and cultural learning practices that students draw on and use when negotiating learning in their University studies and to understand the ways that University courses including teaching and learning interactions and course materials contribute to student learning and success. At the centre of this study is the concept of learning as negotiated practice.

Data sources included a questionnaire with semi-structured and open-ended questions. Data collection and analysis was guided by the construct of third space theory (Guitierrez, 1999), which provided a frame for considering students’ DFL experiences as acts of negotiation that are situated in nested socio-cultural and socio-historical contexts. Two descriptive campus cases of learning are presented, one for each of the Lautoka and Labasa campuses. Within each case, data from a student group provides background to in-depth learning stories for focus of students at each campus.

Given the socio-cultural, economical, political and the geographical difficulties that DFL students face this study shows that they also face constraints within the University learning contexts that impact the way they construct meaning from their learning experiences. This study draws attention to the need for teaching and learning in DFL that is learner focused and learner centred and that acknowledges learning as a social and cultural undertaking which is constructed as students draw on personal funds of knowledge to navigate unfamiliar terrain.

Findings suggest that universities offering DFL courses would benefit students if the environments for learning constructed in DFL courses were developed in such a way that
provides students with opportunities to draw on their unofficial personal and cultural resources in ways that enhance their ability to learn in the official world of University study. Third space theory is utilised to develop explanations of learning in DFL as a mediated act of negotiation between these official and unofficial spaces that learners inhabit. In the process of engaging and negotiating learning between the DFL learner’s two spaces, a third space or hybrid space is created. This space represents the negotiated solution to solving learning problems.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

...................................

Ledua Meke Kailawadoko-Waqailiti

20\textsuperscript{th} August, 2010
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father the late Viliame Titoko Kailawadoko and my mother the late Kuini Tawavuki Kailawadoko who have shaped my life and inspired me to pursue the best that I can do in this life and to serve God and family for that was their goal in life.

They often used to say:

“Mo qarava na Kalou ena yalodina, nanuma na vetwekani, dou veilomani vakaveitacini ka dou vuli ka cakacaka vagumatua. Dou vakavulici ira na luvemudou enai vakavuvuli oqo.”

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, acknowledge your families both far and near, love one another with brotherly love, work diligently and learn to do more than you can as best as you can. Be sure to pass this on to your children and their generations to come.
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First and foremost I acknowledge the Almighty God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for their blessings upon me that has enabled me to pursue a dream that I never dreamt would eventuate. All Praise and Glory and Honour are His!

I wish to acknowledge Griffith University for offering me the scholarships GUIPRS & GUPRS that have facilitated my PhD studies in the years undertaken for this journey. I offer my sincere gratitude to Dr. Maxine Cooper and Dr. Elizabeth Hirst who initially prepared me for this long and arduous journey. I especially acknowledge Dr. Elizabeth Hirst for the success I had in my Confirmation and in her constant belief that I could follow a dream and reach my destination as an international student in a competitive academic world within Australia. Her goodwill and kindness is what I draw on during upheavals on this journey. I am also thankful to Dr. Annette Woods, and Professor Donna Pendergast for their kind advice and suggestions along the journey.

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Introduction to the Research Study

Introduction
This study explores the academic learning practices of Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL) students at the University of the South Pacific (USP) and it investigates how the students negotiated learning in their distance education studies. It examines DFL students’ contexts, and how they drew on a variety of resources within their social, cultural, political contexts to negotiate how and what they learned. Much of this exploration involved contexts of DFL students’ environments, their spaces and how context and space influenced students’ academic learning practices in distance education studies. This study looked at the spaces created in the context of a DFL students’ environment of learning. It looked at the DFL students’ first, second and third spaces and examined how and what the students drew on to make meaning of the materials of learning used in their distance studies. In exploring the DFL students’ spaces I use Gutierrez’s third space theory and examine how and what students did when they tried to make meaning of the materials of learning used in the DFL courses they enrolled in at the University of the South Pacific.

In understanding the students’ contexts of learning, I also draw on Bronfenbrenners’ theory of ecological systems to demonstrate the importance of the teaching & learning contexts, the institutional context of the University of the South Pacific and the wider Pacific context. Each context is constituted within the micro-system, meso-system and macro-system, which Bronfenbrenner used in his ecological systems theory. I expand the use of his theory beyond childhood to adult learners in tertiary institutions in the Pacific context.

Learning is significant in this study. Walden (2009) stated that it opened doors to infinite possibilities for individuals and for societies. Walden’s address in a magazine article said, “Learning is the key to personal fulfilment and empowerment, and the foundation on which sustainable, just and peaceful communities are built” (p. 1). Learning has emerged as one of the key concepts to the twenty first century in meeting the challenges posed by a world that is rapidly changing and emphasising the need for people to be educated in order to deal with new situations arising in their personal and working lives (Delors, n.d.,
In doing so, Delor et al.,(n.d.) report that this need has continued to grow, and the only way of satisfying it is for individuals to “learn how to learn” (p.20).

On a local level, it is hoped that this study will offer insights into the ways in which Fijian students engage with DFL in meaningful ways and it will provide new information about the role of learning practices within this Pacific DFL context. It should inform education stakeholders, Fijian policy makers, course writers or course convenors, course designers and those who are responsible for providing the academic content of the course(s), lecturers, tutors and students to provide a reflective lens through which to view the impact of different roles and identities that learners bring to learning in distance and flexible learning mode. When considering materials for learning, there are important questions to be answered. For example, how do students’ process, interpret and understand the meaning(s) conveyed by these materials? Likewise, what do they do with the information they gather from their readings? Are there sociological, cultural, environmental, political, historical, economic or religious influences that impact how students negotiate meanings in the print-based materials they use for learning? Those responsible must ensure that the course contents are written in ways comprehensible for DFL students to follow.

An understanding of the socially mediated and mediating role of these materials is critical in understanding the nature of learning that takes place for DFL students. This research contributes to the collective research base on DFL in developing countries and adds further information to the field of DFL in general. As mentioned earlier, learning and how it occurs is a significant focus of this research. To date, theories of distance education have drawn on a range of theoretical perspectives on learning, which largely emphasise how individual behaviour may be externally shaped or influenced. These are discussed in the ensuing chapters.

My aim as a scholar was to extend the theoretical bases for understanding DFL modes by drawing on socio-cultural theories of learning in general and on third space theory (Gutierrez, 2008, 2003, 2001, 2000), in particular to examine learning in DFL as socially, politically and historically situated and to view the learning that developed as the result of a complex negotiation of meaning. Taking this view would extend current academic
discussions of DFL as I have described in an attempt to explain the complex academic learning practices associated with DFL and its learning environment.

**Overview of the Chapters**

This thesis has been organised into eight chapters which are outlined below:

Chapter One provides a description of the social and historical context of education in Fiji and the wider Pacific and the significant role they play in the education of Pacific peoples. It describes the geographical location and extremities of the physical environments that have had an enormous impact on the DFL learning environment. The historical background of the educational context of the Pacific region plays a significant role in the education of Pacific Islanders as they are reflected in the students’ practices in distance studies. These are discussed to illustrate the consequential effects it has had on the education of the peoples of the region. Linguistic variations in the Pacific region are also presented for readers to understand the wide range of languages that DFL learners use in their everyday and professional lives. On the one hand, they use their mother tongue or vernacular in everyday settings, and on the other hand, they use English for learning in academic settings. In essence, DFL students use English as a second language for distance study, which is often puts a limitation on their studies. This chapter concludes with an examination of DFL operations at USP and related strategies that the university uses in DFL teaching and learning.

Chapter Two focuses attention on distance education and distance and flexible learning context beginning with the history, growth and development in the Pacific region. This is followed by the impact of distance learning in the region and on a global scale, while also emphasising the importance of partnerships in distance education at international levels and the advantages this brings to DFL students. Finally, previous research on DFL is examined drawing a number of research findings together that reflect learning theories and practices conducive to learning in DFL mode and representing previous conceptualisations of learning in DFL. These are expanded in the next chapter.

Chapter Three presents various theories of learning from the behaviourist, cognitivist, constructivist and beyond to modern day theories learning that have emerged during these
last few decades. These theories have laid the basis of much of the principles of distance education. The behaviourist and cognitivist theories are still important in theories of learning today but on a lesser scale than the constructivist’s approach to learning, which is commonly used by many educational researches now. I draw from the constructivist’s models as well as the ecological approach as a basis for this research. As a result, I have also developed a theory of learning based on the constructivist and ecological theories using the third space as a method for analysing data for this research. This is further elaborated in Chapter Four of this thesis paper.

Chapter Four examines the contribution of the third space theory and describes its potential utility in exploring how students think and learn in DFL studies. The third space is what students draw upon to negotiate meaning between the personal (first space) and official spaces (second space). Their third space is created from their historical backgrounds, early experiences in education, linguistic knowledge, financial resources, school locations and school types, status, religion and media knowledge and many other experiences which students draw on to enable them to negotiate meanings in the materials of learning they use in distance and flexible Learning (DFL). This theoretical perspective adds a new way of understanding the complexities of human learning in socially mediated contexts like DFL.

Chapter Five presents the methodological design of the study I undertook in two distance learning campuses in Fiji. I begin with the overview of these research procedures, linking them to my theoretical frame before outlining my research questions from which emerge students’ responses to learning practices in distance and flexible learning (DFL) mode. Methodological concerns are discussed examining the students’ practices in distance and flexible learning studies and the networks of interactions imbedded in the variety of contexts of learning that affect the learning styles of DFL students. I consider third space as a methodological approach for this research, as I believe it is the appropriate means to investigate the key questions of this thesis. This approach is in no way to prove facts or to make generalizations but rather, to provide a another methodology, perhaps a stronger and effective one, that will uncover the relations that bind learning to the networks of practices that DFL students bring into the way they negotiate learning through print-based materials they use for DFL studies. My aim is to identify the hybrid space created
between the students’ varieties of contexts and the institutional contexts and how this hybrid space enables students to engage in meaningful learning using the print-based materials for learning, or course materials, as the term I have in this chapter.

Included in this chapter are research practices that consider both ethical issues in academic and cultural contexts. I have discussed the rationale for the design of the study, the strategies used for sampling are described and participants’ credentials are presented. This chapter addresses issues of the time frame of data collection and a description of the two campuses of the University of the South Pacific in Fiji where data was collected. Problems associated with the observation and conduction of data collection is also highlighted with summaries of the findings from the data analysis that are examined in the next chapter.

Chapter Six and Chapter Seven draw primarily on data from the interview and field notes collected from DFL students during the research study. The summaries of the findings are analysed and discussed in further detail here in the light of DFL and its nested contexts and the third space.

Chapter Eight concludes with a summary of the main findings and places this research contribution in theoretical context. The study of distance education is important theoretically because it seeks to understand, explain and apply principles with the view to facilitate and improve academic learning practices in distance education or flexible learning. This is the essence of researches of this nature. A third space theoretical approach to distance and flexible learning can contribute to the many gaps in literature on learning in distance education and it is one of the many approaches to understanding learning in social context and understanding students’ practices and how they use them to negotiate meaningful learning in DFL. This chapter also proposes some recommendations for Distance and Flexible Learning both globally and locally and ends with a conclusion to this thesis paper. It is crucial for distance education to be designed to meet the needs and requirements of all students studying through the distance and flexible mode and it is hoped that these recommendations will contribute to enhancing students learning at university.
Chapter One: Understanding the Pacific Context

1.0 Research Focus

The focus of this research is the investigation of students’ Distance and Flexible Learning practices that underpin and emerge from a university’s DFL programmes. The study builds on previous research, which suggests that programmes of learning that are challenged in terms of learning resources such as in libraries, tutorial support, technology, and social amenities struggle to achieve their goals. Such support services and infrastructure are crucial to modern-day distance education (Guthrie, 2008) as they impact on students’ learning practices and shape the way individuals negotiate meaningful learning that will enable their progress and betterment in studying via the distance and flexible learning mode (Holmberg, 1995b). This study is an attempt to discover how challenged systems and environments impact on student learning and how students support themselves in the process of learning. Central to this work is a desire to understand the variations in learning practices that distance and flexible learning (DFL) students deploy to enable them to understand, interpret and negotiate the meaning of the course materials they use in their studies.

The students who are participants in this study came from a range of locations in Fiji and had different backgrounds, goals and access to resources. As such, it might be expected that their learning practices and those that they developed would be the result of a complex meshing involving the distance learning materials, learning environments and their existing learning practices. In the course of engaging in the DFL courses, each student was expected to negotiate their own learning via their own learning practices, to integrate and reconstruct a unique skill set and body of knowledge (Rogoff, 1998). In such a study, crucial questions emerged about how students process information from course materials and how they interpret and understand the meaning(s) conveyed. Further, it might ask what information they acquired, how they used it in the course and to what extent were they critically engaged in challenging or contesting the knowledge presented. There is no doubt that sociological, cultural, environmental, political, historical, economical or religious implications existed for how students negotiated
meanings in the print-based materials they used for learning. These are questions that are addressed in the remainder of this chapter.

While globally there has been an explosion in the range and number of distance education courses (particularly technologically mediated) of study, there has been a surprising dearth of research into the role of learning and literacy in distance education (Mathewson & Va’a, 1999; Manghubhai, 1997; Louden, 1999). This study highlights a number of issues that will be of interest to researchers in this field and fills some gaps in our understanding of how learning practices in DFL environments reflect and construct student learning. Previous research in distance education has frequently been centred on evaluation rather than research; and in recent times the focus has been on technologies and their effects on distance education. Lockee & Burton (2001) stated that distance education was based on comparing different types of media-based instruction, e.g. film or television, or comparing mediated instruction to teacher-presented instruction or lecture to determine the best methodology. According to them, these studies became known as the media comparison studies, which justified the uniqueness of each medium rather than researching how these media affected learning or attended to the learners’ needs.

Much of the research conducted in recent years focuses on the quality of distance education by assessing the effectiveness of the methods or approaches used in distance education. Lockee et al (2001) were of the view that there was a need for more, “research involving theories and constructs to inform practice instead of research that are concerned with evaluation that seek to determine if a product or program was successfully developed and implemented according to its stakeholder’s needs” (p.62). This study supports their view that it is important for research to move away from making comparisons or evaluating the effectiveness of a product to placing more emphasis on the “content to be learned and the role of the learner and the effectiveness of instructional design decisions rather than on the instructional quality of a specific medium” (p62.) This research places more emphasis on the role of the learner studying through distance and flexible learning, focusing on the content of the course materials or print-based materials that students use and what and how these materials inform the learner.

This study has arisen from my personal interest in distance and flexible learning (DFL), which commenced when I was employed as a part-time tutor at the University of the
South Pacific (USP) in the 1990s. At that time, I was tutoring two classes: one was a class for second and third year bachelor of education students and the other was a class of first-year students undertaking an English course, which was a core course and a prerequisite for students beginning a degree at the university. This interest in DFL students continued through the early years of the new millennium as I tutored undergraduate students in English for Academic Purposes (LL114). Daily interactions, observations and conversations with DFL students, within and outside the university premises, highlighted the strengths and weaknesses that this mode of learning provided. For example, students living near the campus had an advantage over the students living in remote distances because the remote students did not have the same access to the library and information and technological services (IT) as urban students. Some students in remote areas had access to the library and IT at the weekends but only when they would travel down to town to study. The effects of rural living on access to technology were not a new experience. Prior to working at the university, I was employed as a curriculum officer with the Fijian Ministry of Education for five years. Having been born and bred in the city I was unaware of the difficulties that rural living presented. As I travelled the country, I was confronted by the harsh realities of living in rural areas.

Poor libraries and infrastructure in some schools, irregular transport services, lack of services such as electricity, water and sewerage all contributed to under-development in the region and affected students’ access to the benefits of education. Access to facilities however, was only one of the many problems students faced. Another major problem commonly encountered was the lack of familiarity staff and students had with the internet in the learning environment, particularly the low level, or lack of, technical knowledge involved with its use. Gold & Swann (2002) endorses this in the following statement, “A final reality at USP is the relative inexperience of the distance education staff when it comes to technology” (p.3).
Under such enormous challenges and difficulties, it is evident that DFL has many constraints and consequently there is a critical need to develop educational strategies in distance teaching and learning that will constantly engage students in print-based materials. If DFL is to work effectively for people in all areas, then certain factors need to be addressed, factors that are not only limited to learner characteristics, media attributes, instructional strategies and psychological theories (Lockee, et al, 2001), but factors that acknowledge the students’ social contexts.

This experience and the questions that it raised stimulated an interest in undertaking this research and to apply the findings to make a difference in the field of distance education in Fiji. As this research has been conducted by a Fijian, it role models to the Fijian people that they can make a difference in whatever field they work in. In this way, Fijians are building a better nation for ourselves and the generations that follow.

Holmberg (2000) stated that there is a great need for fact finding about international education and to do this it is important to know the factual background of these communities before being able to relate value judgements, traditions and practice to one another. Chand (2007) further suggested the need for future research to focus on distance learners and “to acquire a better understanding of learner’s strategy use and skills awareness” (p. 16).

The essence of this research was to observe how, why and what distance learners do within the factual backgrounds of their communities that assisted them in using and negotiating meaning from the mediated text. The how, why and what they drew upon in this process of learning is what this research study terms the third space. This third space is basis of this research study in distance education, it is the focus of the discussion in my thesis and is the contribution the research makes to the gaps in the current literature. The outcome of this research is important in developing an understanding of the distance learner’s learning practices and therefore, it will elucidate how teaching and learning strategies in distance education could be developed to foster meaningful teaching and learning to enhance the education access of Pacific people.
The following sections outline the Pacific context in terms of geography, the people and their languages. Central to understanding teaching and learning and the associated practices within the University of the South Pacific, is understanding the communities of which it is composed.

1.1 Pacific Context

Knowledge and an understanding of the context of the Pacific and the vast distances between islands within the region will recognise the problems and realities of distance education in the region. According to Schrum and Ohler (as cited in Fouche, 2006, p. 61) “…distance education represented a way of communicating with geographically dispersed individuals and groups…” The expansive ocean with islands far from one another even within each island state, reveal the extreme isolation that most DFL students experience in the Pacific, consequently distance education is the most practical and feasible way of accessing and communicating learning in this vast oceanic region.

1.1.1 Geography of the Pacific Region

Ethnologists classified the islands of the Pacific region into three broad cultural groups: Polynesians, Micronesians and Melanesians. Each group consisted of islanders with a unique culture and traditions that are distinctively identified according to their physical features (Miller & Ahkiong, 1992). Map 1.1 shows the ethnic divisions of the Pacific Island countries.
Map 1.1: The Pacific Region

Geologically, the Pacific Islands are volcanic or made of limestone and coral atolls (Miller et al, 1992). The smaller coral island soils are the least mature and are deficient in organic materials and low in fertility. However, the region has an abundance of marine life that is infinitely valuable for human subsistence (Britannica, 2008). This rich marine environment provides subsistence living for most of the islanders and is a source of revenue for the people and the governments. Many of the larger islands are volcanic-
based, but the smaller islands are low coral islands and/or atolls. The limitation of the islands’ ecosystem makes it probable that any change, whether developmental, political, social or economical, will have profound effects on the ecosystem and the islanders.

Most Pacific Island states are developing states and present much cultural, linguistic, environmental and historical diversity (Thaman, 2002; Mugler & Landbeck, 1997, 2000). Recently, these small Pacific Island states have been adversely affected by a series of unprecedented hurricanes, political turmoil, economic disasters and the constant rural-urban migration and the flight of human capital that is affecting the progress and development of these small developing countries. Island states are fragmented with many small islands and populations spread over vast expanses of ocean, which create problems of communication and integration. The entire region is isolated and outlying islands face high transport costs and infrequent services. The region is characterised by small populations, limited land areas and resource bases, features that have been largely dominant in the Pacific region (Overton, 1994). However, many of these countries have attained independent nationhood.

Many Pacific Island nations face serious development problems, and there are predictions of disaster for the region by the year 2010 if present trends continue (Wesley-Smith, 1995). This situation is by no means unique to the Pacific. Since World War II, despite massive international efforts to foster development in the region, conditions for third-world countries have deteriorated for most of its inhabitants, and the gap between their living standards and those of the inhabitants of the industrialised world continues to widen. The way forward for many Pacific Island states is the education of its population. This would be a positive strategy for the future development and progress of the Pacific Island states.

1.1.2 Pacific Languages

Apart from geographical difficulties, linguistic diversity is also a challenge in the region. Language variation in the Pacific region is a barrier that continuously challenges distance and flexible learning students. The languages of the islands (with some exceptions) belong to a large category, which linguists call Austronesian. Scientists now believe that the Austronesian languages were originally carried to the Pacific Islands through south-
east Asia, as a consequence of the expanding agricultural population from south China and Taiwan into south-east Asia and on to the Pacific, influencing regions that were either empty, or sparsely inhabited by foraging people (Morris, 1993). The islands have a host of indigenous languages many of which are found in Melanesia. These languages were part of the Oceanic languages of the Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian) family, one of the largest language families in the world, in terms of the number of languages and in terms of its geographical extent (Lotherington, 1998; NVTC, 2007). The Malayo-Polynesian language classification has 1239 languages with the Oceanic language numbering 706 different languages, which does not include dialects (NVTC, 2007). The multicultural region of the University of the South Pacific represents 60 cultures and 235 languages (Chand, 2007).

This enormous heterogeneity among the Pacific Islanders has many prolific advantages yet it is not without challenges. It is a unique region known for its language diversities and multicultural environment. Morris (1993) described the region as islands that are “… flung like pebbles over one third of the world’s surface” (p.197) and futurists predict that in the coming decades the region will be “… characterised by a shift in orientation away from the Atlantic toward the Pacific” (p.197). To date, the powerful nations of the world have focused on the Pacific with a particular interest in its marine environment and its economical viability.

1.1.3 Developments of Secondary and Post-Secondary Education in the Pacific

Geographical barriers, linguistic diversity and a historical perspective of the Pacific have had significant effects on the education of the Pacific people. The history of education in the region, initially, had been a history of missionary endeavour and only in the recent decades have governments and committees been providers of primary and secondary schools. The early missionaries were intent on introducing education to the small island states of the Pacific Islands as an integral part of their evangelical mission (Mangubhai, 1997; Lotherington, 1998). Throughout the first half of the 19th century missionaries moved across the Pacific executing mission-based education creating literacy traditions and educational affiliations that exist today. The church did indeed play a pivotal role in the education of Pacific islanders from the 19th century onwards.
The early Christian missionary work was connected to colonial expansion in many ways. Marxist thinkers would say that it was a form of religious-political activity expressing itself in the conversion of people of other faiths (Gunson, 1969). Colonisers on the other hand would see missionary activity as “… one of the means of establishing and strengthening the colonial system.” (Gunson, 1969, p. 255). As far as the British were concerned the missionary movement “…was in part an expression of a far wider development – the social emancipation of the under-privileged class.” (Warren, 1967, p. 37). Others like Lowrie (as cited in Gunson, 1969, p. 277) have described these missionaries as “… smotherers of local indigenous cultures” and “…as forerunners of imperialism working in cahoots with colonisers.” (Warren, 1967; Neill, 1966). The evangelists saw it as a means of discarding social atrocities (in Fiji it was cannibalism) and customs for a servile, humble and less pagan religious system that was exemplified by the new religion: Christianity. The fact remains that missionaries introduced the concept of learning (as in the western concept) into Pacific societies and began educating people at the same time as they evangelised people.

Education was conceived in those earlier days as social services, which would enable the territories, as most of these island regions were called at that time, to be supported by their own resources as well as from subsidies donated by metropolitan countries. Education was seen as significantly affecting the social, political and economic life of the Pacific Island societies (Morris, Aitken, Collins, Hughe & Christie, 1966) and was the key to success in these small island states. Educational needs of all young and adult learners needed to be catered for to enable them to develop learning and life skills suitable for primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Educational providers need to ensure that developing countries such as those in the Pacific Islands have greater access to education. Aderinoye & Ojokheta (2004) believe that education is a tool that people can use to achieve greater levels of knowledge acquisition, which is the key to greater educational development that will enhance peoples’ individual capabilities for human growth.
Aid donors should have a wider knowledge of the needs of educational institutions serving the region and guarantee support for the education of Pacific people. Infrastructure, technology and manpower are greatly desired in the region and will enhance distance education. Distance education, therefore might be seen by many as the most appropriate and feasible mode of learning in the islands scattered across the vast Pacific Ocean. Distance educators play a major role in developing flexible programs for prospective students who come from a variety of backgrounds, contexts and geographical locations (Kirkwood & Price, 2006). To this day, many students in the Pacific aspire to attend the University of the South Pacific (USP) via Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL), having left high school on their islands to enrol at USP. Many enrol because DFL has become the most convenient way to access tertiary education for many Pacific Island students. It is certainly a need as endorsed by Deo & Nabobo (2003), “DFL is a necessity for a region so geographically dispersed and relatively economically poor” (p.2).

Most Pacific Island students are multi-lingual or bi-lingual and are second language learners and speakers of English and have not been properly prepared for tertiary education. English is the medium of communication in all Pacific Island states and is used at the University of the South Pacific and, as many other universities around the world, university students are required to have basic competencies in reading and writing skills before enrolling in any academic subject at the university. This is a challenge that many Pacific Island students face in distance education. Most individual academic subjects cover reading and writing tasks, which are often an enigma to DFL students in remote areas where the print-based materials for learning are exclusively used.

The last decade has witnessed an enormous expansion in distance language learning opportunities, and the accelerating developments in information and communication technology have been phenomenal (White, 2003). Societal changes have also eventuated with an increased awareness of, and demand for, distance education. More traditional forms of distance learning that used print, audio and video materials are being supplemented by online, e-learning and the new technologies in education (White, 2003). The fourteen campuses of USP are fortunate to make these new technological provisions for its DFL students. However, availability of these services is only linked to the urban capitals or towns of each island state.
A greater number of DFL students still live in remote areas where accessibility to new technologies is impractical and the print-based materials are the only mediated text for learning. The self-study, print-based package is the core component of the DFL materials that USP students use. The same package is used by on-campus face-to-face students at USP. The package comprises: the course materials or course book that contain the essential contents of the course; the course study guide or Introduction and Assignment (I and A) book as it is called at USP; and the reader that contains readings relevant to the topics covered in the course: these are are not provided for all courses. Students buy their own textbooks or they may borrow them. DFL students in remote areas often cannot afford the textbooks and getting a book on loan is a waste of effort and money as poor transport and postal services inhibit the prompt delivery of these books. Many of these books arrive late into the semester or after the required time and students become despondent and drop out of the course.

Under these circumstances, there is an obligation for educators to recognise and identify the learning needs of DFL students in remote areas and re-examine the current practices in distance education to take into account learning and literacy practices that will enable DFL students to negotiate meaning in their learning materials. Related to learning with texts, Luke & Freebody (1999) outline the four aspects of literacy learning, arguing that readers and writers need proficiency in the social practices of literacy and as such, need to be able to have access to a repertoire of practices.

Academics and the professional communities in education emphasise learning skills in their specific domain of practice and, embedded in these academic learning practices, are literacy skills. There is not much known about the culture of literacy practices in most South Pacific countries, particularly in the small island states that the University of the South Pacific serves. Baskin (2000) stated that Australia has had a similar situation. In the higher education communities there is a general tendency for academic literacy to be seen at university levels in connection with basic literacy: that is, reading and writing, schooling, and education as a means to finding employment. These are often supported by institutional management and policies.
Most teaching staff at university and tertiary institutions expect that students who attend tertiary institutions will have some competency in the language and literacy skills required to be successful at university before enrolling in tertiary studies (Kessell, 1997; Soontiens, 2004). Others believe that these skills must be developed and learned as part of tertiary study (Postle 1995, HEC 1992; Skillen & Mahony, 1997; Henderson & Hirst, 2006). The kind of support that is available to students in universities tends to favour the skills-based approach (Henderson & Hirst, 2006) and it still continues to be dominant.

1.1.4 Island Communities in the Pacific Context

The University of the South Pacific (USP) is a regional educational institution currently serving twelve member countries that form the Pacific Island states (Deo & Phan, 2006). It comprises the Marshall Islands, Kiribati and Nauru that form the Micronesian ethnic group in the north, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Western Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tonga that form the Polynesian islands strewn along the central and eastern side of the region, and Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon islands, the three Melanesian islands scattered towards the western and south-western regions of the Pacific belt (USP, 2006). The member countries of the University of the South Pacific (USP) do not include all the Melanesian, Micronesian and Polynesian island states. The university region alone is spread across 33 million square kilometres of ocean, three times the size of Europe, but with a total land mass equal to the area of Denmark (USP, 2006). This is shown in Map 1.2 below. These island member states are scattered over an expansive ocean area across four time zones (Thaman, 1994b).
Distributed over the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean are scattered islands strewn from as far east as the Cook Islands to the most northern location, the Marshall Island state spreading in a westerly direction to the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and finally to Fiji and Tonga in the south. This is the expansive nature of USP’s physical environment with its diverse historical backgrounds.

### 1.2 Early Beginnings of the University of the South Pacific

In the early 1960s, colonial administrators had great foresight in perceiving the need for education in the Pacific island regions and initiated the provision of higher education in the South Pacific. In October of 1965, the recommendations of the British, New Zealand and Australian Governments were combined and which were then instrumental in establishing the higher educational institution of the University of the South Pacific (Morris et al, 1966). This Mission’s report expressed interest in the “… educational systems and institutions because they stimulated economic development just as they are
stimulated by it and these significantly affect social, political and economic life of societies from which they are drawn" (Morris et al., 1966, p. 11-12). This interest by the various states in the Pacific for a regional university came to fruition a few years later. With the growth in the number of students in secondary schools, there were no training centres or facilities available beyond this in most of these regional states. Developments began operating in a few Pacific Island states as described in the next section.

1.2.1 Post-Secondary Schools Situation in the Pacific

The Solomon Islands, which was earlier known as the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, had just begun secondary schooling in 1958 and by 1962, it had built a co-educational secondary school named King George VI School accommodating 240 boys and 240 girls and in 1967, the sixth-form course was introduced. A few students from New Hebrides (now known as Vanuatu) and Ocean Island were also enrolled at King George VI School (Morris et al, 1966). In 1964, Gilbert and Ellice Islands had two government schools with two aided secondary schools with an enrolment that totalled 326 students (191 boys and 135 girls). They had begun in 1959 with 119 boys and 28 girls and, as years passed the numbers increased. Some of the students were sent to King George VI School. In 1964, the School Certificate and General Certificate of Education (GCE) were introduced and a few students qualified for the General Certificate of Education (Morris et al, 1966).

In Vanuatu, secondary school students were sent to King George VI Secondary School in the Solomon Islands or to New Zealand and Australian secondary schools until its own secondary school was established. The Cook Islanders sought secondary education in New Zealand because Tereora College was the only secondary school on the island until 1963. Niue High School in Niue was established in 1956 and by 1967–1968, the student roll had also increased to approximately 190 pupils. Schooling in Nauru had developed to lower secondary school and the intermediate certificate was being provided by the University of Melbourne through a system of scholarship funds. Western Samoa enrolled 460 students in secondary schools with only 36 students in Form 6 studying at the Samoa College, the largest government secondary school in Samoa. Post-secondary school education was available to scholarship awardees and enabled them to study in New Zealand. With 43 schools in 1963, Fiji had the greatest number of pupils – 6,378 –
enrolled in secondary schools. Post-secondary education for Fijian students was in New Zealand, Australia or England. In Tonga, the church played a significant role in education at the secondary level and by 1964, 4337 students enrolled at secondary schools (Morris et al., 1966). The beginning of secondary education in the region was slow at first, but it improved as island states became more developed.

The mid-1960s saw educational development in secondary education that was potentially promising for these islands. However, there was nothing offered to cater for post-secondary education. At the same time there was growing need for qualified teachers to teach at higher levels of education. At the completion of secondary education, Pacific Island students would complete their post-secondary studies and teacher training in New Zealand, Australia or the United Kingdom (UK). A considerable number of students were sent overseas for further education and training by governments and missions who did so at their own expense. Those who travelled overseas to study faced many problems. The Higher Education Mission (HEM) to the South Pacific received evidence of social maladjustment among island students to life in the overseas countries. HEM also found that some of the courses and teaching were irrelevant to Pacific island students (Morris et al., 1966). This became a concern together with the lack of provision for adequate and appropriate educational needs of the South Pacific secondary school students.

1.2.2 The Establishment of USP

The development of any country at that time depended on its natural resources and trained manpower to produce and market the resources and to administer the country. Such manpower needs were vital for the Pacific countries. The establishment of a regional educational institution was needed to help meet the requirements of each of these islands. The expansive geographical entities of this region under different political systems and with different social environments had one commonality: the need for trained manpower in each of its state. The report that Morris et al. (1966) gave highlighted the following recommendation: “It is obvious that no institution that could be devised could possibly aim at supplying precisely and exactly all the very various needs of highly qualified manpower which the future of the region will in actual fact demand but it is clear that there is an educational and institutional problem here which urgently needs to be attacked” (Morris et al., 1966, p. 24).
In 1965, following the discussions in London between the representatives of the British and New Zealand Governments, it was agreed that a joint Mission — to which the Australian Government was to be invited — was to investigate the provision of higher education in the South Pacific. It was the proposal and recommendations of this Higher Education Mission to the South Pacific report that brought the University of the South Pacific to fruition. USP was then born out of the interest of eleven island states or nations namely: Fiji, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, Gilbert & Ellice Islands, New Hebrides, Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Tokelau Island, Tonga and Western Samoa expressing their wish for the establishment of a university in the region (USP, 1970). The collective voice of these small island states with the support of their colonial administrators was a significant factor in developing a regional university. It was the leadership and foresightedness of the British, New Zealand and Australian Governments at that time that offered the opportunity to establish a university in the region and which was seized by the island states.

The university was not formally established until 1970, and in the same year, the distance education program began and was initially called the Extension Services. The vast expanse of seas covering the Pacific area was a difficulty that educational providers had to contend with, and consequently the introduction of distance education in the region was seen as the most economical and feasible mode of learning for tertiary education.

The statistics shown in Table 1 clearly indicate the distances between the University of the South Pacific island region’s campuses and their isolation from one another, especially from the main headquarters at Laucala campus situated in Suva, the capital of Fiji. It was the geographical situation that at first made the realisation of a university in the region seem impossible, but the economic viability of the region was foreseen as a stimulus for economic and educational development in the region.
Table 1:1 - Facts about the USP Regional Campuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total Land Area (Km²)</th>
<th>Number of inhabited atolls/islands</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>18,272</td>
<td>100+ islands</td>
<td>797,800</td>
<td>Fijian Communalects, Hindi, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>12,200</td>
<td>83 islands</td>
<td>182,500</td>
<td>Numerous local languages, Bislama, English, French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>28,450</td>
<td>17 islands and several atolls</td>
<td>417,800</td>
<td>Numerous local languages, English, Pidgin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1 atoll</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>Nauruan, English, Yaren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marshall Islands</td>
<td>181.3</td>
<td>29 atolls</td>
<td>61,100</td>
<td>English, Marshallese, Many dialects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>32 atolls</td>
<td>85,100</td>
<td>I-Kiribati, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuvalu</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9 coral atolls</td>
<td>11,000</td>
<td>Tuvaluan, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokelau Island</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3 coral atolls</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>Tokelaun, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>236.7</td>
<td>15 islands</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>Maori dialects, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niue</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>1 coral island</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>Niuean, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>36 islands</td>
<td>98,000</td>
<td>Tongan, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>2,935</td>
<td>2 islands and 7 small islets</td>
<td>174,800</td>
<td>Samoan, English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When distance education was introduced in the late 1960s, many in the islands considered this an advanced undertaking for a promising future for the island states. Others thought it was an impossible task. In 1993, at the silver jubilee celebrations of the University of the South Pacific, the vice-chancellor of the university expressed the following sentiments:

*A university in the Pacific Islands could only have been idle conjecture.*
*Nowhere could it be justified economically, nor did the basic educational infrastructure exist in any country to sustain it. A regional university was no more feasible, except that there existed at that particular point in time the opportunity for united political will that would prove vitally necessary in the launching of such a university.* (Sofola, as cited in USP, 1993, p.3).

Indeed it was the political will of its inhabitants that brought the realisation and materialisation of the University of the South Pacific. As the University expanded, many centres of administration were established on each island state. The centres’ objectives were to service the students that were studying via distance education.

### 1.2.3 Operations of Distance and Flexible Learning

Distance education began at USP in the same year that the university was formally established. It began its operation as part of the School of Education and, in 1974, it became a semi-autonomous unit of the University (Lockwood, Williams & Roberts, 1988). In 1992, the Extension Services was renamed the University Extension in response to the recommendation of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) Report on Distance Education at the University of the South Pacific. The Extension Services was no longer seen as having a service or ancillary function, but as a partnership and means by which the university extended into the region to meet its regional educational commitments (USP, 1992).

It was conceived as a dual mode institution in that it offered face-to-face teaching programs to on-campus students and distance study to off-campus students (Lockwood et al, 1988; Landbeck & Mugler, 2000), but today USP is the premier provider of education in the region, offering courses in a variety of modes: face-to-face courses, internet courses, print-based courses, summer school, video, video broadcast and multimodal courses, all of which are also offered to the Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL)
students. Distance education began offering credit courses primarily for the Diploma in Education taken by in-service teachers in a number of USP member countries. It was based in USP's Department of Education in the then School of Education. Since its inception, the USP distance education program has expanded tremendously in the number of courses it offered and in student enrolments. DFL courses today are designed for independent study. Traditionally these courses had been print-based, sometimes incorporating other media e.g. audio or videotapes. The high quality of education offered through distance education in the last decade has generally been the result of new technologies in teaching and learning. The use of computers, video-conferencing, e-learning and other technological forms of learning have advanced distance education to a higher level, allowing students greater accessibility to education equivalent to that of students who are based on-campus. However, today a significant number of students studying through distance education at USP still use the print-based materials for learning.

1.2.4 USP Campuses

Approximately half of the university’s students choose to study by DFL within their own home countries (USP, 2007a). The vast geographical distances that USP serves make it impossible for all students to come to study at any one of its campuses. DFL is administered by the DFL Support Centre, which manages the administrative and academic operation of fourteen USP campuses. These campuses are responsible for the administrative and academic operations of USP courses in their island states. Some campuses have sub-centres, which are mainly used for tests and examinations and also as venues for enrolments and tutorials.

According to the USP website a satellite communications network, USPNet, is available to deliver tertiary education to students in the Pacific who would otherwise not be able to study using the face-to-face mode at Alafua, Emalus and Laucala campuses (USP, 2008c, 2006). Highly technological equipment has been introduced through the USPNET to the major campuses, yet communication between students and campuses or sub-centres continues to be a problem for many DFL students (USP, 2002a). High tech equipment is useful only to the DFL students who have access to the main campuses because power facilities are available only in the urban areas where most of the campuses are situated. Consequently, the vast majority of DFL students continue to depend on print-based
materials for learning. Although each campus, and the larger centres, have library facilities, they still lack appropriate resources. The smaller sub-centres do not have these amenities.

Traditionally DFL courses have been predominantly print-based and sometimes incorporating other media, e.g. audio and videotapes. Of late, more advanced communication technologies, through the USPNet, are accessible by DFL students at each campus. Almost all the campuses are now equipped with modern technology that provides satellite tutorials and video-conferencing classes. Courses are offered at many levels, enabling students to study for pre-degree studies — known as Preliminary and Foundation courses, degree, and post-graduate degrees. Sub-degree qualifications in vocational studies are offered through DFL and also Bachelor degrees and some postgraduate courses. During enrolment, students are issued course materials, which include an introduction and assignment (I and A) book that outlines the schedule of study during the semester and the assignment instructions and details for the particular semester. A study guide with weekly notes and tasks is included in the learning package and in some courses a reader with relevant readings is included.

Distance education is critical for small countries with a small population of learners (Jenkins, 1993) and is even more critical for the Pacific Island states that are dispersed and scattered over the Pacific Ocean. The University of the South Pacific (USP), being the premier institution of higher learning for the South Pacific region and the principal provider of education through distance education, has a unique role to play in promoting, enhancing and delivering education in the region. After leaving high school on their islands, many students aspire to study at the University of the South Pacific (USP) via Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL). Many enrol because distance education has become the alternative mode of accessing further education for many Pacific island students. Studying by distance and flexible learning (DFL) is ideal for these students because of the expansive geographical distances, cultural diversity, social, economic and political differences that necessitate this kind of learning in this region (Guthrie, Griffith & Maron, 2008). Many DFL students still live in remote areas where accessibility to new technologies is impractical and for them the print-based material for learning is the only possible mode of learning.
Since its inception in 1971, the university has offered distance education courses and at this time it served only eleven countries. Now it has extended its programs to twelve countries with fourteen campuses or small distance education centres (Jenkins, 1993). In the 1990’s there were a little over 160 courses altogether available through distance mode (Jenkins, 1993). Today the number has increased manifold: the 2007 DFL Handbook lists 396 courses on offer throughout the region (USP, 2007a), and approximately half of the university’s students choose to study by DFL within their own home countries. The expansive distances in the region are not viable for students to come to study at any one of its campuses that offers a multimodal system of learning comprised of face-to-face courses, internet courses, print-based courses, summer school, video, video broadcast and video conferencing and e-learning (Guthrie et al, 2008; USP, 2006). These modes are offered through DFL programs in the main campuses of all twelve regions of USP and have greatly benefitted students in tertiary education courses.

1.3 Distance and Flexible Learning at USP Today

As mentioned in earlier paragraphs, distance education studies at the University of the South Pacific (USP) have undergone a number of name changes and in 2006 it adopted the new name Distance and Flexible Learning (USP, 2006). It has since become a support services centre for the university’s distance education program.

1.3.1 Administration of Distance and Flexible Learning

Figure 1.1 illustrates the structure of Distance and Flexible Learning and the amalgamation of the three pre-existing university sections namely: the Distance and Flexible Learning Centre (DFLC); the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT); and the Continuing and Community Education (CCE) (USP, 2006) into what is now known as the Centre for Educational Development and Technology (CEDT). CEDT was created from the need to align the work of the Centre with university faculties and other university departments. The CEDT role was to “… turn the aspirations the University had for the Centre (improving student achievement and mainstreaming DFL) into a strategic and operational direction” (USP, 2007b, p. 303). The new CEDT promoted and facilitated excellence in teaching and learning in all delivery modes to the
staff and students of the university and meets the needs of communities in the region (USP, 2006).

Figure 1.1: Administrative Structure of Distance and Flexible Learning at USP

(Adapted from Lentell, 2007)

DFL offers a support services role in the operation of the fourteen USP campuses in the region. Regional countries have a main campus located in the populous areas and islands within the country. The smaller centres or sub-centres have been established as service centres for students who live in remote locations. There is a common infrastructure for the main campuses of the region, but the sub-centres do not have adequate facilities for DFL students in remote locations. Initially only a few courses were offered to DFL students in these locations, but this has increased in the last ten years. This increase in the number of courses offered has increased opportunities for students to access tertiary education in the new millennium, enabling students who would not have had a chance to attend face-to-face tertiary education access to further study.
1.3.2 Distance and Flexible Learning Modes at USP

A variety of distance learning modes are available to distance and flexible learning students at the University of the South Pacific. Face-to-face courses are offered at the university, but are limited depending on the availability of lecturers, from any of the fourteen campuses in the region, to teach these courses. The support provided is similar to that for USP's on-campus students (USP, 2004c). A majority of DFL students throughout the region use the print-based mode, as it is the most convenient and the best-suited mode of learning for students in remote areas of the region. A ready-made learning package is provided for this mode of learning. Online and internet courses are offered, but essentially only for students who have access to internet and who would have access to either electricity or solar power. These would mainly be students living in urban locations, hence excluding rural and remote students from using this mode. Flexi-school courses are short intensive courses undertaken in half the time a full face-to-face course is normally conducted. These flexi-school courses are usually held during the long mid-semester breaks or at the end-of-the-year break and only when a lecturer is available to conduct the course. Audio and video modes are available through satellite teaching and tutoring and video-conferencing, which are also advantageous to urban DFL students and some rural students who can have access to recordings of the lecturers if power is accessible in their rural settings. The blended mode involving print-based, face-to-face tutoring and online learning is also offered to DFL students (USP, 2004c). The University of the South Pacific has provided these different modes of learning to give more opportunities to access learning to greater numbers of people from all backgrounds, and this is a great advantage to the people of the Pacific region.

1.3.3 Goals of Distance and Flexible Learning at USP

DFLC’s role is to support high quality and innovative teaching and learning materials and environments at USP and as an agent of change, lead and support the use of networked learning (USP, 2006). Its role is to promote and facilitate teaching and learning in all the delivery modes it provides for the staff and students of the university. It acts as a source of empowerment and development to all communities within the university region. In 2007, USP coordinated the implementation of Moodle, a learning management system that the university had introduced, to support the quality of learning and teaching and
reflect excellence in these areas. Moodle has also been used as a learning tool for student support (USP, 2008a). DFLC has a student support role providing orientation and training in all delivery modes used at USP and works in partnership with all the regional campuses in developing programs and providing assistances and advice to all DFL students (USP, 2008a).

The next chapter will focus on an historical account of the development of Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL) as a mode of instruction, and a review of the contributions of DFL research studies to our current understandings of DFL.
Chapter Two: Distance Education Learning Contexts

2.0 Introduction

This literature review is comprised of three sections. The first section is a review of the literature that concerns the history of distance education or distance and flexible learning, its definitions, growth, formation and focus. Distance education is not a new phenomenon; its history reflects that it is a field that is constantly evolving, supported by theory and continued research that responds to many unanswered questions (Jeffries, 2001). Understanding the history of distance education has shown that there was more than one historical path to distance education and that its evolution has had many challenges (Jeffries, 2001). Researchers have suggested that the history of distance education is often ignored yet it is important to our understanding of this discipline (Gunarwardena et al, 2003 cited in Fink 2007, p. 15). Fink (2007) makes reference to Pitman (2003) and pointed out that although the discipline rarely reflects on the past, it has focused instead on the practical issues involved in distance education and the results that are obtained from professional practices in the field.

The second section is a literature review of previous research in distance and flexible learning from its inception to the present and how these research findings have affected the growth and development of distance and flexible learning in general. This section also examines the global impact of distance education highlighting the connections with societal change and, in particular, the promotion of a globalised community of practices through distance and flexible learning modes of study.

The final section of this literature review is a presentation of previous and current conceptualisations of learning in distance and flexible learning studies (DFL), this includes an examination of the characteristics of the learner in DFL and this section concludes with the literature of DFL in the context of the University of the South Pacific (USP).
2.1 Defining Distance Education

A simple definition of distance education is: it is education at a distance. Many definitions of distance education have evolved over the years, which have made it impossible to agree to a specific definition of this concept. However, the following paragraphs relate various definitions of distance education as proposed by experts in this field of learning. These experts’ definitions are important to this study, because they impact on DFL learners who are the focus of this study. Earlier periods of distance education have the same characteristics as twenty-first century distance learning, which is why this study has referred to the various definitions and characteristics advanced by experts in this field during this time.

Many researchers defined distance education as a process of learning where the majority of the instruction occurred when the student and instructor were not in the same place (Cassell, Henson, Jensen & Wiley, 2008; Perraton, Creed & Robinson, 2002), but Keegan’s (1995a) definition was precise when he stated that technically, the teacher and the learner are separated, which allowed the learner to access learning without the need to travel to a “… fixed place, at a fixed time to meet a fixed person, in order to be trained” (p7). The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (cited in USP, 2007a) also defined it as the delivery of learning and training where the learners are separated mostly by time and place from those delivering the training. Distance education has also been seen as the adversary of the traditional face-to-face mode of teaching and learning. Moore (1990) and Moore & Kearsley (1996) defined distance learning as planned learning separated by the teaching element, and because of this separation there was a need for the use of special techniques in designing courses, particularly the instructional techniques and other special methods of communication using new technologies. It also needed special organisational and administrative arrangements to be made for this mode of teaching and learning.

Holmberg (1996) referred to distance education as a situation where the students and the tutors were at a distance from one another, that is, they are not present in the same room when teaching and learning are happening. Distance education in this respect meant a reliance on media, which had two constituent elements: the presentation of the learning material, which he described as a one-way traffic; and the interaction between students
and tutors, which he described as two-way traffic. Both of these elements depend on media, which a hundred years ago was print or written words only with occasional phonographic recordings but today is supported by media of many kinds (Holmberg, 1996).

Holmberg characterised distance education in several ways. He first stated that one of the characteristics of distance education was that it involved the acquisition of cognitive knowledge and skills, affective learning and some psychomotor learning, which were proved to be productive in distance learning. This was evident in Alms’ study in 1972 of telephone interaction in distance education (as cited in Holmberg, 2005) and Baath’s (1982) adaptation of Gagne’s work on course materials for distance learning. Holmberg added that individual learning was guided and supported by non-contiguous means. He was of the view that the modes of learning used in distance education were open to behaviourist, cognitivist and constructivist modes of learning. He further characterised distance education in terms of tutorial support, which he claimed was a central part of learning as it helped students become aware of how they can contribute to their own learning and solve their own study problems. Finally, he stated that empathy was a motivating factor to learning and influenced study favourably (Holmberg, 2005, 1989). Holmberg expands this by defining empathy to mean “the power of projecting oneself into and understanding someone else’s thinking and feeling” (Holmberg, 1989, p. 7). According to Holmberg a certain degree of empathy in relation to students’ work and circumstances is required by all distance educators. Holmberg’s approach to learning in distance education has been favourable to teaching and learning methods that are conducive to learning; his contribution has continued to be valuable today.
Keegan outlined some characteristics and differences of distance education and traditional teaching and learning. He identified the characteristics and differences as follows:

- The separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process (which distinguished it from conventional face-to-face education).
- The influence of an educational organisation both in the planning and preparation of learning materials and in the provision of student-support services (which distinguish it from private study and teach yourself programs).
- The use of technical media – print, audio, video or computer – to unite teacher and learner and carry the content of the course.
- The provision of two-way communication so that the student may benefit from, or even initiate dialogue (which distinguishes it from other uses of technology in education).
- The absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals and not in groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings for both didactic and socialisation purposes.
- Participation in an industrialised form of education (Keegan cited in Holmberg, 2005, p. 9; Smith & Ferguson, 2005; Simonson, Schlosser & Hanson, 1999)

These characteristics proposed by Keegan have continued to have relevance today although in a variety of modified forms.

Perraton was another expert who described distance education as “… an educational process in which a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner” (Perraton, 1988, p.34). Perraton’s definition was based on the use of teaching materials, in which the constraints on study are minimised in terms of access or of time and place, pace, methods of study, or any combination of these things (Perraton, 2000, p. 10).

Perraton viewed distance education as connected with power and he elaborated by saying that people without education are at the mercy of those with it, who can use what they know to their advantage and to the disadvantage of the ignorant around them. Education
was a means of gaining power and not simply the right of the better-educated minority. Education was expanded in response to both political pressure and the growing economic and social evidence of its benefits. In the colonial world, for instance, it was an important route to educational qualification (Perraton, 2000). He integrated existing theoretical paradigms with philosophies of education and emerged with the theories of equivalency and reintegration of teaching acts (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright & Zvacek, 2000). Simonson et al, (1999) described this theory of equivalency in terms of students’ learning experiences. According to this, students’ learning experiences should be tailored to the environment and situation in which they find themselves; hence those responsible for developing distance learning systems must strive for equivalency. Therefore, although local and distant learners had different environments of learning, the learning had to be designed with equal value for the learners.

Perraton’s theory consisted of fourteen hypotheses that can be summed up as concerns for educational expansion, emotional involvement, interaction and communication and teaching methodology (Simonson et al, 2000). His hypotheses included concerns for distance teaching and how it could be used to maximise education, for example, he stated that the economies achievable by distance education are functions of the level of education, size of audience, choice of media and sophistication of production (Simonson et al., 1999, p. 6).

Perraton was also concerned with the need to increase dialogue, for instance he stated that it was possible to organise distance teaching where dialogue could be used. He particularly advocated group discussions as effective methods of distance learning that would deliver relevant information to the group. Lastly, Perraton was concerned with the methods used in distance teaching that catered for the maximisation of learning. As an example, he emphasised the importance of feedback as a necessity to distance learning systems and that the distance teaching materials needed to ensure that students undertook frequent and regular activities over and above reading, watching, or listening (Simonson et al, 1999, p. 6).

Perraton’s contribution has highlighted important issues in DFL that need to be addressed to maximise learning in DFL studies. His contribution to a theory of distance education
has been in the form of the fourteen hypotheses that he advanced as ways of enabling people to learn at a distance and to maximise that learning. Firstly, as stated above, for the distance teaching system to be effective, the distance teaching materials should ensure that students undertake frequent and regular activities over and above reading, watching and listening. Distance learners need to be active participants in their own learning. Secondly, dialogue between tutor and students, students and students or in groups must increase in distance learning and finally, using multimedia programs is more effective than one which relies on a single medium (Perraton, 1987, 1988; Holmberg, 2005).

Peters (1983) looked at distance education as an industrialised form of education, because it involved industrial processes. Distance education to him was a “… method of imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes which is rationalized by the application of division of labour and organisational principles as well as by the extensive use of technical media, especially for the purpose of reproducing high-quality teaching material which makes it possible to instruct great numbers of students at the same time wherever they live” (as cited by Chaney, 2006, p.4). Understanding the history of how technological tools are used in education influences our ideas about how the media can support instruction for distance education. Peters believed that distance education was successful only when mediated by technology in any of its present forms. According to him, distance education was connected with industrial production processes and the production of study materials was an industrial process built into the teaching process, which can be restructured through increased mechanisation and automation. He stated, “Media is an essential element of distance education and it cannot happen without it, transmitting the instruction to, and/or from the learner” (Fink, 2007, p. 39).

Each of these definitions of distance education – past and present – have contributed to developments in teaching and learning that emphasise independence and autonomy of the learner, industrialisation of teaching, and interaction and communication (Simonson et al, 1999). Changes to modes of teaching and learning continue to challenge distance educators and researchers as new theories arise and new technologies are invented. These are inevitable, but there is a need to continue developing new methods to meet the needs of learners in distance education throughout the world and particularly for developing nations such as Fiji.
2.2 **History of Distance Education**

The concept of distance education has been around since the 1800s (Wheeler & Amiotte, 2005). Initially, it had been used to bridge the geographical distances between teachers and students who were not able to attend the face-to-face traditional forms of learning (Lentell, 2007; Wheeler & Amiotte, 2005; Ndlovu, 2002), and today it has become a dominant force and the way forward for many educational institutions. For many developing countries, distance education has been an important building block in the improvement of social and economic conditions of its population, even more so for those whose rural population is extremely high (Berman, 2008).

Distance education has its origin in teaching and learning, which was based on the hypothesis that the teaching and learning without the learner and the teacher meeting was possible and could be effective. It evolved from the face-to-face interactions, to interaction through print as a result of the invention of the printing press and then to interaction through electronic media. Organised distance education in the form of correspondence instruction has been dated back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as discussed later in this chapter. Initially, correspondence education was known for decades as a provider for adult education (Holmberg, 1989). For instance, Mathieson (1971) cited in Holmberg (2005, p. 14) relates Anna Eliot Tickner’s monthly correspondence accompanied by personalised instructions and guided readings for adult women in America, who aspired to higher education, and who she encouraged to study at home. Tickner’s instructions included assigned readings, tests and interaction with a teacher. She was one of the pioneers of correspondence education from the 1870s to the 1890s and was one of the largest distance learning organisations in the world (Holmberg, 2005; Fink, 2007).

Towards the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century sophisticated technology changed the scope of distance education in society adding new dimensions to its characters. As the years progressed, computer technology developed and it began to play a progressively important role in distance education courses (Nunan, 1996; Trevitt, 2000; Kirkpatrick, Jakupec & Riele, 1997; Cassell et al, 2008). It made texts, pictures and sound easily available. Correspondence education began to be
regarded by many as narrow. Hence the term “distance education” was adopted in the English-speaking world in the early 1970s (Holmberg, 1995a).

As far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, people have known and used organised distance education in the form of correspondence instruction. Even as early as biblical times, references are made to the occasional feed-back through messengers from the congregations and St. Paul writes letters to his congregations in the books of Titus, Timothy, Corinthians and Thesalonians for teaching purposes (Bible Society, 2004). Delling (1987) cited in Holmberg (2005) noted that in the Netherlands and Germany during the first half of the eighteenth century, educational letter writing for religious instructions were given by the German priest Gerhard Tersteegen. Letter writing for the purpose of teaching has long existed for probably as long as the art of writing existed (Holmberg, 2005).

Distance education is practised in all parts of the world, and in recent years its scope has developed enormously and rapidly. It has provided study opportunities for those who cannot, or do not want, to leave their jobs to attend a full-time education program or take part in classroom teaching, and for some it is identical to private study of prescribed texts, with or without special study guides (Holmberg, 1989; Adebayo, 2007). It has become an intrinsic part of many national educational systems and an academic discipline. Throughout its history, problems of implementation and acceptance of educational innovations existed in distance education and has continued to exist (Jeffries, 2001).

2.2.1 Early Forms of Print-Based Mode

The first clear statement of organised distance education was observed in the Boston Gazette of 20th March,1728, in which Caleb Phillips, teacher of the new method of shorthand, posted this advertisement:

“Persons in the country desirous to learn this Art, may by having the several lessons sent weekly to them, be as perfectly instructed as those that live in Boston”

(Battenberg cited in Holmberg, 2005, p. 15). This attracted general public attention and marked the dawn of a new era of formal teaching and learning through correspondence. A century later the old Swedish university of the city of Lund published an English
advertisement in the weekly paper the *Lunds Weckoblad* No. 30, 1833 with the following advertisement:

“Offers Ladies and Gentlemen! An opportunity to study! Composition through the medium of the Post”

(Baath as cited in Holmberg, 2005, p. 13). This was early evidence of the development of distance education.

Another early attempt to provide distance education was developed in England, by Isaac Pitman who taught by sending postcards to students who were invited to transcribe passages of the Bible into shorthand. The students then sent back the transcripts for him to correct (*Times* of 24th December cited in Holmberg, 2005). The reference to weekly consignment presumably indicated two-way traffic. He used the technologies of the day to bridge the geographical distance between the teacher and the students using the print media and introduced the postal service as a means of delivering the materials for learning (Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Wheeler & Amiotte, 2005). In 1836, the University of London opened its doors as an examining institute for students who were non-university members (Tight, 1987). It was an important development for distance education, as it made it possible for learners taught through correspondence schools to acquire academic degrees. This pioneered distance education for further innovations. Later developments then provided for both academic and practical occupational study opportunities which became typical of distance education in the 20th century (Holmberg, 2005). In Australia, the University of Queensland joined the field of distance education in 1911 (Store & Chick, 1984). Australia was the first country to have developed a large-scale, systematic way of providing correspondence education for primary and secondary students who had never been to school (Holmberg, 2005). Australia had a lot of experience of distance education of isolated primary children who were taught in their homes rather than in schools, usually with one of the parents as supervisor.

Distance education has continued to expand at an extremely rapid rate to the present. The potential of distance education is often not fully used. Ross (1976) cited in Holmberg (2005) calls it an “… innovation within the accepted paradigms” (p111). The innovative character of distance education lies in the underlying premise that learning is possible for each student to start and complete their studies as it suit him or her or, as work, health,
and family conditions allow. Distance education provides the capacity for learners to work at their own pace disregarding all the restrictions that apply to classroom teaching or group learning (Holmberg, 2005). With the different types of distance education, there are also more or less successful teaching and learning practices. A hundred years ago, those practicing distance education used the print and written word exclusively and occasionally supplemented these media with audio recordings. Pioneers of distance education were convinced at the time that it could be made effective and saw this to fruition. There was also a lot of interest in comparing the effectiveness of distance education with that of traditional face-to-face teaching and learning. The history of distance education reflects theories that are in a constant state of expansion but in need of more research. Distance education has shown an exponential flow of ideas and technologies balanced by a wall of resistance to change and placing technology in the light of a promise much greater than it can deliver (Jeffries, 2001). Jeffries states that history has also shown that non-traditional education tries to blend with traditional education, but the challenges are to address and confront these constantly changing learning theories and evolving technologies (Jeffries, 2001, p.5).

### 2.2.2 Print-Based Learning in Distance and Flexible Learning

Print-based learning was used decades before the arrival of computer technology and Holmberg (1989) stated that “… there can be no doubt that for all serious study the reading of printed material will remain a prime medium in distance education” (p.16). He also stated that “… for teaching purposes the presentation of verbal subject matter in print is in all respects decidedly superior to screen (computer) presentation: it is easier to read, it facilitates leafing and browsing and it is open to all sources available (Holmberg, 2005, p. 63). This is supported by other practices, for instance in Zimbabwe the print medium is the predominant communication tool between distance educators and the students, although other educational technologies are also used (Ndlovu, 2002). In the Pacific print-based learning is common in rural and remote areas because educational technologies are unavailable in these areas as power sources are available only in urban and semi-urban areas.

Prior to the new computer technologies, print-based materials were commonly used in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). In approximately 1886,
William Harper of the USA (cited in Holmberg, 2005) insisted on devising highly-structured courses with prescribed pace or time. In his plan of study delivered by correspondence each week, students were mailed an instruction sheet with assigned tasks that outlined an order of work that students followed, and possible ambiguities were addressed to avoid misinterpretations. The instruction sheet provided support materials with specified amounts of work to be reviewed, and a well-constructed examination paper was also enclosed. The instruction sheet functioned as a guide for students. Students then submitted a paper to the instructor listing their queries and difficulties in the exam paper. These were promptly returned with all corrections, suggestions, criticisms etc. (Holmberg, 2005, p. 16-17).

Later in 1901, H.S. Hermod of Sweden would send two teaching and question letters as well as detailed instructions on how to use the letters to students who had enrolled in his correspondence course. After the first teaching letter, the student then began to work on the question letter by answering the questions in the order given. The student then sent their response by mail to the correspondence institution. Thorough corrections were completed at the institute, marked in red and then returned to the student with comments and suggestions. This procedure continued in the second letter. Students began work in their own time and at their own pace and responded when they felt ready (Holmberg, 2005, p. 17-18).

Harper expected a weekly correspondence while Hermod allowed the students to work at their own paces. Hermod stressed the teaching element of the tutor’s work more than Harper, who was more concerned with control and corrections. Both men insisted on a high standard of work by tutors and both catered for individual study (Holmberg, 2005). Hermod, in particular, stressed that each student can study whenever and at whatever time is convenient to them as long as it suits them. There are issues that continuously arise in distance education and continue to be discussed and debated. These issues relate to students’ independence, self-selected pace of study, and individual or group learning which are highlighted in Harper and Hermod’s correspondence education (Holmberg, 2005).
2.2.3 Distance Education as a Product

Distance education is a product of an evolutionary development that began with only the print media. Today it develops at an accelerated rate, with seemingly unlimited potential, as a consequence of the wealth of sophisticated media that is at its disposal.

The advent of telecommunications technologies has transformed the traditional distance education dual mode to multimodal developments in teaching and learning and consequently, changed the mode of distance education for many decades to its present form. In this study, these modes of education are referenced to the method for delivering distance education learning materials to learners. Traditionally, distance education used a dual mode, which provided a two-way interaction between the learner and the teacher, and interaction between them took the form of correspondence around learning materials which the learner completed and sent to the teacher/tutor for feedback. Keegan’s (1980) dual mode is represented in Figure 2.1.
Today multimodal forms of Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL) have increased globally. In Europe, for instance, the use of media and technology in higher education has focused on the need to provide unified educational access to a culturally diverse population. Throughout the world, telecommunication networks link people from many nations in remarkable and exciting ways that promote global understanding between people. The current electronic age has the capacity for information to develop and spread exponentially with the potential to provide resources that enable the less developed countries to keep pace with advances in global research and education (Utsumi, Rossman, 1988).

2.2.4 Focus of Distance Education

Our world is changing at an accelerating pace and this rapid change is facilitated by technological advances. The changing face of higher education providers, the increase in provisions for educational services, the increase in the organised learning opportunities, and the advancement in communication technology that makes information readily available, are all facilitating learning in the field of distance education. Consequently, distance education has gained prominence in the last decade. Much focus of distance education has now been centred on the effects of new technologies on teaching and learning and how effective they have been. Online education is at the forefront of higher education’s recent investment in technologies and yet it is not as widely used or accepted in higher education teaching and leadership circles as would have been expected (Ebersole, 2006).

Despite the growth of technology in distance education, the majority of people in developing countries do not have access to these technologies due to infrastructural difficulties. Information and communication technologies are not widely distributed throughout the population in developing countries. A way to address this is to create centres of distance education in a number of urban areas or places where these technologies could be locally available to students (Trindade, 2000).

Holmberg, Wedemeyer, Peters and Perraton have focused on different aspects of distance education and offered propositions that are beneficial to teachers, learners and institutions of distance education as will be highlighted in Chapter three of this thesis. Garrison (2000), however, postulates that the focus for distance education theorists, in this new century, is to provide an understanding of the opportunities and limitations of facilitating teaching and learning at a distance, which includes a variety of methods and technologies. He demands that theories which reflect a collaborative approach to distance education – as opposed to independent learning – have at their core an adaptive teaching and learning transaction. Moore’s (1993) “transaction” theory denoted the special nature of the relationship between the learner and the instructor during distance learning. This
relationship evoked an experience and meaning for the individual learner. The learner interprets the event, acts on the dialogue and structure, which produces a response. The response is the realised experience of the learner. This focus on distance education may well have the potential to shape future practices in distance education.

2.2.4.1 From Distance Education to Open and Distance and Flexible Learning

There are different interpretations of distance education concepts as there is no single definition of open learning or distance education that seems to satisfy the diversity of stakeholders involved. Maxwell (cited in Tella, 1997, p. 1) defined open learning as “… a student-centred approach to education that removes all barriers to access while providing a high degree of learner autonomy,” and distance education referred to “… a mode of delivering a course of study in which the majority of communication between teacher and student occurs non-contiguously, and the two-way communication between teacher and student necessary for the educational process is technologically mediated”. Distance education according to Maxwell may or may not be based on open-learning ideals and he argued that distance education and open learning should be recognised as two distinct concepts. Tella (1997) stated that open learning (OL) together with flexible learning (FL) and distance learning may have formed the concept of open and distance learning (ODL). She mentioned that distance teaching (DT) and distance learning (DL) are sometimes alternated for distance education (DE) in terms of modern day education. Figure 2.2 illustrates the interconnections between distance education (DE), distance teaching (DT) and distance learning (DL) and other terms associated with distance learning.

Bates (cited in Tella, 1997) used the term distributed learning (DL) to mean a learner-centred approach to education that integrated technology for activities and interaction. This approach allowed instructors the flexibility to customise learning environments to meet the needs of diverse student populations while at the same time providing high-quality and cost-effective learning (Tella, 1997). Bates argued that distance education did not mean the same thing as distributed learning.
The concept of distance learning, according to Creed (cited in Adebayo, 2007) is “… as an educational process in which a significant proportion of teaching is conducted by someone far removed in space and/or time from the learners” while open learning is defined as “… an organised educational activity, based on the use of teaching materials, in which the constraints on study are minimised in terms of access, entry, or time and place, pace, method of study, or any combination of these” (p. 3). It was an educational approach designed to reach learners wherever wherever they were located: whether at home in the city (urban) or in the suburbs (rural), in offices or any workplace. It was aimed at providing learning resources for life-long learning regardless of where they were and when they wanted to study. Adebayo (2007) described this type of education as one outside the conventional system.

Dzakiria’s (2004) definition emphasised the importance of institutional learning support for the learners, particularly by the teachers. McLoughlin & Marshall (2000) have also
highlighted the importance of this support as learners are being faced with a new learning environment and the expectations are that they have independent learning skills that they need to manage their own learning and engage with the activities. Distance learners in this context are required to engage in the new ways of learning (technology). Ross (cited in White, 2004) argued that success in distance education should be related to “… learner independence and to develop each individual’s capacity to look after his own learning needs” (p.3). This means that developing course materials that support self-instruction will maximise self-sufficiency on the part of the learner.

Nunan (1996) defined flexible learning in terms of characteristics that satisfied stakeholders in education. He describes these characteristics as follows; It can serve the interests of managers and politicians who focus on the effectiveness and efficiency and cut price solutions to the delivery of a service. For students and teachers it can suggest a student centred approach to learning and the democratising of the processes of learning and teaching. For curriculum developers it may mean the availability of a range of approaches to suit student diversity and for those marketing student educational services it can mean the production of commodities, which can be used competitively in a global economic market (Nunan, 1996, p.3). Nunan concluded that in essence flexible learning was a direct consequence of the ways that information technologies were changing education. Flexible learning is compatible with the constructivist’s view of learning that asserts learners use what they know to learn more about what they are interested in.

What was obvious in all the differences between DE and ODL was the difficulty in having a single interpretation and a single notion for each concept. Stakeholders would select what were most suitable for their needs and the needs of the students they served and implement the concept(s) that was viable in their situations.
2.3 Research in Distance and Flexible Learning

Distance education research has been concerned with problems of understanding and explaining the circumstances and conditions of the multifaceted learning practices that exist in this field. It is concerned with students’ needs and requirements and the measures taken to meet these. Parts of these concerns include methodologies, the use of media, organisations and administrations. Evaluation of these measures and the distance education systems from educational, social and financial viewpoints is also a concern of distance education. The search for an understanding of these has resulted in attempts to find the kind of instrumental approach that will improve distance education and facilitate distance students’ learning.

Social backgrounds, literacy, academic and/or tertiary literacy practices are additional areas of study. The study of distance education as a separate field is good theoretically, because it seeks to understand and explain, and practically or technologically, apply principles with the view to facilitate and improve academic learning practices. It is essential that research is done in order to look into academic learning practices of students who study through distance education.

Much of research in distance education that investigates teaching strategies or comparing distance courses in terms of student achievements (Lockee et al 2001, p. 60). These researchers often did comparative studies without probing into the attributes and characteristics of the learner’s needs. They believed that there should be more emphasis on conducting research that focused on individuals and their unique characteristics and learning needs. According to these researchers contemporary research in distance education has moved away from a comparative approach to focusing more on the content to be learned, the role of the learner, and the effectiveness of instructional design decisions. They argue that research must rely on the testing of some theory, that inquiry devoid of theory is not valid research. They also view research as that which involves testing theories and constructs to inform practice.
2.3.1 Previous and Current Research in DFL

Until well into the second half of the twentieth century there was little research into distance education. Research that did exist was anecdotal or was based on case-study research. However, in the last two to three decades there have been widespread research activities and surveys by Holmberg, (1982, 1990, 1996) and Peters (1983) and other experts in this field. Two broad categories of distance education research will be examined, the endogenous and the exogenous. Firstly, the endogenous research has focused on the presentation of the learning material on and the interaction between students and tutors, and students and students (Keegan, 1990; Holmberg, 1995b, 2005; Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Weingartz (cited in Holmberg, 2005) did an analysis and constructed an empirical study of problem learning while Bates (cited in Holmberg, 2000) conducted a study of media research. Many others researchers also developed studies of aspects related to learning materials and student-tutor interaction.

Exogenous research focused on studies in distance education that related to aspects of society and social conditions, and studies of society as influenced by distance education. The role of distance education in society was studied by Ljosa in 1991 and 1992 (cited in Holmberg, 2005). Research has increased, and continues to do so, as a consequence of the enormous technological developments occurring in distance education. Although distance education is well-represented in the literature, there is more research to be carried out, particularly in relation to students’ approaches to learning. These elements are important and useful for research in distance education.

2.3.2 Research in Learning at USP

Mugler & Landbeck (1997, 2000) have completed extensive surveys and research studies in the Pacific on learning styles, strategies and conditions. In their studies of student learning at the University of the South Pacific they found that students used rote-learning in their studies, because it was their preference and they could not use any other learning style. An important point worth highlighting from their studies was that:

…”whatever culturally transmitted informal learning styles children first bring to school, by the time they reach university, they have had at least a dozen years of
exposure to a formal education system which was imported from the West as a result of European contact and colonisation and is still very much influenced by an exam-driven, teacher-centred, de-contextualised model of education based largely on transmission of knowledge through language, and in our case specifically English, which is not even the students’ first language. (p.237)

In 2000, they wrote another paper that suggested that learning materials for students be developed to encourage meaningful learning that were appropriate to the cultures of the South Pacific (Landbeck & Mugler, 2000). Their research showed that USP’s current learning packages did not encourage deep approaches to learning and learning materials were not culturally appropriate. What USP needs to develop are strategies for a “culturally sensitive pedagogy” (Thaman, 1997; Landbeck & Mugler, 2000) that will enhance meaningful learning and teaching at the University of the South Pacific.

2.4 Learning in Distance and Flexible Learning

Many have expressed the view that distance education is an innovation that has given students a greater degree of independence (Wedemeyer, 1981). Wedemeyer emphasised the great importance that instructional designs had in distance education stressing that instructions be appropriate, explicit, adaptable and understandable given that the teacher may or may not be present in the learning environment. He encouraged an instructional system that blended with other media and technology that learners would adapt to easily. Ross Paul (cited in Cynthia White, 2003, p. 37) argued that the most important criterion for success in distance education should relate to learner independence and that “…the ultimate challenge … is to develop each individual’s capacity to look after his or her own learning needs”. White (2003) emphasised the importance of designing high-quality materials of learning that consisted of a comprehensive range of learning resources. This she added was the key component in fostering and maximising learner independence.

Rothkopf (1981) listed three factors interacting reciprocally that would enable the likelihood of achieving competence: the straight forward relevance of information in the instructions; the relevance of the instructions to the learner’s experience; and the organization for appropriate mathemagenic process (p.105). Rothkopf coined the term mathemagenic to mean “to give birth to learning” highlighting the fact that it is something that learners do in processing or thinking about learning material that cause
learning and long term retention of the learning material. Rothkopf (1982) believed that when learners are faced with learning materials, their attention to it deteriorates with time, but when the learning materials are interspersed with questions on the materials, learner’s can maintain their attention relatively highly and for longer periods of time.

Michael Moore developed a theory of independent study, classifying educational programs into two dimensions of autonomy and distance. Moore referred to autonomy as “… the extent to which the learner in an educational program is able to determine the selection of objectives, resources and evaluation procedure” and distance, he referred to as “… the educational program that consisted of a list of item by item plan with the knowledge and skills to be covered by the program” (as cited in Holmberg, 1986, p.110). The structure of the program included the objectives, implementation plans and evaluation methods of the learning program. The absence of dialogue would mean that a large part of directions would be administered by the learner. This was to be determined by the learner’s competence as an autonomous or self-directed learner (Holmberg, 1986). Emphasis here is on adequate instructions in the learning materials, relevance of content, attention to learning needs and evaluation processes that cater for students’ interests.

2.4.1 Characteristics of the Learner

Learners in distance and flexible learning (DFL) learn in different ways and there is no perfect way to deliver learning materials that will meet the varied needs of learners. Research in the past has focused on demographics and life situations of learners encompassing their age, gender, ethnic backgrounds, disabilities, geographic distances or locations and the roles learners played as distance learners (Thompson, 1998). Since then there has been a shift in focus to the affective characteristics of DFL programs. One characteristic of DFL learners is the interest and preference they have for DFL studies regardless of what situation they are in because they have a common goal of studying via DFL and succeeding in life (Willis, 1994; Thomson, 1998). Liao (2006) referred to this as “extrinsic motivation” (p.47). Learners, who are prompted by this, study through DFL because they are interested in an outcome, such as job performance, pay or promotion.

Another characteristic of learners is that they have been motivated due to the geographic barriers that prevent them from attending a face-to-face educational institution
(Thompson, 1998; Holmberg, 2005). Others have also been motivated because they enjoy learning through DFL. Liao (2006) referred to this as the “intrinsic motivation”. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity without receiving any apparent reinforcement, such as simply for enjoyment (p.3). Over time these characteristics of learners in DFL may change depending on the many factors of global market changes, societal and educational and institutional changes.

2.4.2 The Role of the Learner
Lentell (2007, p. 78) listed some guiding principles behind distance education practice that described the important role the learners had in distance education. Firstly the learners needed to know why they were learning. Secondly, learners better understand the knowledge they discover than the knowledge that is passively presented to them. Finally, learners needed to know if they were learning correctly. It was essential for learners to acquire skills for self-directed and independent learning to be successful in DFL studies. Learners using computers and new technologies in DFL studies must be computer literate and know the skills required to participate in such studies.

2.4.3 The Role of Supporting Organisations
The role of the supporting organisation in distance education is seen as being on a highly personal level, where discussions between students and teachers are believed to bring about improved performance and enhance study pleasure. These discussions would require a certain level of student maturity, self-discipline and independence. Perraton (1987) argued that it was not possible to apply only one single theory of distance education. He pointed to three inter-related systems: teaching, administration, and assessment. Nunan (cited in Keegan, 1993) stated that one of the core values central to distance education was the value of processes and power relations between learners and teachers at a distance. Learners did have the unique opportunity to shape their own learning without direct intervention from teachers and fellow students.

The balance between the influences of autonomy and control was at the heart of this value. Gillard (as cited in Keegan, p. 6, 1993) described this balance as “… learning in distance education is supervised but not invigilated, organised but not controlled, student centred but not anarchic”. Supporting organisations need to realise the need for more
student autonomy and less overt control of students. Keegan (1993) emphasised that
distance teaching and learning should not devalue interactions of group-based teaching,
but should acknowledge a range of interactions that are employed in various forms of
education.

2.4.4 Technology Mediated Distance Education
Towards the end of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century sophisticated
technology changed both the view of distance education in society and its practice in such
a way that it added a new dimension to its character. The term “flexible learning” was a
preferable choice to distance education. In the recent literature, the concept of flexible
learning is more commonly used than distance education. This concept is not easy to
define, however, flexible learning can be best described as that which occurs, is shaped
and adapted to the students' needs, rather than to the needs of the teachers or the
institution offering the course. This has also been referred to earlier on in this chapter.

The word “flexible” literally means to be easily adapted, moulded, or managed. Defining
learning as flexible connotes the freedom for learners to learn despite barriers in
education, caused by family or work commitments, financial challenges, disabilities of
some kind or geographic locations and remoteness. Flexible learning is often related to
student centredness in educational practices (Taylor, 2000). This notion emerged from
the view that students are central to the learning and the teaching process. The consumer-
centred culture that is prevalent in our society today states that students have the right to
decide how they undertake their learning (O’Neill & McMahon, 2005). This definition of
flexible learning suggests that it is an individually tailored approach to learning. The
Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) (2003) defined flexibility for learners as
anticipating and responding to students’ ever-changing needs and expectations and
expanding their choices in what, when, where and how they learn.

Brande (1994) offered a description of flexible learning which implied that learners had
control over their learning, meaning learners learn when they wanted (frequency, timing,
duration), how they wanted (modes of learning), and what they wanted (that is learners
can define what constitutes learning to them). Bishop (2002) and Willems (2005) argued
that there is evidence that flexible learning options can be anything but flexible. It created
constraints to students in ways they had not imagined causing frustrations in their process of learning.

Ebersole (2006) offered another view of the 21st century distance education as “… a brave new world of higher-education technologies,” which had to “… accommodate the oncoming technological, demographic and economic trends” (p. 2). He believed that if young people had access to technology, and especially to the internet, regardless of whether they were in the rural or urban communities, they would master it quickly. It was the economics of being able to afford the software and being able to afford the internet connectivity that mattered. These were the challenges and opportunities to be found in the constantly evolving environment of distance education and learning.

The introduction of new technologies has assisted in creating metaphors to explain the new and unknown technology (Meyer, 2005). Metaphors have an important role in distance education. They are words that show how two things that are not alike in most ways are similar in one important way. Metaphors are ways to describe something and are a way to learn something (Tuncay & Ozcinar, 2009). They have become essential elements that comprise everyday language in distance education users and they are used to communicate meanings, without describing them directly, but using some element that could help others understand the concept individuals want to communicate. Meyer used metaphors such as “web” and “information highways” and “internet” to refer to current technological delivery systems. The use of metaphors help us understand the changes happening around us (Meyer, 2005). These metaphors create a conceptual framework to help us understand our emerging technological world and shape our beliefs about the future role of technology and its implications. The term “eLearning” refers to instruction or training delivered using media, computers and technologies such as the World-Wide Web and intranets. The contents delivered via eLearning relate to instructional and organisational goals, and methods and knowledge and skills that eLearners hope to achieve.

McLuhan (1964) refers to this era of technology as “… electronic interdependence: when electronic media replaces visual culture or aural/oral culture. An evil influence on society and ourselves, but this as we know, is to be renounced.” However, there are barriers to the
use of technological tools. McLuhan (1964) proposed that the media should be the focus of study and not the content as he often says, “the medium is the message” (p. 203). His insight was that a medium affected the society in which it played a role not because of the content delivered over the medium. With automation for example, the new patterns of human association tend to eliminate jobs, while on the positive side it created roles for people. McLuhan believed that there could only be disaster arising from our ignorance of the causality and effects inherent in our technologies.

Computer literacy is essential to all students that use the World-Wide Web (Burniske, 2006). They must develop the critical literacy skills to read and interpret web pages. Students need to acquire a deeper and a richer sense of computer literacy to enable them to participate in discussions of educational technology during this upsurge in online education and elearning. Motteram & Forrester’s study cited in Som Naidu (2005) argued that in the context of online distance learning, a fundamental understanding of students’ needs and their initial encounters with the online programs are important to ensure effective support is provided when students begin their studies.

2.4.5 Global Impact of DFL
Developing countries have been inundated with aid donors from industrialised nations to promote development and progress in the nation. They are required to model themselves to resemble the industrialised countries that are providing the aid (Barr, 2004). Barr reported that under the rubric of “good governance” bilateral aid to developing countries demanded greater Western-style democracy and the enforcement of human rights as a pre-condition for the development aid. This new form of domination is comported as a part of the globalisation process, which was best summed up by David Held et al (cited in Prakash, Vijapur, & Shah, 2006, p.1) “as a widening, and deepening as well as the accelerating speed of interconnectedness throughout the world and in all aspects of contemporary social life”. Kema (2005, p. 11) expanded on this and stated, “We live in an interdependent economic world where there can be no absolute or autocratic control over all nations and peoples. No country can realistically survive on its own without collaboration and cooperation with others, where international relations ought to be based on mutual interest and respect and reciprocity”.

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Globalisation is a fairly broad term that describes the phenomena of turning what is “local” into the “global”. There is nothing new about different countries and cultures becoming integrated and working together but what is new is the speed at which this is occurring. This is a direct effect of the technological changes and acceleration that have occurred and continue to occur in developing countries. Globalisation is enabled by ICT and the media of communications through radio, satellite and currently by internet, so that information can move globally as fast as possible (Amaladoss, 1999). The communication’s revolution has brought about new technologies that have revolutionised society’s way of life. The Pacific Island states have not been immune to such revolutionary changes in their societies. They have become connected to a world wide network of global interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social, political, economic and cultural life (Prakash et al, 2006). We live in an interdependent economic world where survival depends on collaboration and cooperation with others, which is why developing countries have accepted globalisation as a means for reinforcing social, cultural, political and economical and environmental developments in the region.

Some argue that globalisation brings prosperity to underdeveloped countries (Kema, 2005), but others argue contrary to this. This study argues that globalisation does have advantages and disadvantages, but for educational and technological purposes. Globalisation has helped the region and has had a positive effect in terms of the development of technology and information system in the region. The New Zealand development assistance helped establish the South Pacific’s first journalism school at the University of Papua New Guinea in 1975 (Robbie, 2007). Japanese aid has helped establish IT facilities at the University of the South Pacific and other projects sponsored by aid-donor countries have helped individual countries in the Pacific to establish information systems conducive to their environment.

The future of many Pacific Islanders depends on the strength and growth in their countries’ economies. A strong economy will foster growth in businesses and industries and will attract foreign business and investments, which in turn will create new jobs, new markets and new businesses. Learning is the tool that will allow Pacific Island people to steer their country towards greater economic development within the region. Education therefore, plays a major role in the training and skilling of individuals. The key driver to
technology is human knowledge (Amavilah, 2007). Knowledge is fundamental to technology, and therefore to economic performance and growth. Skills are needed to learn and use knowledge productively, as stated earlier it is the tool for such productivity. In essence, growth in developing countries depends on learning skills and knowledge of the technology to be used for educational, sociocultural, political and economic developments within the region.

2.5 Distance and Flexible Learning in the Pacific

The growth and development of education in the region was prompted by the growing number of secondary school students, which facilitated the beginning of distance education programs (Morris et al., 1966). This is outlined in chapter one of this paper. Thaman (2001) states that many Pacific Island countries see distance education as an integral part of national and regional educational initiatives, such as lifelong learning, basic education, democratisation of education etc (p. 8). But other Pacific countries see it as a vehicle for ensuring better and increased access to higher education. Landbeck and Mugler (2000) described the Pacific region as a region where learning conditions are difficult. Given the expansive nature of this oceanic region, interaction between staff and students, and students and students are restricted despite the use of telephones, satellites and e-mails. Prasad (2009) says that despite USP’s education network (USPNet), which serves as a gateway for internet, phone and data links, audio and video-conferencing, and video broadcasting that provides links with USP campuses in the region, negotiating geographical isolation is difficult. He adds, ‘Not every DFL student can travel to the campus to use the USPNet facilities since many of them are studying in remote locations, and sometimes there is no electricity” (Prasad, 2009, p. 15). The last three decades have witnessed an improved access to higher education in the Pacific region however, as Thaman (2001) says, an education that is exposing more students to the conflicting demands and expectations of their home cultures and those of their formal education (p. 12). Typically distance education in the region is about foreign cultures rather than students’ home cultures and many are leaving their home countries to make use of education elsewhere. According to Thaman (2001) the reason students leave is because they do not find practical value in their learning in distance education given the realities of their home cultures and societies. Thaman (2001) expresses her views of the contents
and process of education that are current in the region as, “selection of the best of foreign globalised cultures and not those of Pacific learners” (p. 13).

2.5.1 Learning Context in DFL at the University of the South Pacific

The main campus is in Lauca, Suva, capital of Fiji and two other campuses are in Samoa and Vanuatu. The School of Agriculture is in Samoa and the School of Law in Vanuatu. Two campuses were recently established in Fiji, one in Labasa serving the north and Lautoka serving the western division. USP monopolizes all programs offered to students ranging from certificate levels to diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Over 18,000 students enrol at USP annually through its main campuses or regional centres.

The University of the South Pacific made available 340 of the USPs 763 courses in 2006 through the distance and flexible delivery mode (Evans & Hazelman, 2007) Distance education at USP and its student enrolments have increased since 1997 when it accounted for 67% of USP’s student population. Courses offered by the departments on the main campus are administered through a central unit in Suva, which disseminate USP courses via its DFL centre in every member country. These DFL centres are located in state capitals or urban administrative centres. Each DFL centre, enrols, advises and offers face-to-face or satellite tutorials to students. All assignments are handed in at the centres, recorded and sent to the appropriate departments in Suva. Likewise, all tests and examinations are supervised at the centres and papers are sent to Lauca campus. They are then returned to the centres and delivered by postal mail to students. Libraries are available in the main campus only but many sub-centres have make-shift libraries where relevant texts are kept each semester and then returned to the main centre at the end of the year. Labasa campus for instance has a good range of resource materials in its library (USP, 2004a) yet many of these books are available to students who live in urban or suburban areas while many of the students in remote areas do not easily access these books. USP manages 23 libraries in the twelve member countries with the main library at Lauca campus housing approximately one million books (USP, 2008a). Each campus library is headed by a head librarian who constantly monitors and ensures that
library facilities and access to materials are able to meet the needs of students and staff in the campus.

Laboratory facilities are available in a few centres for science classes and others have worked in partnership with schools near-by for the use of school labs. USP provides chemicals and the necessary apparatus and equipment and pays fees for the use of the school premises and facilities (USP, 2004a). The laboratories and staff facilities are generally of a good standard (Coll, Ali, Bonato & Rohindra, 2006). However, laboratory facilities continue to be over stretched. A review of the labs revealed serious shortfalls in OHS provision (USP, 2008b). DFL campuses in the region face worse scenarios as will be highlighted by participants of this research study.

Students are given course materials for each course they enrol in which includes, an introduction & assignment booklet with all the semester schedule and assignment instructions, a study guide or course book with weekly notes and tasks, a reader with relevant readings and occasionally, an empty audio and videotape. Textbooks are not provided as these are bought or loaned from the library.

Developing these course materials can be time consuming (Duncan & McMaster, 2008) nonetheless it is convenient for the many DFL students that live in remote areas where access to a computer and internet is not possible. The course materials are meant to ‘stand alone’ ensuring that instructions are explicit, yet students continue to request face to face interactions with tutors (Thaman, 2001; Landbeck & Mugler, 2000). USP campuses and centres are located across 33 million kilometres of ocean, covering five different time zones. There are over 300 inhabited islands and thousands of uninhabited islands. Some students live within a thousand kilometre range from the main campus in Suva and hundreds more from their main centres and sub-centres. The regions’ three cultural boundaries as described in Chapter One are culturally, linguistically, politically and economically diverse in nature hence characterising the variety of learning conditions of DFL students in the region (Landbeck & Mugler, 2000).

English is a second, third or fourth language for almost all of the students. In Fiji, it is a lingua franca mainly in the urban areas and is used as the official medium of instruction in
schools, governments and the media. Fractions of the regions’ population speak English on a regular basis but many are not exposed to the language required for tertiary education. This restriction affects students’ expressions of ideas and comprehension of course contents in the programs they enrol in. It is often argued that language difficulties of Pacific students provide major barriers to academic success but Taufe’ulungaki (2003) argues that it is not the only contributing factor, that is, the problems do not always reside with the students but with the lecturers’ language use and communicative conventions (p.21). Cultural contexts, she adds, can contribute to miscommunication and misunderstanding leading to learning difficulties and academic failure.

Access to technology is limited and without any electricity many students study by the light of a benzene or kerosene lamp. The concept of a study space at home is notable only in urban areas. Family, community, religion and work obligations often take precedence over studying and student support is usually an individual matter. Parents are not overly concerned but do give their moral support. In isolation, DFL students are unable to get academic, economic, psychological and physical support from technological networks that surround urban areas. They are sources of strength to urban students. However, there are enormous hurdles to overcome even in the new technologies used in DFL at USP. For example, the Introductory Course CS121: Information Systems I experienced problems that included difficulties in obtaining and maintaining software and hardware; limited enrolments due to limited computer access; providing local tutors for student support and rapidly updating the software and hardware every four to five years was often tedious and counterproductive (Evans & Hazelman, 2007). They summed this up by writing: “Print course materials were sometimes outdated before the course had begun to run and there were constant scrambles to update materials, softwares and hardware” (Evans & Hazelman, 2007, p.4). Several studies have noted that there is no significant difference between on-campus and distance students’ outcomes of learning. Distance students perform as well as on-campus students. A distance-learning course can be just as successful as an on-campus class, as long as all involved spend the necessary time to prepare, use technology appropriately, become aware of the various learning styles and have resources in place to properly support the programs (Hillstock, 2005).
Mugler & Landbeck (1997) in their research on the learning conditions of DFL students in the Pacific agreed to some extent with Hillstock (2005) in that resources, part of the conditions of learning, are necessary for enhancing learning in distance education. Learning conditions are an important factor in determining the effectiveness of distance education (Ramsden & Entwistle, 1981). Developing countries are disadvantaged in that the learning conditions are significantly lower than the industrialised world’s standards of education.

USP’s current learning packages do not encourage deep approaches to learning (Landbeck & Mugler, 2000). One study showed that USP distance students performed at the reading level required by the materials in only one of the six courses evaluated (Lockwood et al 1988). Landbeck & Mugler in their recent study of USP distance students suggested that promoting deep understanding in this respect was not possible unless the readability of materials were improved. The instructional designer’s role is important here. They needed to be familiar with the conditions of DFL students. Waqa (1984) observed that some staff faced considerable pressure in carrying out both on-campus and distance teaching. On-campus students take precedence over the distance education students who often felt alienated from their on-campus counterparts.

Meaningful learning is appropriate for DFL students, meaning that learning materials are to be culturally appropriate. Va’a (1997) acknowledged the importance of improving science teaching and pleaded for a curriculum that did not alienate students from their cultures. Similarly, Wah (1997) criticised USP’s distance programs for conflicting with students’ cultures and for many years, Thaman (1997) has argued for more culturally appropriate teaching and learning in education in general.

This chapter discussed and synthesised the research literature from the perspective of the historical development of distance education globally and how this influenced the development of DFL in the Pacific region. The chapter examined and deliberated on the various definitions of distance education and considered the research that supports the evidence of how difficult it is to specifically define the term. There was also analysis of the strengths and the weaknesses of these various definitions provided by the experts in the field of distance education. The chapter reflects and draws on the research literature to
consider how the research can be applied to the teaching and learning needs of Pacific Islanders. This chapter examined some characteristics and roles of the learners in DFL and considered earlier and current research in distance education to enable us to engage in future research endeavours. Finally in looking at DFL in the Pacific and in Fiji, it reflects the contexts of learning that comprise the DFL students’ learning environment and presents an insight into the case studies used in this research.

The next chapter discusses the research of other learning theorists with a focus on the connection between developments in distance education, theories of distance education and relates these to how people think and learn.
Chapter Three: Thinking and Learning in Distance and Flexible Learning

3.0 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to examine theories of learning; and to compare these with theories of distance learning proposed by various educational fields that research how people think and learn. The chapter will focus on the theories of learning that have been historically connected to instructional design in distance and flexible education. Much of the emphasis in this chapter is on exploring how these theories help us understand the complexity of human learning in socially-mediated contexts. Chapter Four will elaborate on this context of understanding human learning by developing an account of third-space theory and proposing it as a useful theoretical frame for considering the culturally-based educational work in DFL settings. This chapter looks at significant lines of thought propounded by various experts in learning and in distance learning.

Theories of education guide the practice and research of distance education. Most of these theories have been derived from classical European and American models that were used to develop and explain learning and teaching in correspondence study (Simonson et al, 1999). Today, the practice of distance education has changed and, as a result, new theories are evolving to guide the new practices in distance education. For example, the common use of communications technologies in DFL has instigated the need for forms of distance education that maintain traditional aspects of education while at the same time take advantage of the opportunities offered by telecommunications technologies (Simonson et al, 1999).

Theoretical accounts of learning in DFL (Holmberg, 1995b) demonstrate that distance-education theory is based on general-education theory, although DFL represents a distinct type or form of education that has certain target groups, methods, media and other significant features. Distance education and its circumstances vary significantly from other types of education. The theories derived from general-educational research have
been valuable in establishing the relevance and applicability of such theories to the special conditions of distance education. For example, major learning theories such as, the behaviourist, cognitive, constructivist, descriptive, humanist, identity, and social-learning theories have been used to build accounts of learning in education generally and are now being applied to learning in DFL contexts (Holmberg, 1995b). Several theories of teaching and learning are relevant to distance education. Early work by Bååth (1979), cited in Holmberg (2005) presented models that defined some of those characteristics that have been considered and adopted by distance educators. The following table outlines each model in terms of the theoretical conceptions of learning on which it is based and the types of communication that accompany each model.

Table 3.1: Teaching Models and Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Conception of Learning</th>
<th>Conception of Teaching</th>
<th>Two-way Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skinner’s behaviour-control model</strong></td>
<td>Extreme behaviourism</td>
<td>Very Strict control</td>
<td>Checking students’ achievements; individualising functions; assess students’ starting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>level; consider special abilities; previous reinforcement patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rothkopf’s principles for written instruction</strong></td>
<td>Moderate behaviourism</td>
<td>Rather Strict Control</td>
<td>Helping students get started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ausubel’s advanced organisers</strong></td>
<td>Moderate cognitivism</td>
<td>Rather strict control</td>
<td>Determine each students’ previous knowledge and cognitive structure; promote positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>transfer to subsequent parts of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Egan’s structural communication</strong></td>
<td>Pronounced cognitivism</td>
<td>Moderate control</td>
<td>Individually devised discussion comments and “reverse” assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bruner’s discovery-learning theory</strong></td>
<td>Strict cognitivism</td>
<td>Mild control</td>
<td>Provide individually adapted help; stimulate students’ discovery of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rogers’ model for facilitation of learning</strong></td>
<td>Strict cognitivism connected with a basic theory of personality</td>
<td>Freedom to learn</td>
<td>Check ‘open’ assignments for submission; dialogue with each individual student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gagné’s general teaching model</strong></td>
<td>Tries to integrate ideas from most of the other models into his own</td>
<td>Activating motivation; stimulating recall; providing learner guidance; providing feedback</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bååth, John (1982)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bååth (1979)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bååth’s argument is that to some degree all these models are applicable to distance education and that they are useful in generating inspiration for new developments in
distance-education systems (Holmberg, 2005, p.108). Bååth saw the role of a tutor as one that could motivate student improvement through constructive criticism, encouragement, and being personally involved in the students’ learning problems (Bååth, 1982). His emphasis on the pedagogic significance of tutor-comments forms the crucial link in the chain for two-way communication in distance education, which is needed to improve the student’s learning performance. With reference to table 3.1, Bååth is of the opinion that the stricter the control of learning towards a specified academic goal, the more self-sufficient the students become and the less two-way communication occurs. He also suggests that the less the control of learning is towards the specified academic goal, the more significant the two-way communication role becomes. In summing up, Bååth suggests that the design of the teaching and learning materials is important as it can build a two-way communication on its own merit regardless of whether the course is delivered by correspondence or through face-to-face interaction.

3.1 Learning and Thinking as Behaviour

Behaviourist theories of learning dominated the field of education for at least two centuries. This family of theories uses scientific evidence to describe human actions and develops explanations of the causes of observable behaviours. Principles from behaviourist theory include repetition, positive and negative reinforcement, using positive reinforcers to increase learning and so forth. These behavioural-theory concepts formed the basis of most of the learning theory applied to child rearing and classroom learning. Behaviourist theories of learning sought scientific and demonstrable explanations for simple behaviours hence humans resembled machines and explanations of their behaviours are of a mechanical nature (Abrahamsom, 1999). Lefrancois (1988, p. 29) stated, theorists “… make use of one or both of two principal classes of explanations for learning: those based on contiguity (simultaneity of stimulus and response events) and those based on the effects of behaviour (reinforcement and punishment)”. Linked to this is B.F. Skinner’s work, which is still in use today. Behaviourists were concerned with observable behaviour rather than the internal thought processes, and many believed that the environment shaped a person’s behaviour. Therefore, what one learnt was determined by the elements in the environment rather than by the individual learner.
Skinner believed that the learner must engage in behaviour and actively respond to it in order to learn and validate the occurrence of learning. In this way, behaviourists assume learners to be passive and that they respond only to environmental stimuli as was greatly advocated by Skinner. His theory focuses on the conditioning of observable human behaviour and is based on the idea that learning is a function of change in observable behaviour (Cunningham et al., 2007; Skinner, cited in Smith, 1999b). Skinner identified some principles of learning that included:

- Positive reinforcement – Refers to learners who are rewarded or praised causing the learners to make the desired connection between the stimuli and the response.
- Negative reinforcement – When learners are punished, repetitions of undesirable responses to the stimuli are avoided.
- Continuous reinforcement – Continued rewards and praises will cause the learners’ rate of learning to increase.
- Intermittent reinforcement – the rate of learner retention is longer.
- Positive and Negative reinforcement shape learner behaviour.

(Adapted from SIL, 1999)

Aspects of Skinnerian theory have long dominated distance-education systems (Holmberg, 2005) and continue to be influential to this day, as its principles are used in instructional designs for distance education, in teaching as well as in learning. Devi (2006) succinctly stated that the behaviourist and objectivist learning are acquired through passive assimilation or rote learning. This is a learning technique that avoids understanding a subject and focuses on memorising subject material. Rote learning practice involves learning by repetition. The idea is to enable learners to quickly recall the meaning of the materials they wish to learn and know, and the more it is repeated the more retention occurs and the greater the ability is for retention. This was the method that evangelists used in introducing the new Christian religion to the early Fijians. Fijians learnt to memorise Bible verses and key passages such as The Lord’s Prayer and Psalm 23 by repetition. In the Fijian context, this behaviourist approach was noted in Chapter Two and is explored more in Chapters Six and Seven through DFL students’ personal engagement in DFL studies.
The exponential rise in the use of distance education to meet the needs of dispersed learners has also seen a rise in the inclusion of behavioural principles in the design and implementation of computer-based instructional programs (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996). When examining education in the Pacific, there is continuity in the use of behavioural approaches to guide teaching and learning that stretches from colonial times to the present day.

While behaviourist theories have been influential in education and in DFL, Carlson & Buskit, (cited in Pizurro, 1998), state that it has significant limits. The limitation of behaviourism is that it is restricted to relationships between individuals’ environments and their behaviour without explaining how this affects their thinking. In this way, behaviourism is a theory that has a limited capacity because proponents largely ignore individual cognitive functioning comprising of mental events, or feelings and consciousness, which occur outside the confined world of behaviour. In other words, learners are seen in context only in the confines of the behaviour being observed and described. Others have argued that human beings’ actions are much more complex and are the result of richly embedded systems of social functioning that supports thought and action.

### 3.2 Learning Conditions and Thinking Sequences

Gagné’s Conditions of Learning Theory is a theoretical framework that encompasses many aspects of learning (Kearsley, 1994a; Patsula, 1999). Gagné explored the basics of effective instruction or conditions of learning. He advocated the provision of the design of instruction in all domains of learning that was effective, that is, that the instructions should provide a set of component tasks that is sequenced to ensure that the learners master each component task, which will then enable the optimal transfer of the final task (Gagné & Driscoll, 1988). According to Gagné, psychologists observed conditions under which learning occurred and their duty was to describe them objectively. His conditions of learning were the sets of observable situations set up for learning to occur. Gagné is of the view that there are different kinds of learning outcomes and that there are external and internal conditions that determine or promote each type. He believes that if learning was
to occur, there must be a stimulus situation (S) and if the learner responded to this situation (R) then learning would have occurred.

Gagné’s theoretical framework covered many aspects of learning. Kearsley (1994a) stated that the focus of his theory was on intellectual skills that he originally developed as a prescriptive measure for military training. He identified five major categories of learning levels or outcomes, which represented human capabilities, each level requiring different instructions (Kearsley, 1994a). Each level listed below required different internal and external conditions. The five major types of learning are identified as:

- Verbal information
- Intellectual skills
- Cognitive strategies
- Motor skills
- Attitudes

*(Adapted from Kearsley, 1994a)*

In verbal information, the learner merely states previously learned materials such as facts, concepts, principles and procedures. An example of this would be children recalling facts and concepts, and reinstating information and definitions verbally or in writing. In intellectual skills, the learner is able to use the information. The learner is able to discriminate, understand and define concepts and rules and produce higher order thinking. Cognitive strategies refer to internally organised capabilities that a learner uses to guide his or her processes of learning and thinking. Learners employ personal ways to guide their learning, thinking, acting and feeling and they exhibit refinement as they learn to encounter situations. In motor skills the learner executes performances involving the muscles, such as piloting a plane. Gagné (1970) refers to these as “... capabilities that mediate organised motor performances like tying shoes laces, printing letters, etc.” (p. 90). Learning motor skills takes practice in repetitions of the essential motor acts. Attitudes are acquired internal states that influence the learner’s actions towards events or people. Learners choose personal actions based on their internal states of understanding and feeling.

Gagné proposed a sequence of nine learning events that included most of the learning outcomes, which promoted the idea that effective instruction should be systematic and
sequential in order to meet certain learning purposes (Driscoll, 1994). These instructional events do not produce learning but they support the learner’s internal process. Table 3.2 shows Gagné’s nine instructional events and their corresponding cognitive processes.

**TABLE 3.2: Gagné’s Learning Theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Instructional Event</th>
<th>Cognitive Process</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gain attention</td>
<td>Reception – relates to perception</td>
<td>Use an “interest device” that captures the learner’s attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Inform learners of the objective</td>
<td>Expectancy – builds up expectancy</td>
<td>Initiate the internal process of expectancy and help motivate the learner to complete the lesson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Stimulating recall of prior learning</td>
<td>Retrieval – focuses on selected stimulus</td>
<td>Associate new information with prior knowledge or experience that can facilitate the learning process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Presenting the stimulus</td>
<td>Selective perception</td>
<td>New content is presented to learner. Content should be chunked and organised meaningfully, and typically is explained and then demonstrated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Providing learning guidance</td>
<td>Semantic encoding</td>
<td>Help learners encode information for long term storage. Additional guidance should be provided along with the presentation of the new content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Eliciting performance</td>
<td>Responding</td>
<td>Practise by letting the learner do something with the newly acquired behaviour, skills or knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Providing feedback</td>
<td>Reinforcement</td>
<td>Show correctness of the learner’s response, analyse learner’s behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Assessing performance</td>
<td>Retrieval</td>
<td>Test or assessment to determine if the lesson has been learnt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Enhancing retention and transfer</td>
<td>Generalisation</td>
<td>Inform the learner about similar problem situations, provide additional practice. Put the learner in a transfer situation, review the lesson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Kearsley, 1994a.

Adapted from Patsula, 1999, pp.2-3

Adapted from Mooi, Bakar & Hashim, 2009, Slides 12-15

The examples provided in the third column of Table 3.2 illustrate the functions of the course materials that have been widely used in distance education. Gagné’s demands on written learning materials, based on the behaviourist and cognitive principles, proved productive in distance education (Gagné, 1970). Learning is expedited by instruction, which varies depending on the nature of the desired outcome. Distance teaching and
learning are based on courses pre-produced for a purpose. The course book as this is called differs from a textbook in that a textbook has all the relevant facts, but it does not guide, teach, or induce the students to learn — as expected of course-study materials (Holmberg, 2005). According to Holmberg (2005), the course book is a substitute for the textbook and the teacher. The course book can be, and should be, a complete substitute for the teacher. Therefore for the pre-produced material to be successful it must meet the requirements that are clearly outlined by the Gagnerian functions (Holmberg, 2005, p. 56).

Gagné’s theoretical account of learning has contributed to understanding more about the role of instruction. Gagné believed that there are many differences in learners and learning styles and his primary concern was to motivate the learners. According to Bååth (1982) correspondence or distance education is well-suited to teaching that is directed towards cognitive goals of verbal information or intellectual skills type. The conclusion from this has been to acknowledge that learners have individual differences, readiness and motivation and therefore those who design instruction for learning must consider these differences in terms of the rates of learning and cognitive strategies and learner capabilities. Learners will achieve their goals in learning through the success of the instruction that informs and directs their attention and assists them in making decisions about tasks.

Finally, learning is precipitated by the use of sequenced instructional strategies that provide motivation, direction, guided practice, feedback and reinforcement. These ideas are embedded in today’s design principles and delivery systems, more so in computer-based instruction (Driscoll, 1994).

3.3 Thinking Individuals and the Rise of Cognitivism
The cognitivist revolution replaced behaviourism in the 1960s becoming the dominant paradigm in use for explaining how people think and learn (Holmberg, 2005). Cognitivism was a theory of learning that used a metaphor for the mind: as a computer that stores incoming information, which is processed and results in an outcome. In this theory, the human mind had several inner mental processes occurring, such as thinking, memory, knowledge and problem-solving. Knowledge was seen as a set of symbolic
mental constructions or schemata, and learning was defined as a change in a learner’s schemata. Cognitivists take the perspective that students actively process information, making connections between the old and the new knowledge or schemata (Ryder, 2009). This is how information is processed in the mind. Knowledge comprises mental representations that the learner constructs based on his or her past learning experiences. Learning is seen as being largely self-motivated. Ausubel, Bruner and Gagné were researchers interested in human cognition and who developed and presented different perspectives that described how people learn. The theoretical contribution of cognitivism to understanding learning and thinking has been immeasurable and has been central to the development of instructional paradigms in all types of education.

Ausubel’s cognitive approach led to new thinking and modification in educational practice. He was concerned with meaningful learning, implying the acquisition of learning through cognition (Ausubel, 1968). Ausubel’s notable contribution was in the notion of the advanced organiser, which was described as a device or mental learning aid that helped learners master and control incoming new information. The advanced organiser was a means of preparing the learner’s cognitive structure for the learning experiences that were about to take place (Ryder, 2009). He described organisers as a bridge between new learning and existing ideas or knowledge. The advanced organisers allowed the learner to organise and reorganise information in a meaningful way and activated the relevant schema so that the new information would be assimilated into the learner’s existing mental picture.

The advantages of the advanced organisers were many. Their use helped improve several aspects of learning, particularly in computer education. Computer education as stated here is learning promulgated by innovation that allowed communication between computers networks, which changed the way in which distance education was delivered. For instance, audio-cassette tapes that were historically separated from text instructions were merged into an audio/data CD-ROMs. Networks enabled computers to communicate with one another and further on in time, as globalisation increased, organisations linked their systems using intranet (Fink, 2007). Internet services were created hosting many delivery systems in distance education. This contributed to improved comprehension and transfer of information and text recall. For instance, Snapp
& Glover (1990) studied 35 middle-school students. Those who read and paraphrased an advance organiser prior to studying correctly answered a lot of lower-order study questions. These students did better than those who did not use the advanced organiser. It also facilitated computer learning as Sook-Hi-Kang (cited in Bastik, 1999) found that advanced organisers made a significant difference in facilitating learning in a computer simulated environment. Cardinale, (cited in in Bastik, 1999) found advanced organisers facilitated learning for pre-service teachers in an introductory microcomputer class. Advanced organisers were also helpful in facilitating listening comprehensions. Herron, (cited in in Bastik, 1999) found advanced organisers consisting of several short sentences in therench language summarised the events in the video chronologically and helped learners retain the information more easily.

Ausubel’s contribution has been about meaningful learning which implies anchoring new learning matter in cognitive structures already acquired (Holmberg, 2005). His emphasis has been on the active nature of reception learning. This requires learners to be active by underlining, completing missing words, rewording sentences or summarising them, or giving additional examples and so forth. Ausubel’s theory of reception learning has been influential in the domain of written instruction and has appealed to instructors in distance education.

Early cognitivists rejected the contributions of behaviourist theories to our understanding of human learning, because of the latter’s tendency to minimise the importance of the mental processes that occur in the human mind. They are of the view that behaviourists are concerned mainly with the observable behaviour of a person and do not focus enough on trying to understand the processes occurring in the mind. Cognitivism also had limitations in assuming a narrowly conceived idea of the mind and how it functioned. The metaphor of the mind as a computer that processed information as symbolic representations and thinking processes that were seen as disconnected to deep and wide social mediation limited the cognitivists’ ability to account for differences between people, other than in the idea that developmental stages were responsible for different levels of thinking developed by Piaget (cited in Mergel, 1998). While the “…possibility of the potential of computational modelling to simulate the mind in all its richness and complexity” (Dai & Sternberg, 2004, p5), might still be useful on
some levels, such a view does not allow us to address the complexities that motivate humans and explain the role of emotions in actions. Probably the greatest limitation of cognitivism is its inability to include human’s social and cultural experiences as a force for higher-order mental functions (Dai & Sternberg, 2004). It fails to consider the socially mediated and mediating influences of the values, attitudes, characters, self-understanding and beliefs of a person and the way he or she thinks. There is no consideration of the person’s culture, which is the context in which a person’s actions are deeply embedded. Culture influences the thinking, the values, the actions and knowledge of each person in ways that are culturally specific and individually expressed. It was this essential element in a person’s existence that prompted socioculturalists like Vygotsky to develop other theories of learning that would take into account the social interaction and behaviour of a person in learning.

3.4 Thinking in Social and Cultural Contexts: Sociocultural Theory

In recent years, theories that seek to promote understanding of the social nature of human learning have been given more emphasis in general education and in DFL. Most notably, the work of Lev Vygotsky has been of influence. Vygotsky’s work is concerned primarily with the socially mediated nature of human learning and development. He theorised that social interaction is crucial in cognitive development and created a “zone of proximal development”. Vygotsky defined the zone of proximal development as “… the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Wertsch, 1984, p.8). He proposed that human mental functions are shaped by cultural, historical and institutional forces (Wertsch, 1991) and that an individual cannot be separated from the social context in which she or he is embedded (Rogoff, 1998). Vygotsky’s accounts of human learning shared many of Piaget’s assumptions (McNaughton, 2002) but placed more emphasis on the social context of learning: while Piaget emphasised cognition as a foundation for discovery learning. The major theme in Vygotsky’s theoretical framework is social interaction as having a fundamental role in the development of cognition. According to Tharp and Gallimore (cited in Scherba de Valenzuela, 2002), Vygotsky argues that a child’s development cannot be understood by a study of the individual alone but rather by an examination of the child situated in the external social world in which the
individual’s life developed. As Kublin et al (cited in Scherba de Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2007) succinctly states “Vygotsky described learning as being embedded within social events and occurring as a child interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment” (p.287). In short, according to the social cognition-learning model, culture and society teach children what to think and how to think.

Vygotsky argued that social interaction preceded development and it was learning processes that led to development, rather than development occurring so that learning could take place. According to Vygotsky, there are two primary means of learning that occur, one is through social interaction and the other is through language. A child's new knowledge is learnt through interaction with others on the social level and then later it becomes more meaningful as the child masters the knowledge and skills. One aspect of his theory that has been influential in teaching and learning is the idea that the potential for cognitive development depends upon the “Zone of Proximal Development,” (ZPD) or the level of development that children attain when they are engaged in social behaviour. Here, Vygotsky argued that much of the important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with a skilful teacher, tutor or an adult. The teacher can model behaviours and provide verbal instructions for the child, which Vygotsky referred to as co-operative or collaborative dialogue. The child seeks to understand the actions and instructions provided by the teacher or adult then internalises the information, using it to guide or regulate their own performance. The place where instruction and learning can take place is the zone of proximal development hence anything that the child can learn with the assistance and support of a teacher, tutor or adult and the instructional environment is said to lie within the ZPD (Wilhelm, Baker & Dube, 2002).

Wertsch (1984) describes this full development of ZPD as dependent upon full social interaction. Vygotsky’s theory promotes learning contexts in which students play an active role in their own learning. The teacher’s role is to collaborate with students in order to facilitate meaning construction in students. The traditional instructional model in which a teacher or lecturer transmits information to students is being contrasted to one where learning becomes a reciprocal experience for teacher and students (Wertsch, 1984).
Vygotsky’s impact on learning in general may also be applicable to distance education learning. His argument is that human beings learn much more through interaction, therefore the educational curricula should be designed to emphasise interaction between learners and the learning tasks. Scaffolding is a task that children require from adults to assist them in completing the task. It instils the skills that are needed for independent problem solving. Finally, assessment methods need to consider the ZPD. What a learner is capable of doing alone is his/her level of actual development, and what he/she can do with assistance from the teacher/tutor is the level of potential development.

Other psychologists who have contributed to understandings of how human beings’ actions are socially mediated come from Bandura’s accounts of social learning. Bandura states that people learn from one another by observing and modelling the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1977). Bandura states, “... Most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (Bandura, 1977, p. 22). His theory posits some important characteristics that stimulate learning and which Kearsley (1994c) explains as:

- Attention and observer characteristics – how much the observer can understand, how interested the observer is, and past reinforcement.
- Retention – remembering what you paid attention to including mental association and organization.
- Motor Reproduction – rehearsal or practice or reproduction – reproducing the image both mentally and physically.
- Motivation – which includes external, self-reinforcement and justifying reasons for imitating.
- Observer characteristics (such as sensory capacities, arousal level, perceptual level set and past reinforcement).

Bandura advocated the concept that people influence each other and create their own environments. In behaviourism, one’s environment causes one’s behaviour and Bandura supports the view that behaviour also causes environment. Bandura believed in “reciprocal determinism”, stating that the world and a person’s behaviour cause each
other, while behaviourism essentially stated that one’s environment causes one’s behavior. Bandura, who was studying adolescent aggression, argued that this was too simplistic suggesting that behavior caused environment as well (Patsula, 1999). Later, Bandura considered personality as an interaction between three components: the environment, one’s behaviour, and one’s psychological processes (one’s ability to entertain images in minds and language).

In essence, he believes that we affect our environment, as well as learn from it. He was trying to emphasise that cognition plays a critical role in people's capability to construct reality, self-regulate, encode information, and perform behaviours. Much of Bandura’s theory is related to the importance of social learning, which is reflected in some of the discussions and analysis from this study’s data collection and the theory of the third space, which I have used as my theoretical framework.

### 3.5 Constructive Thinkers and Constructivism

Towards the end of the twentieth century, constructivist approaches began influencing thinking and practice in distance education. The main thrust of this approach was raising the awareness that each learner constructs his or her knowledge by individual interaction with the subject matter and that each learner learnt different things from the same course (Holmberg, 2005). The constructivist paradigm asserts that learning is an active, constructive process where the learner is actively constructing or creating his or her own subjective representations of reality. New information is linked to prior knowledge, which makes mental representations subjective. Learning is a contextualised process of constructing knowledge, rather than acquiring it. In other words, knowledge is constructed based on personal experiences and assumptions of the environment. Often the learner will bring past experiences and cultural factors to a situation which constructivists believe is how learning occurs.

The role of the learner in the construction of learning is imperative to constructivism. Boud (1990, cited in Holmberg, 2005) presented this constructivist thinking as:

> Knowledge does not exist independently of those who possess it. It cannot be transmitted unchanged to the learner. It always fits into the existing framework of understanding of the learner and is shaped by this framework. Learning for
meaning and tight teacher control sit uneasily together. Learners must make their own maps of knowledge.

Holmberg (2005) argues that those who endorse full student autonomy are of the view that any uninvited intervention in adult student’s work is offensive to the student’s integrity, whilst those who limit students’ independence by various control measures consider it a moral and social duty as far as possible to prevent failure (p114).

There is a distinction between cognitive constructivism and social constructivism. In cognitive constructivism, the learner understands things in terms of developmental stages and learning styles, as have been presented in the preceding paragraphs. In social constructivism, meaning and understanding that evolve from social interactions and encounters is emphasised. It views the learner as an individual that has unique needs and backgrounds. It also acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of the learner and it encourages, utilises and rewards it as an integral part of the learning process (Wertsch, 1997).

A learner’s culture and background are important in learning, because they influence the learner’s thinking. The learner inherits a lot of things from being a member of a particular society or culture, and as such, their thinking also develops so that they are able to negotiate and make meaningful relationships that will shape their knowledge and learning. Social interaction with knowledgeable members of the society will enable the learner to acquire social meaning of the systems surrounding him or her and enhance how they utilize them. Wertsch (1997) also confirms the importance of the background and culture of the learner throughout the learning process, as this background also helps to shape the knowledge and truth that the learner creates, discovers and attains in the learning process. The responsibility for learning is upon the learner. Di Vesta (1987) believes that the role of the teacher then is to support the learner to become an effective thinker. Social constructivist scholars like Brown, Collins, & Duguid (1989) and Kukla (2000) agree that learning is an active process where learners learn and develop thinking for themselves through interaction with society and the people around them.

Bruner’s view of constructivist theory is based on the study of cognition and his view that learning is primarily the result of interactions that human beings engage in. His theory
proposes “... learning as an active process in which the learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current and/or past knowledge” (Kearsley, 1994b). Bruner’s profound contribution has been in the theory of instruction, which has been widely used in education. According to Bruner, the theory of instruction should address the following aspects:

- the most effective sequences in which to present material
- the ways in which a body of knowledge can be structured so that it can be most readily grasped by the learner (Kearsley, 1994b).

His contribution to the process impacted on education policy development in many countries and influenced many teachers and scholars. Bruner’s contribution to the theory of instructional learning (in the materials for learning) is linked to a constructivist perspective with a focus on cognitive development. He argues that learning is an active process where the learner constructs knowledge based on what the learner knows now and what he or she knew from the past.

Materials for learning should have instructions that acknowledge students’ experiences to ensure a state of readiness towards learning. The need for the learner to understand foremost is an important priority before the learner makes use of the information given (Cunningham, Gannon, Kavanagh, Greene, Reddy & Whitson, 2007). Bruner states that, “... ideally, interest in the material to be learned is the best stimulus to learning, rather than such external goals as grades or later competitive advantage” (Smith, 2002, p.4).

The practical application of Bruner’s theory to instructional design is effective in distance learning. Kearsley (1994b) outlines Bruner’s characteristics of effective teaching techniques based on his theoretical concept. These are:

- Readiness – Instructions must be concerned with the experiences and contexts that make the student willing and able to learn.

- Spiral Organization – Instructions must be structured so that the student can understand them easily.

- Going Beyond the Information Given – Instructions should be designed to facilitate extrapolation and/or fill in the gaps (Bruner, cited in Patsula, 1999).
These principles have been embedded in pedagogical practices in web-design strategies for web courses in distance education (Fahy, cited in Patsula, 1999).

3.6 Experiential learning and the role of cognition

Last, but not least of these learning theories, is the theory of learning advocated by Carl Rogers and its relevance to education, particularly to distance education. The basic argument in Roger’s learning theory is that learning is possible because by nature human beings have a natural eagerness to learn (Maharg, 2008; Smith, 1999b). Learners are responsible for their own learning and are at the centre of the learning: it is a person-centred learning. Rogers states that there are two types of learning, the cognitive and the experiential learning. The cognitive learning is one that corresponds to academic knowledge such as learning vocabulary or multiplication tables, while the experiential learning, which refers to applied knowledge, is the more significant because it is meaningful to the learner. He further explains that experiential learning addresses the needs and wants of the learner, such as learning about engines in order to repair cars.

The focus of Rogers’ work has been influential in current education. Rogers’ theory was highly criticised at a time when behaviourism was the dominant paradigm in educational psychology. This is how he deemed learning:

*I want to talk about learning. But not the lifeless, sterile, futile, quickly forgotten stuff that is crammed into the mind of the poor, helpless individual tied into his seat by ironclad bonds of conformity! I am talking about LEARNING – the insatiable curiosity that drives the adolescent boy to absorb everything he can see or hear or read about gasoline engines in order to improve the efficiency and speed of his ‘cruiser.’ I am talking about the student who says, “I am discovering, drawing in from the outside, and making that which is drawn in a real part of me.” I am talking about any learning in which the experience of the learner progresses along this line: “No, no, that’s not what I want”; Wait! This is closer to what I am interested in, what I need”; “Ah, here it is! Now I’m grasping and comprehending what I need and what I want to know!”* (Rogers, 1980, p.18-19).

Rogers shows that there seems to be a lack of attention given to the nature of learning. Learning becomes a product and a process. Rogers believes in the view of learning as a
personal act that will fulfil a learner’s potential, that experience is the key to learning. He says:

“Experience is for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person’s ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience... My experience is not authoritative, because it is infallible. It is the basis of authority because it can always be checked in new primary ways. In this way, its frequent error or fallibility is always open to correction” (Rogers, 1969, p.26)

To Rogers, experiential learning is equivalent to personal change and growth. This is Rogers’ assertion of the primacy of individual experience. Maharg (2008) shows the distinction between Rogers’ experience as authority and as authoritative: Rogers detested the latter because experience is the ‘highest authority’ that it is fallible, and must be “always open to correction” (p.7).

‘Empathy’ played a key role in Rogers’ work. Just as a doctor would listen to a client or patient, Rogers believed that learners need to be heard and accepted. This includes communicating with the learner from the learner’s views and guiding by the responses of the learner and being a ‘confident companion’ (Maharg, 2008, p.7-8).

Rogers believes that humans have a natural tendency to learn, while the role of the teacher is to facilitate the learning by allowing the learner to participate completely in the learning process and taking control over its nature and direction. Hence, the learner takes responsibility for his or her own learning. Learners should as often as possible be able to provide input for the learning. The input should occur through their insights and experiences. Rogers emphasised the importance of learning-to-learn and an openness to change. Rogers’ theory agreed with the constructivists’ view of always beginning with what the learner knows, including what the learner knows about the learning process. His theory is grounded less in theory and much more in experience and practice, as is the constructivist learning design and constructivism.

The constructivist approach to learning focuses on learning processes and mental conceptualisations surrounding meaningful learning, which Rogers describes as the facilitation of learning. The mastery of the processes of learning and conceptualising will lead to greater transfer of learning. The active involvement of children intellectually,
emotionally, socially and physically promotes meaningful learning therefore the role of communication becomes crucial in promoting this type of learning. The active involvement of students in the facilitation of learning is reinforced when the teacher engages in the role of listening to students while they are learning, as well as guiding them during their learning experiences. Herman, (1995) states that the ideal situation would be that the teacher learns from the students while at the same time the students can learn from the teacher and the other students. Rogers’ theoretical perspective on the student-learner approach is advantageous particularly in distance education learning.

A student-centred approach to learning has been a concern from the beginning and putting the student more firmly in the frame as an active learner and meaning-maker who comes to the course with an existing store of knowledge. There has also been a concern to make written texts as interactive as the medium allows, placing much emphasis on the development of the part-time tutoring and counselling force who are the students’ immediate contact beyond the learning materials. Carl Rogers’ learner-centred approach to learning is popular among those responsible for developing the tutors and counsellors. The facilitation of learning, whether in the face-to-face situation or through the medium of correspondence, emphasises dialogue with the student, albeit at a distance (Herman, 1995).

If these changes advocated by Rogers and constructivists are to happen, it is important for all educators to be aware of various epistemological and educational theories, which influence practice, and for such awareness to be enacted in teaching and learning practices. It is only then that the quality of teaching, learning and research improve. The learning theories highlighted in this chapter have all had some influence on distance education, and all have been, in some way or another, instantiated in the epistemology of teaching and learning in distance education. There are strengths and limitations in all these theories, but they are generally practical and realistic, with each providing a particular perspective that informs pedagogy, curriculum and assessment in some way. Herman (1995) likewise outlines some points that constructivists employ, which are worthy of consideration in teaching and learning, particularly in distance and flexible learning modes:
• It is best suited to a one-to-one or small group setting since teaching and learning must be extensively individualised.
• Teachers and tutors must be knowledgeable about the content to be taught and must demonstrate outstanding communication skills, and foster the idea that students create and translate mental conceptualisations into thoughtful actions.
• Teachers and tutors must believe that all learners possess the ability to learn and think and will learn the things that hold meaning for them.
• Helping students discover personal meaning in learning requires considerable time, energy and patience for all those involved in the teaching and learning process.

(Adapted from Herman, 1995, pp 13-14).

Constructivism taps into and triggers the student’s innate curiosity about the world and how things work. Students attempt to learn how the world turns and how it functions. They engage in the task and apply their existing knowledge and real-world experience, hypothesising and testing and ultimately drawing conclusions from their findings (Thirteen, 2004).

The following chapter will explore another theoretical perspective that is emerging as a powerful force in discussions of teaching and learning. Third-space theory (Gutierrez, 2006, 2008) has much to contribute to a re-conceptualisation of learning in DFL. After a review of current research on third-space theory, the idea that learning is conceived in this account as the meeting of two distinct social groups occurring through interactions that take place in a special third space will be discussed. Each space is conceptualised as a place where culture is disseminated. Learning in this instance is not simply a form of lesson planning that ensures respect for diversity or inclusion, but is “... transformative, critical and transferable across the boundaries of all learning spaces in children’s lives” (Gutierrez & Larsen, 2007, p. 71). Creating space for students to question and explore concepts they have never considered can transform classrooms into places that challenge lives or perspectives rather than simply deliver lessons to build literacy skills.
Chapter Four: Teaching, Learning and Third Space Theory

4.0 Introduction

Chapter Three outlined the basic tenets of broad families of theories of learning including: behaviourism, cognitivism, and social constructivism. Also discussed was how each theory has impacted on teaching and learning pedagogies from the past to the present day and how these theories are seen to contribute to DFL. More recently, socio-cultural theories of learning that focus on learning as a socially mediated process have emerged as an important area of educational research. Socio-cultural theory argues that learning occurs within a social setting and therefore the learning and the social setting in which is takes place are intrinsically linked. What the learner knows and how he or she accesses this knowledge can be found in the environment around which the learner is situated, whether it is a physical, social or cultural background. In this theory an active learner takes social guidance in a number of ways: some through interaction with others, some through personal exploration in socially and culturally constructed settings and activities, and some through being immersed in a social and cultural set of practices and organisational structures that channel possible developmental pathways in certain ways (McNaughton, 1995).

In relation to education, Visser & Visser (2000) state that learning has always been assumed to be the consequence of instruction and that this assumption has been the driving force behind the idea of instructional design. If instruction is designed appropriately then it will determine the degree of learning that the target learners will engage in and it will also determine the result the target learners will obtain. While behaviourist and cognitive theories focus on the individual as an agent of learning, who stores, retrieves and applies information, more contemporary developments in learning theories focus more on the social nature of the meaning-making process.

Social constructivists believe that meaning making is a process of social negotiation. Learning is inherently a social-dialogical process (Savery & Duffy, 1995). Vygotsky claimed that learning occurs through dialogue and that the dialogue is instrumental: meaning that it occurs between teacher and student, student and student, and even between text and student (Yang & Wilson, 2006). This theory proposes that human
beings are social creatures who depend on their fellow human beings for their own existence, learning, and authenticity. What individuals learn and how they make sense of knowledge depends on the social context of the learner. Learning in this context is interactive, in the sense that the learner must interact with the sources of ideas and knowledge in the social setting and they must take an active part in reconstructing knowledge and ideas within their own minds (Vygotsky, cited in Yang & Wilson, 2006).

More recent developments in socio-cultural theories have taken as their focus this zone in which humans negotiate learning. This is the place where the intermental becomes intramental (McNaughton, 1995). In Vygotskian terms it might be considered that this act of negotiation is an act of construction that occurs in the space that is created as humans think and learn together (Glasswell, 1999). In more recent Vygotskian theories, this zone is referred to as the “third space”. How it is incorporated into theories of teaching and learning is of interest to a number of scholars (e.g. Gutierrez, Rhymes & Larson, 1995; Gutierrez, 2008; Moje et al, 2004). Third-space theory does not challenge the ways other educators have employed theory, but it conceives new ways of describing the third space as a theoretical framework for educational research. The notion of “third space” is built upon ideas from hybridity theory, which argues that individuals draw on multiple discourses to make sense of the world. It has recently become a lens for educational research (Flessner, 2008). The initial conceptualisation stages of third-space theory originated from Bhabha (1994) and was later expanded and re-invented by others such as Moje (2004), Pane (2007) and Gutierrez (1999).

4.1 Hybridity
The term hybridity derives from biology and the Darwinian evolutionary theory (Gould, 2002). The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary’s* standard definition of a hybrid in biological terms is “... an animal or plant, which is the offspring of individuals of different kinds” (as cited in Fargher, 2007, p. 35). Today its use has become widespread across academic disciplines and significant cultures. A key text in the development of hybridity theory is Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994), which analyses the space “in-between” (the hybrid) as a form of colonial anxiety. Bhabha (1994) focuses on the combination of two relatively pure entities: the coloniser and the colonised coming together to form hybrids or culture, but also acknowledging that culture itself is a hybrid.
Hybridity theory perceives global society as a living space where culture and identity are not static, but an amalgam of ways of knowing and communicating with one another. In similar vein to Vygotskian theory, people draw on language and cultural resources in any given situation and their use of these resources reflects and constructs the “in-between” (Bhabha, 1994). This negotiation of an individual in social and cultural context has the potential to transform ways of making meaning as well as the actor’s identity. Bhabha’s work (1994) is grounded in the nature of cultural hybridity in post-colonial worlds and illustrates the instability required to enter into third space in order to challenge the dominant ways of culture, which have traditionally been seen as fixed.

Bhabha considered a discursive framework to unglue the third space by “appropriating signs and re-signifying symbols” (Maniotes, 2005) to clearly express this third place and the cultural “in-betweens” (Bhabha, 1994, p.1). As he states:

*It is significant that the productive capacities of Third Space have a colonial or post-colonial provenance....the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or diversities of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of a culture’s hybridity. To that end we should remember that it is in the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture* 

(Bhabha, cited in Flessner, 2007, p. 9).

In this in-between sense, hybridity offers a way to consider how students make meaning of their world as they engage in the in-between spaces to negotiate and reconstruct culturally available knowledge (Maniotes, 2005).

The work of Bakhtin (1981) is also relevant to discussions of how humans make and negotiate multiple meanings. Bakhtin suggests that a hybrid occurs when two or more discourse communities, widely separated by time and social space, merge. He argues that the potential for the creation of new forms of discourse lies within the hybrid and that historical life evolves through “organic hybridisation” — organic hybridisation creates “...new world views with new internal forms for viewing the world in words” (Bakhtin,
Maniotes (2005) refers to Bakhtin’s description of language as socially and culturally formed and historically changing. When teachers and students come together in third space, it can evoke a hybrid discourse that transcends both the official and unofficial discourses of the classroom, transforming talk, ideas, and opening up the possibilities for the creation of new meanings. Flessner (2008) adds to this and states that in classrooms where hybrids occur, learners and their teachers learn from each other’s multi-vocality and as a result, there are at their disposal new words to describe and interpret their worlds. Teachers create and inhabit an official space of structured learning and the students create and inhabit a personal space built from previous experiences and cultural ways of knowing and doing. Through their interactions, the teachers and students transcend the two discourse spaces and forge a new hybrid space, in which there are new ways to discuss and describe their understandings. They take a step into this space and their hybrid talk is transcendent of either official or personal and creates the third space where transformation of ideas can be realised (Maniotes, 2005, p.12).

Scholars who work with hybridity theory, posit that people in any given community draw on multiple resources to make sense of the world and to make sense of oral and written texts. According to Moje et al. (2004) hybridity theory examines how being “in-between” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1) several funds of knowledge and discourses can be both productive and constraining in terms of one’s literate, social and cultural practices and ultimately one’s identity development (Moje et al., 2004, p.42). Discourse as noted here is described as:

... a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expression, and artifacts, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or social network (Gee, 1996, p.131).

Gee’s distinction was designed to recognise the interrelationships between social relations, social identities, contexts and specific language situations. Moje et al (2004) further expands on the notion of hybridity, stating that it can apply to all of the following:

... integration of competing knowledge and Discourses; to the texts that one reads and writes; to the spaces, situations and relationships one comes
across and person’s identity enactments and sense of self (Moje et al., 2004, p. 42).

Ababneh (2006), another scholar of hybridity theory, adds that the hybrid is the outcome of the fusion of different structures of meaning within cultural or political formations resulting in the emergence of a new system or new culture that is neither of its original components and that ends up displacing them.

4.2 Third Space

Third space as a concept is seen as a theoretical response to “binaries” (Bhabha, 1994; Soja, 1996), which refer to terms set in opposition to one another. Soja (1996) exemplifies them as: large/small; subject/object; open/closed, while Bhabha lists them as: self/other; rural/urban; private/public. Because of these opposing binaries, Soja (1996) warns against stepping into the battlegrounds of these binaries. He cautions:

... to set (binary terms) up in antagonistic opposition only constrains critical interpretation and severely limits the possibilities for strategic intervention... Such binarizations... are never enough... There is always an otherview (Flessner, 2008, p. 22).

From the perspective of third-space theorists, binaries limit the ways in which ideas can be examined, expressed and discussed. In order to negate the limitations imposed by these binaries, the concepts of “hybridity” and “thirling and third space” (Flessner, 2008, p. 22) have been explored by many scholars. English (2005) builds on this idea and states that: “Third space serves as a rebuttal or corrective to regulating, rigid views and suggests that “...polarities do not apply” (Flessner, 2008, p. 22).
Similarly Bhabha (1994) rejects intellectual disputes and negative polarities. Soja (1996) says:

*When faced with a choice confined to the either/or.. creatively resist by choosing instead an-Other alternative, marked by the openness of the both/and also... with the ‘also’ reverberating back to disrupt the categorical closures implicit in either/or logic* (Flessner, 2008, p.23).

Third Space theory, as does hybridity theory, reconceptualises the first and second spaces of human interaction (Moje, et al., 2004). First and second spaces are binary — often competing — categories where people interact physically and socially. Moje et al (2004) discussed the binaries in literacy as the first and second spaces of people’s everyday lives versus academic knowledge that exists in educational settings. Third space generates new interpretations of everyday and academic knowledge as it is “… produced in and through language as people come together” (Moje et al., 2004, p. 43).

Researchers have defined ‘third space’ in various ways. Zeichner (2008, p. 4) defines third space as “…a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a first place perspective that is focussed on the real material world and a second place perspective.” that interprets this reality through what Soja (1996) refers to as imagined representations of spatiality. In activity theory, Engeström (1999), refers to the third space as that in-between activity system created out of: “… instability (internal tensions) and contradictions as the motive force of change and development” (Engeström, 1999, p. 9). It has been redefined in ways that acknowledge that people in any community have access to multiple sources of knowledge and resources to make sense of the world. According to Moje et al. (2004), the first space refers to what the person does in everyday life, which could also be his or her culture, and the second space is the institutionalised academic knowledge that the person receives whether it is educational, governmental or political in origin. The third space is that new hybrid or interpretations generated from what the person knows about his or her own cultural and social background and what he or she draws from academic knowledge. It is the space in between these two systems that has developed from what he or she knows about herself within his or her own culture and what he or she encounters in the second space created by academic life (Moje et al, 2004).
At this juncture it is important to note that impermanence characterises the third space. Working with this theoretical approach demands a sense of openness and ambiguity. Third space theorists implore others to:

... always be restlessly and self-critically moving on to new sites and insights, never confined by past journeys and accomplishments, always searching for differences, and otherness, a strategic and heretical space beyond what is presently known and taken for granted (Soja, 1996, p.34).

Rather than providing a sense of permanency, or what some educators call “best practices” (Flessner, 2008, p.27), third space theory encourages perpetual motion. In reality the third space intends to build further, to move on and to continuously expand the production of knowledge beyond that which is currently known. In this way, third spaces are elusive, open and ambiguous. Soja (1996, p. 2) explains,

In its broadest sense, third space is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings.

The changing milieu presents problems for third space theorists because of the need to engage in verifiable, definitive and cumulative forms of research. However, some theorists have been proactive in defending the temporary nature of third space. This perspective maintains that third space can be as useful methodologically as it can theoretically. Hannula (2001, p. 1) advocates its utility because the relative flexibility that is inherent in the concept ‘third space’ can be a way of opening, “… a door that is ajar towards wildly varying themes and possibilities”. This opening is one that allows for new themes and possibilities to emerge. Recently, many researchers have utilised third space as a theoretical lens for educational research including Gutierrez (1999, 2001, 2006), Moje (2004) and Moje et al., (2004). The construction of third space theory extends beyond education into other fields, which will also be examined in the following theoretical perspectives of third space.

4.3 Educational Perspectives on Third Space Theory

Gutiérrez (2008) brought the idea of third space to the educational community. Building on the work of Bhabha (1994) and Soja (1996), Gutiérrez (2005, p. 9-10) notes that “third spaces encourage us to examine a minimum of two interacting contexts or activities to
produce more complicated understandings of how social organisations of people’s everyday practices supports and constrains cognitive and social development”.

Gutiérrez (2008) discusses the third space in guided inquiry as a space between the first space and the second space and her conceptualisation of the third space is derived from Vygotsky’s notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This was developed as a social constructivist’s view of learning, in which the ZPD served as a central guiding principle for educators and future learning theories. ZPD was a level of development attained when children engage in social behaviour. Vygotsky (1978) maintained that the child follows the adult’s example and gradually develops the ability to do certain tasks without help or assistance (as previously discussed in Chapter Three). He believed that individual development could not be understood without reference to the social and cultural context within which the development occurred (McNaughton, 1995).

Ideological approaches to literacy, by authors including Moje and Gutierrez have prompted others to draw on aspects of the third space theory to investigate how literacy practices were able to sustain students’ practices at home and in school (Levy, 2008). Third space theory can be used as a tool to make accurate assumptions on how students make sense of their home or cultural practices, and school reading and expectations. This is illustrated in Figure 4.1.
Figure 4.1: Third Space in Guided Inquiry

(Psource: Collier, Kuhlthau, Caspari, Maniotes, 2007, p. 32)

Pahl & Rowsell (2005, p. 157) define third space “… as a space where students draw on different discourses that are in-between other domains”. Their definition of the third space as it is related to school-based learning is represented in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Third Space

(From: Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.66)
Children’s meaning making lies between home and school. When they compose and write at home they draw on their experiences at school and when they compose at school they draw on their home experience and practices. What they write about within these two settings can be described as the third space. Educational researchers such as Gutierrez have used the third space theory to describe the in-between literacy practices between home and school. Home and school are often seen as separate spheres by parents and teachers but Hull and Schultz, cited in Pahl and Kelly (2005), declared that children operate in both spaces of home and school.

Family literacy has been seen by educators as an attempt to connect home and school through a focus on shared literacy activities with parents and children and to draw on home-based experience (Pahl & Kelly, 2005). Family learning was an attempt by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills) a department in the English government that inspects, regulates and promotes achievements in educational, economical and social well-being of learners of all ages (Ofsted, 2002). They conduct surveys to “… raise school standards and the potential for creating a culture of learning in a locality and for widening participation in education and training” (Ofsted, 2002, p.5). A report targeting history classes in secondary schools found students achieving greater understanding and success in the discipline when students linked their learning to their family histories and the histories of their surrounding areas. Students draw from their home and family history and the curriculum or school to negotiate meaning in the history curriculum. The outcome was positive as the students improved and achieved success in their history studies, (Ofsted, 2002). Drawing on home-based experiences and practices enabled students to negotiate their learning in the history curriculum. In this case family history has become a third space between home and school.

Further educational research has been conducted using the third space theory methodology. Anita Wilson (2002) has been researching in-between literacy practices of prisoners in the UK, who write to the outside world drawing on an ‘in-between’ space that is neither the prison nor the outside world. She has refuted the traditional notion that literacy and prisoners co-exist only within the prescribed area of education departments and prison school rooms and drawn on the practices of prisoners who have chosen to
share their views on what they can do rather than what they cannot do. Wilson (2002, p. 5) states that:

... although people in prison are unable to access various social worlds and are unwilling to be drawn into the realms of prisonisation, they seek to define a third space in which to live out their day to day prison lives. This space is driven by its own culturally-specific discourse, at the heart of which lies literacy-related activities, practices and artefacts.

Young men who draw graffiti in prison reflect the contemporary icons and visual markers of their outside worlds, but are drawn into the ‘third space’ of the prison world where it colonises the prison spaces of mattresses and cell walls. Wilson’s study has re-emphasised the need to study communities or their everyday sources of knowledge and discourses to understand the learning practices they use and how they construct meaning from their communities of practice. Prisoners draw the creative processes of the outside world into the regulated environment of the prison, which is the third space they have created. Prisoners occupy their minds with non-institutional activity, transforming the physical spaces of their cells and the constraints of prison time into social domains. The institutional becomes the creative and the dullness and boredom of prison life is transformed into self-generated process and practice (Wilson, 2002, p. 5). Wilson (2002) concludes that literacy practices of prisoners are not confined to the walls of the prison cells or to the institution itself, but that there is richness in the literacy-oriented third spaces that prisoners create. If educationalists can engage prisoners in expanding their abilities and their source of knowledge, then there is a need to look at other spaces that generate their engagement in learning and possibly highlight the positive things that they can do that may help prevent them re-offending.

Moje et al (2004, p. 38) also refer to these sources of knowledge as ‘... homes, peer groups, ways, networks and relationships’ that shape learning. Moje et al. (2004) utilise third space theory to explore and explain the ways in which students’ identities and practices are realised. The ideas and definitions that characterise the third space theory reflected here lend themselves to this study’s attempt to re-envision pedagogies in the field of education and, in particular, in the field of distance education. My appropriation of third space theory (Gutierrez, 2008; Moje et al, 2004) is in, and of itself, an act of
negotiation that will lead to a better understanding of the creation of third spaces and to better educational practice and research. As Gutierrez (2008) might argue, this study is a space where new knowledge is created because in negotiation there is room for expansive learning. In the remainder of this thesis, this study uses her notion of third space to understand the learning practices of 30 students at the University of the South Pacific who study through the distance and flexible learning mode. The study is mindful of what experts in educational research recognise in learning practices i.e. that they are culturally constructed and historically situated (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) and they represent peoples’ social identities and are produced and shaped by social institutions and power relations (Pane, 2007). In the following section there is a discussion of the notion of third-space as it applies to Fiji’s history, particularly the history of educational practices.

4.4 Learning in Hybrid Spaces in Fiji

While the concept of third space is a relatively new addition to a family of theories concerned with how human beings learn and develop in formal settings, the notion of hybridity has long been acknowledged as a significant process in cultural worlds (Bhabha, 1994). Colonial perspectives on cultural interactions might well argue that learning as a third space negotiated practice in Fiji has a long and complex history. In some senses after the arrival of the Europeans, learning for Fijians became a hybrid space.

The aftermath of cultural, social and political invasions — initially by the European missionaries and later by political powers including Great Britain, France, the United States of America, New Zealand, Australia and Germany — have impacted on Pacific Islander people in many ways. Early missionaries had the greatest impact on early Fijians. These missionaries introduced a new religion: Christianity, when the local Fijians already had their traditional religious practices and belief systems (Weir, 1998). The indigenous Fijians ancestral worship was the religion that belonged in their first spaces along with their oral history and cultural knowledge and practices. Christianity became for the early Fijians a new religion, which they adopted and used in their second spaces. Early Fijians were taught new practices in the new religion through the teaching of the scriptures in the Holy Bible. Scriptures were written in English and historically Fijians had no written language because their whole socio-cultural and historical practices were based on oral traditions (Warren, 1967). The Fijians’ first space of oral history contrasted with the
written literature imposed on them in the second space created by the missionary practices of the colonisers (Bhabha, 1994).

During the advent of Christianity, the missionaries selected and trained local converts in Biblical teachings in the vernacular language. These local converts then taught the people in society (Mangubhai, 1997). Missionaries understood the importance of the role that the paramount chiefs and leaders played in their societies; as everyone was subservient to them and therefore converting the chiefs or leaders first would enable a whole village to be converted to the new religion. It was this top-down strategy that hastened the conversion of many Pacific Islanders to Christianity.

As colonial expansion grew so did the number of converts. Eventually missionary settlements established schools supported by early colonisers. This was the beginning of formal education in the Pacific and the introduction of a new official space in their second spaces. Education was provided throughout the region principally by dominant colonial powers who introduced their own languages as the language of education in their colonies. The English language was used in the majority of Pacific Islands because many of the islands were colonised by the British while the French and Spanish languages were used in a few islands (Lotherington, 1998). Today English remains the dominant language of education in the region.

Further second spaces for indigenous Fijians occurred with the introduction of a second language: English; this language was foreign and unfamiliar to them as their first space language was Fijian with its many variations, which is further described later. Figure 4.3 describes the two spaces in people’s lives as they first began to learn in historical times.
Formal language and literacy education in the small island states of the South Pacific began to develop as early as the 19th century as the early missionaries made it their goal to convert all Islanders to Christianity. Invasions by the first European missionaries were cultural, social and political, which created a great impact on the education of the local population. Children were required to acquire some learning skills in their mother tongue while at the same time developing a standard of English that would enable them to use it to cope with learning in schools. Lotherington (1998) records this as a transition that occurred when children reached Class Three. Reading and writing became the language practices that children had to learn in their local language and which the missionaries employed in the Islands as part of their evangelical mission. The missionaries used literacy as their weapon to achieve this goal of evangelising the natives (Mangubhai, 1997). The arrival of the Wesleyan missionaries in Fiji in 1835 marked the arrival of literacy as a weapon (Warren, 1967) for converting the pagan worshippers to the new Christian religion. The missionaries converted Fijians to Christianity by first reinforcing the translation of the Word of God (The Bible) into vernacular then teaching the Island natives in vernacular forms. Inhabitants of the eastern islands of Fiji had already been introduced to the Tongan version of the Bible and were worshipping Christianity in Tongan vernacular (Spurway, 2002).
In 1835, formal western-style schooling was introduced into Fijian society. Prior to this, learning had been fully integrated into the everyday lives of the people and occurred in clans and families as cultural roles were developed and passed among generations. Fijians already had a culture of learning that involved the acquiring specific skills necessary for survival in society and a culture of learning channelled by distinguished elders of society (Mangubhai, 1997). For instance, one learned to become a ‘bati’ or warrior/protector by learning the skills required for this particular duty from the elderly warrior leaders in the clan. Similarly, one learned to become a fisherman or ‘gonedau’ by going out with the fisherman and learning their practices from them. This was cultural knowledge and practice in the people’s first spaces. Bole in Mangubhai, (1997) described traditional education as a practical educational or a vocation that was expected of its people because it was concerned largely with maintaining the status quo.

4.5 Literacy and Learning
Reading was initially taught by missionary educators to enable the people to read the Bible and to practice Christianity. The missionaries emphasised the teaching of reading in the Fijian language because its prime focus was the teaching of reading in order to read the Bible and other religious writings (Mangubhai, 1997). Reading stories and reading materials were predominantly from biblical sources and references. Learning in this instance was spontaneous, practical and in alignment with oral literacy to which the people were accustomed. Reading the Bible and meditating and reciting it became the kind of learning practices that people were taught to use during the evangelical missions; even to this day, Fijians continue to read religious extracts from the Bible as part of their education. The verses that the Fijians were exposed to were meant to be read and remembered as social and moral lessons. Memorisation and repetition were typical approaches to learning that were used during early missionary days (Jones & Jiang, 1995). Such practices did not encourage free thought or critical appraisal of the subject matter. Rather, students were expected to rote learn and repeat what they were presented with accuracy and respectfulness. In this way, commitment to Christianity would be sustained through daily Bible reading (Mangubhai, 1994).

With these practices, western education’s view of learning and literacy were blended with traditional Fijian ways which included oral language, rhyme and song; and over time
hybrid literacy and learning practices occurred. For example, missionaries adapted biblical texts translating them into Fijian languages to give the new converts access to the texts in their own languages via a standard Fijian language called ‘Baun’ Geraghty (1984). The missionaries and the Fijian converts created hybrid spaces for learning practices that were different to both the first unofficial space of Fijians and the second official space created by the Colonisers’ religious practices. This hybridity has been a part of Fijian social, cultural and educational history since early contact with Europeans was made.

In my own family, these hybrid-learning practices centred on Biblical texts were evident to me even as a child. My mother was able to read the Bible in Fijian from Genesis to Revelations, but she was not able to write her name until after I was at upper-primary school. No one taught her how to write, but as she continued reading the Bible she slowly developed the art of writing and her first written piece was a short sermon she delivered in a Methodist Women’s Fellowship church service in 1977. She used what had been taught to her in school and developed it in ways that allowed her to contribute to her community.

Mangubhai’s (1997, p.6) historical accounts of learning in the Pacific, present the idea that “… early literate behaviours that become part of a society have some congruence with behavioural patterns that already exist in the society and is part of the social behaviour of the group”. Mangubhai’s point is that the introduced literacy practices initially serve to reinforce the existing social behaviour of the group and amplifies the idea that new practices are not just accepted or transplanted: they are integrated and reconstructed by the target group in ways that reflect existing ways of being in that culture. What results is a hybrid practice that draws partially on first space resources and practices, and partially on those from the second space.

Taking this view, it may be expected that students in DFL programs at USP would engage in the same kinds of negotiations. This is to say that students’ current learning and literacy practices will interact with socio-cultural, economic, environmental, religious and political factors to impact how they engage in the distance and flexible learning mode of study. Learning in this case is negotiated practice.
The inheritance of a historical past embedded with social, cultural and historical diversities has had a great impact on the lives of Fijian people —past, present and future — and more so on its educational systems and policies: much of which continue to influence people’s lives today.

It is at this point of the research that there is consideration of the methodological procedures that focus on pedagogies in distance education. A new lens is employed that looks at the course materials as a second space, which is representative of a curriculum that distance and flexible learning (DFL) students use in their formal studies. Students are already engaged in their own socio-cultural, economic, political and geographical environments, which are referred to as the first space. Now they are to engage in a second space that they have been obligated to engage in. How DFL students make meaning of the course materials for the courses they enrol in is drawn from their multiple capacities or resources (Moje et al, 2004) from within their contextual environment. New knowledge is created within this third space drawn from the first and second spaces. The following diagram represents the nested contexts that these DFL students have to engage in for their first and second spaces.
Figure 4.4: Third Space in Distance and Flexible Learning

Figure 4.4 illustrates these nested contexts and the varieties of interaction and interweaving DFL students need to make in order to negotiate learning in DFL studies. In order to create a positive and effective learning environment, the two spaces must provide ways and means of engaging learning in a third space of negotiation. Providing a space where DFL students can engage their first space experiences and knowledge with their second space of learning — provided by the university — will result in more meaningful, higher-order thinking and effective learning.

In the remainder of this thesis third space theory is used to explain the learning practices that 30 DFL students draw on to make meaningful learning from the two spaces mentioned previously.
Chapter Five: Methodology and Research Design

5.0 Introduction
This study is positioned within a qualitative-methodology framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Within this broad framework, the study deploys a case study design integrating qualitative data sources to examine student experiences as DFL learners at USP. The theoretical construct of third space theory (Gutierrez et al, 1999, 2001; Moje et al, 2004) is used as an analytic frame for guiding data collection and analysis to examine how students construct negotiated learning in their nested social and cultural contexts. The chapter begins by explaining the rationale for, and the design of, the study including an overview of the methods used and how they are linked to the theoretical frame. Research questions are developed and these are followed by details of the inquiry and analysis methods used including data collection tools and procedures, and analytic methods.

This study contributes to the knowledge base for examining DFL in developing countries and adds detail to understanding learning in DFL contexts as the act of third space negotiation. The study builds on the work of previous researchers who have examined DFL learning environments from socio-cultural and historical perspectives including Thaman, (1994b, 1997, 2009); Mugler & Landbeck, (1997, 1998, 2000); Lingam & Burnett, (2008); Deo & Phan, (2008); and Phan, (2009). By examining learning as it occurs as a socially-mediated negotiation in the third space, this study explores the relations that bind learning in institutional contexts (second space) to the networks of nested contexts (socio-cultural, historical, political, environmental and linguistic) that make up the students’ first spaces (see Chapter Four for more detail).

Researchers who have investigated third space theory have done so using a range of inquiry methods that include: observation, interviewing, and discourse analysis of transcripts of classroom discussions (Gutierrez, et al, 1999; Gutierrez, Rhymes & Larson, 1995; Moje et al, 2004). This research is predominantly qualitative and it draws on long-established traditions of representing the personal experiences of research participants in depth and with integrity (Dyson and Genishi, 2005).
Figure 5:1 Framework of Third Space Interactions in Nested Contexts
5.1 My Starting Point as a Researcher

The motivating force behind this research originated from my prior experience as a lecturer and tutor in distance education in two DFL campuses of USP. During my time at USP, I became particularly interested in how DFL students negotiated a range of challenges to their learning, in productive and sometimes less productive ways, as they engaged in their DFL studies. Students were affected by factors such as their physical/geographical location, as well as family, social, cultural and religious obligations. I believe that their abilities to engage in the learning opportunities offered by the university were also influenced by the resources and pedagogies used for their learning experiences. At a macro level they were influenced by the larger economic and political contexts of modern Fiji. All of these influences on learning needed further exploration if USP’s DFL offerings were to be as successful as the university’s mission statement warranted: that is to develop, deliver and administer credit courses and programs through the distance mode for people who are not able to enrol on campus (USP, 2009).

5.2 Research Aims

There were several aims in this research study:

1. To document and describe the contexts for learning provided for DFL students at two USP campuses
2. To gather information about DFL students as learners, their experiences, skill sets, and the resources they draw on to learn
3. To provide accounts of the ways in which groups of students and individual students negotiate learning in the hybrid space created by the intersection of university study and their social and cultural worlds.
5.3 Case Studies of Learning in DFL

The following two chapters will present two case studies of learning in DFL mode at two campuses of the University of the South Pacific. Case study one being at the Lautoka campus and case study two being at the Labasa campus, each is situated in a different part of Fiji and serves different populations of DFL students. Within each campus case study, there are reports of group experiences of DFL at USP. Situated within the accounts of group experiences are reports of individuals’ experiences. These individual accounts take the form of learning stories and provide in-depth account of personalised learning experiences. This nested approach to data reporting provides a way of viewing multiple levels of situated activity simultaneously and allows elaborated accounts of learning at each campus to be presented from the multiple viewpoints of various students.

A case study approach was seen as appropriate to this study because of its potential to illuminate the highly contextualised nature of the learning undertaken by students at USP in Fiji. A case is “... a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 25), the case being a unit of analysis and the participants are the heart of the inquiry. As Dyson and Genishi (2005, p. 2) argue:

Cases are constructed as researchers make decisions about how to angle their vision on places overflowing with potential stories of human experience.

Qualitative researchers have developed preferred methods to best suit their research as they probe into human experiences to gain insights into the factors that shape people’s interpretations and meanings in their contexts (Silverman, 2005). The two cases addressed in this research have attempted to probe and represent the DFL students’ learning practices and their own representations of their personal and official spaces. The study of real-life situations is a feature of qualitative case study research (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1999) and researchers who use this method of inquiry are able to analyse a real-life problems, which they have experienced or observed in specific situations. Miles & Huberman (1994, p 27) explain this simply, “... we cannot study individual cases devoid of context”. In this way, the study of students engaged in DFL studies at the two USP campuses could not be separated from the nested contexts in which their learning
operated. Description and analysis are intertwined in an approach that seeks to value the participants’ views. As Dyson & Genishi, (2005, p. 81) state:

*In all qualitative case studies, the researcher’s purpose is not merely to organize data but to try to identify and gain analytic insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon being studied. That is, the end goal is to understand how the phenomenon matters from the perspectives of participants in the ‘case’.*

**5.4 Case Study**

This research uses the case study as a qualitative research methodology. A case study can be defined as,

...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984, p. 23).

It represents a research strategy whose prime purpose is to examine or investigate contemporary phenomenon within real-life contexts using multiple sources of evidence. Trochim (1999, p 334) adds that “... a case study is an intensive study of a specific individual or specific context...” Anderson (cited in Noor, 2008, p. 1602) proposes case studies as being concerned with how and why things happen: allowing the investigation of contextual realities and the differences between what was planned and what actually occurred. In all these definitions of a case study, certain features are evident: researchers use real-life situations to examine a phenomenon.

Qualitative case study methodology provides tools for researchers to study complex phenomenon within their contexts. It enables the user to understand complex issues and they can expand and strengthen what is already known through previous research. Many researchers in a variety of disciplines have used this method and it is a method that is advantageous for this research. Although critics of the case study method believe that the study of small number of cases can generate findings that are unreliable, fallacious or biased, many researchers continue to use this method with success: Noor, (2008); Soy,

In order to examine the learning practices of students studying through the distance and flexible learning (DFL) mode at the University of the South Pacific (USP), this method was chosen to enhance the understanding of how DFL students engage in these practices. The use of case studies to probe an area of interest in-depth is appropriate as described by Patton cited in Noor (2008, p. 1602-1603):

\[\text{Case studies become particularly useful where one needs to understand some particular problem or situation in great depth and where one can identify cases rich in information.}\]

There are advantages of using this method in this research. The case study has a small data set that is manageable and sufficient for making generalisations about students’ learning practices in distance learning. Critics of the case study method believe that the study of a small number of cases can offer no grounds for establishing reliability or generality of findings, while others believe that case study research is only useful as an exploratory tool. However, researchers continue to use the case study research method with success in careful studies of real-life situations. It is in this light that I have willingly undertaken this challenge in the research study of the two case studies discussed in the next two chapters.

Participants of this research are real students who are studying at the university via distance education. From my perspective it is the best method of inquiry and suits the theory of the third space, which is used in the attempt to explain the learning practices that DFL students draw on to make meaningful learning from their first space and the second space experience as described in Chapter Four of this thesis. Davies (2005) highlighted other advantages of using case studies, one of which was that they involve “... detailed, holistic investigation” (ppt. slide10) meaning that case studies would take into account all aspects of the study. Other advantages of case studies that he describes include the collection of data over a period of time and the contextual nature relative to the study. Case studies offer a range of different measurement techniques that can be applied, in which case the researcher is not limited to any one methodological tool. Lastly, histories
and stories told by the students illuminate their practices and relationships within the context of the study (Davies, 2005). As such, case studies were a suitable methodology of inquiry for this research study.

This case study method is advantageous in that it allows a variety of research tools to be used for data collection. For instance, Olsen (2008, p. 1) conducted a research study of social class and workers’ behaviour in south India using a case study method, which she declared was advantageous because it enabled her to use mixed-methods that acknowledged the “... deeply qualitative nature of relationships in society”. The three recognised methods of conducting research are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Mixed methods is a design tool that integrates quantitative (biophysical) and qualitative (socio-cultural) data in the context of a single study (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Driscoll et al, 2007). It refers to all procedures of data collection and data analysis of quantitative and qualitative research. Mixed-methods research has been ongoing for a number of years and is also referred to as multi-method, hybrid and integrated research (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 6). It encourages researchers to use multiple approaches to collecting and analysing data within a single study and recognises the limitations of using a single method. Driscoll et al (2007) claim that although the designs vary the basis for using mixed methods is to expand the scope and breadth of research to offset the weaknesses of the other design methods used.

The mixed-methods approach in research is still in its ‘adolescent’ stage and is employed less than other approaches (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The reason for this is that mixed methods are difficult to conduct because quantitative and qualitative researchers use different philosophies and methods to study research problems. However, an increasing awareness in the procedures for mixing different methods has become evident including work by: Tashakorie & Teddlie, (2003); Cresswell, Plano, Gutmann, & Hanson, (2003) and a range of research developed in recent years using this method of inquiry. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) and Onwuegbuzie, Jiao, & Bostik, 2004) observed the diverse use of this approach in education, in psychology (Waszak & Sines, 2003), in sociology (Hunter & Brewer, 2003), and in library and information (Onwuegbuzie et al, 2004). Although there has been an increase in the use of mixed methods for research there
are still many unresolved issues to address to reach maturation stage (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

5.5 Research Sites

Data for this study was collected at the Labasa and Lautoka campuses, the two campuses of USP in Fiji. Both of these campuses conduct certificate, diploma, pre-degree and degree programs through USP’s distance education mode. By the nature of their location and the students who enrol in programs, the two campuses represent two variations in learning options at USP.

The Labasa campus is situated on Fiji’s second largest island serving the northern region of the country, and the Lautoka campus is located on Fiji’s main island serving the western region of the country. The Labasa campus serves remote and rural areas. The student population who enrol there live predominantly in remote areas, which are poorly served by transport and communication technologies. Students at the Lautoka campus tend to be more urban in their living arrangements; although some live in semi-rural areas their access to the city is relatively easy compared with the students at the Labasa campus who live in the rural areas.

5.6 Research Participants

The participants in this research were students enrolled at USP in the DFL mode, ranging in age from 18 to the mid-forties. They were young and mature men and women who were studying for personal and professional development in life. Most of the participants were employed and worked and studied at the same time; while the others, who were younger, had left the school system to do foundation studies offered through DFL at USP and were continuing on to degree-level studies. Initially thirty students from each campus were sought to participate in the interviews, but ultimately fifteen students from each campus volunteered to participate in this research.

The participants were all students of the University of the South Pacific who were enrolled in different programs of study in a range of courses. Fifteen participants who volunteered from the Lautoka campus were from either urban or suburban areas. At the
Labasa campus, there were eleven participants from the rural or remote areas and four from urban or suburban areas who volunteered to participate.

Table 5.1 shows the educational backgrounds of the case study participants. These are further detailed in the two case studies presented in Chapters Six and Seven. The process of recruiting research participants from the campuses of the University of the South Pacific was undertaken in consultation with current campus staff and the Director of DFL. Initial written information about the research project was sent to the Campus DFL administrators. They then invited students who might be willing to participate. These students were approached and invited to a local meeting to hear more about the project. After this meeting the students were given written project information and the opportunity to decide whether to participate. Only after this were students asked to complete questionnaires and attend interviews. Some students declined to participate, others decided to participate with conditions: such as participating but in a group interview. All the participants had adequate command of the English language, which assisted the work of the research study. Most of the students spoke two or more languages, but English was always used for communication between the research team and the participants of the research study.

Choosing to include students from the two different campuses provided an opportunity to sample the range of students who use DFL at USP as their major mode of study. The sample included students from different genders, courses studied, as well as social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, employment situations and geographical locations.
Table 5.1: General Background Information of Participants of the Two Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program of Study</th>
<th>Lautoka Campus</th>
<th>Labasa Campus</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
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<tr>
<td>PGCE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BED Primary &amp; Secondary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BA/BA +GCE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Degree</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Studies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. Of Participants</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.7 Data Collection: Processes and Protocols

During the course of the research study, participants were given questionnaires, which most completed, they participated as individuals in a one-to-one based interview or in interviews with groups of two or more participants. Questions for the questionnaire and the interview were semi-structured. The majority of the interviews in one of the case studies were conducted on an individual basis while in another case study the individual and group interviews were conducted as requested by the participants. Field notes were taken during the interviews as a precaution in the case of a breakdown in the recording equipment, but also as a source of information about the participants’ physical backgrounds. The course materials which were also a feature of this research were accessed through the USP book shop and the course conveners. Textbooks, teaching notes and other materials that participants used were collected from them as they were important data sources for this research study. These materials included course books, course guides, audio-tapes and CDs. These are described later in this chapter and are drawn on to present examples of learning interfaces in Chapters Six and Seven.
5.8 Culturally Sensitive Research: Practice and Positionality

The complexity of the social, cultural and linguistic negotiations in context of DFL students provided opportunities to reflect on the importance of understanding how research methods must be considered in the larger socio-political context of the research project.

My position as a ‘cultural insider’ became clear to me during this investigation. Bishop (2005, p. 111) argued that ‘cultural insiders’ conduct research in more sensitive and responsive manners than outsiders. Birman (2005, p. 172) added that ‘cultural insiders’ are familiar with the language and the culture that can give greater access to cultural communities of the research study. As a ‘cultural insider’ in this research, familiarity with the physical environment, socio-cultural contexts and languages was a major advantage. It provided greater insights into the learning practices of the participants in this research. This, however, does not tell the whole story of my involvement in the research context of USP.

Researchers operating from critical and feminist perspectives assert, “… both researcher and participant are positioned and are being positioned by virtue of history and context” (Oleson, 2003, p.350). This means that as a researcher I must reflect on my positionality in this research context and to some extent problematise my role. In attempting to understand the experiences of my research participants, I must acknowledge that I was associated with USP for a number of years and to them I may be seen as having a position of professional privilege and power. How and what I attend to are therefore shaped by the personal and cultural lenses that I bring to the research setting. I have gained an in-depth understanding of DFL students’ experiences through interpretive approaches while studying them in their context: much like an interpretive approach to research, which studies social life assuming that the meaning of human action is deeply rooted in that action.

This approach is further described by McGregor (2001) as an action that a person takes based on meanings that a person may or may not know. Researchers who use the interpretive approach do so because they want to reveal the real meaning as well as gain a better understanding of the issues involved. Connected to this is constructivism, which
generally refers to how an individual’s mind is active in making and structuring knowledge, previously described in Chapter Three of this thesis. When used in interpretive research, constructivism implies that any discovery of meaning in human action involves a conceptual framework in the minds of the researchers and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Interpretive research is thereby reflexive as Dyson & Genishi (2005, p.81) state: “Researchers’ data gathering, analysis, and indeed eventual write-up of others’ experiences are mediated by their own lives”.

I have reflected upon the ways in which my values, experiences, interests, beliefs and how my purpose in life and my social identity have shaped this research study. My previous experience as an assistant lecturer at USP is relevant in that it perhaps afforded me certain insights when constructing the case studies described in this work. Moreover, I had to remain alert throughout the research process to the ways in which this prior knowledge might influence my interpretations and in some cases might contribute to potential biases in presenting the students’ experiences. My pre-existing position at USP afforded me access to students to work with in the research, but it also brought challenges. While I was a ‘cultural insider’ in some ways, I was an outsider in others. In essence, I too inhabited a hybrid space.

5.8.1 University Research Ethics

In engaging in this research, as an insider and outsider, several ethical issues were negotiated. In the first instance, attaining ethical clearance while studying in Australia entailed a complex and multi-level process. An approval from the University of the South Pacific was necessary to allow DFL students to be interviewed in Fiji at the two campuses. Approval also had to be granted by the Director of the Centre for Educational Development and Technology (CEDT) under which DFL operated. Permission from the Campus Directors at the two campuses in Lautoka and Labasa had to be granted before the research commenced. In addition, the consent of the Ministry of Education in Fiji, through the Research and Development Section, was also required. Finally, the head teachers and principals of the schools where the teachers taught had to grant permission for the interviews to take place. Since some of the participants were teachers working and/or residing in school premises, the head teachers or principals’ approval was a matter of courtesy and protocol particularly in village settings. In one scenario of a church-
owned school, approval from the priest-in-residence together with the school head’s approval had to be granted beforehand. The required ethical approval from Griffith University required confidentiality, honesty, responsibility and fair returns to the participants (Dobbert, 1982; Lang’at, 2005) and in order to obtain Griffith University ethical clearance for this work these issues pertaining to research sites had to be dealt with expeditiously.

5.8.2 Ethics in Community Context

Ethical approval from Griffith University’s internal committee was reliant on these external ethical approval processes in Fiji, but there were further local official and cultural considerations that required my attention as a researcher. As a Fijian national, permission to travel to the islands, visit the schools and villages and gain access to the students on campus and in their workplaces had to be granted by various authorising intermediaries. In addition, local cultural customs had to be observed. Schools that were situated near or in villages had social and cultural protocols that had to be observed in order to gain entry to their sites. The kava ceremony is one such protocol that is central to Fijian traditions. Visitors are often expected to participate in a kava ceremony as a symbol of respect for the community. Kava drink or ‘yaqona’, as it is called in Fiji, is a drink made from the root of the piper methysticum plant (Thomson, Ruch, & Hasenohrl, 2004). The roots are dried and pounded into a powder form then mixed with water and consumed. Kava has been used in many Pacific islands for a variety of ceremonies and for medicinal purposes (Singh, 1992 Turner, 1986).

The ‘i sevusevu’ is the traditional name of the kava ceremony that is often performed when visitors present themselves in the Fijian community. The performance of the kava ceremony was symbolic of the acceptance of the research team’s presence by the community and the permission for the team to conduct research in the community. Acceptance of the ‘i sevusevu’ authorised participation in the interview. Men, rather than women traditionally performed the kava ceremony. When I visited sites that required a traditional acceptance ceremony, my fore knowledge of this cultural practice prompted me to recruit a male relative to accompany me and assist in this social protocol. In these cases, the male support I recruited presented the ‘sevusevu’. On one occasion this was presented to the head teacher who was acting on behalf of the village headman. On
another occasion, the priest-in-residence was absent from a church school and the ‘i vakavuvuli’, a Catholic layman, received ‘i sevusevu’.

These ceremonies granted permission for me to conduct interviews in the parish school’s vicinity. In these contexts acceptance and permission was not granted by simply writing an official letter, it was obtained in respectful and traditional ways. While these ethical considerations did not involve academic issues, nor were they part of the university ethical review, they were central to important cultural issues in the contexts for this research study.

5.8.3 Ethics in Political Context
Initially all interviews were expected to be conducted on a one-to-one basis at both campuses, but this was not the case at the Lautoka campus. Here, prior to commencing, some of the participants requested a group interview rather than an individual interview. They reasoned that they were more confident being interviewed in a group than being interviewed individually. Some participants associated the one-to-one situation with the formal interviews that operated in the school systems for performance reviews and political membership checking. Students recounted how these kinds of situations “instilled fear” in them. Participants stated that they would be less nervous and more secure in the presence of supportive friends and familiar faces.

I assured participants of the confidentiality and anonymity that they were provided in the research, and that it was an ethical requirement for me to maintain their right to privacy. I noted some nervous behaviour before, during and after the interview. Participants spoke in muffled voices and whispered to each other sometimes. At the end of the interview when students were leaving the room, participants began whispering and repeatedly requested their anonymity. They were assured of this at every stage in the process. At the time of this research study, political events in the country were such that the participants expressed concern about the economic and social constraints they experienced as a consequence of the political turmoil in the country. The military coup was just beginning to take its toll on the participants and on USP’s DFL students in general.
The need to have a group interview disclosed a need for security and a sense of belonging. The ‘togetherness’ offered by having each other in the group provided consolation and peace of mind, as well as motivation to keep them going and not give in to outside pressure. These insights indicated that as a researcher, I needed to consider social, economic and political factors during my research.

5.8.4 Ethics in Language Context

The majority of Fiji Islanders either speak Fijian or Fiji-Hindi as their first language, while English (the colonial language) continues to play an important role as a medium of instruction and *lingua franca*, the official language of communication in the country (Mangubhai & Mugler, 2003). English is the dominant language of urbanised groups while vernacular is predominantly a rural language. In the western part of Fiji, participants in this research study were proficient in English because most of them were raised and had lived in urban or semi-urban areas most of their lives. In the northern part of Fiji most of the participants lived in rural and semi-rural areas where Fijian or Hindustani was the dominant language and English was less common. As a result, the interviews were often conducted in two languages. Mostly we used English, although the Fijian language was used as needed to clarify meaning in some of the questions that participants had difficulties in understanding or expressing.

5.8.5 Timing of Data Collection

The fieldwork for this research took place in 2007 at a time when all the ethical approvals and considerations had been completed. Fieldwork research began in the second semester at the University of the South Pacific commencing at the Lautoka campus and concluding at the Labasa campus. Assistance from the staff of USP was sought to support the fieldwork needed to complete this research. The timing for this research had limitations: it was the time of the year when student assignments were due, tests and projects were going on simultaneously, and students were preparing for the external examinations in November. The schedule of academic learning meant that some original recruits found it difficult to proceed with their stated commitment. As a result, some participants changed before the final groups were established. A lesson learnt from this experience is that timing can be crucial in conducting research as affirmed by Lewis & Ritchie (2003) and Wright (2002). At the beginning of section 5.8 of this chapter I dealt broadly with design
issues I encountered in conducting this research in the cultural context. The next section considers the research tools and procedures used to collect and analyse data.

5.9 Inquiry Method

Understanding the way participants negotiated learning in DFL contexts meant paying attention to aspects that contributed to their makeup. In constructing two descriptive case studies, I drew from various data sources: digital recordings of interviews, questionnaire, field notes and artefacts in the form of course materials. All of these were interwoven to construct the two cases.

5.9.1 The Questionnaire

A self-administered questionnaire was explained and used before and during the interview. The reason for administering the questionnaire before the interview itself, was to enable the students in the remote areas to familiarise themselves with its contents. The most important reason for this provision was to give participants adequate time for reading and understanding the questions. As second language speakers, students needed a lot of time to read and understand the questions prior to the interview itself. The questionnaire was also used to elicit more in-depth responses from the participants if they preferred writing down their thoughts privately on paper. The self-administered questionnaires had an advantage in that all participants received the same questions and they could respond to them in any way they liked. Questions in the questionnaire were structured as shown in the sample in Table 5.2.

5.9.2 Questions

The goal of the questionnaire was to gather personal and educational history information from the students. Table 5.2 provides a summary of the main questions in the questionnaire. While the questionnaire was in development, several versions of questions were field tested to refine questions. The questionnaire was designed to gather students’ personal information, from historical and current circumstances. The participants were also asked questions about their physical environment to identify the role that it played in student learning through distance learning. Information was also gathered about each
participant’s educational experiences and achievements prior to attending university and in relation to their course(s) of study.

Table 5.2: Summary of Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PART</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>SUMMARY</th>
<th>SAMPLE</th>
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<td>Age (Please tick the appropriate box):</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Personal Information</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18-27 yrs</td>
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<td>History</td>
<td>28-37 yrs</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
<td>38-42 yrs</td>
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<td>Qualification</td>
<td>43-47 yrs</td>
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<td>Residence</td>
<td>48+ yrs</td>
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<td>Exam Centre (Please write down the name of your exam centre.)</td>
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<td>What was the last formal examination you sat? (Write the name of the exam.)</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Physical background</td>
<td>Rural/urban location</td>
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<td>Power source</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Transport</td>
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<td>What form of communication is available in your home?</td>
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<td>Mobile</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>What mode of transport do you use to get to the main campus?</td>
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<td>Boat</td>
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<td>Private</td>
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<td>Taxi</td>
<td>Walking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What is your regular source of power?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Course Information</td>
<td>Number of years studying through DFL</td>
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<td>Rate and detail of current courses enrolled in</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Number of courses currently enrolled in</td>
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<td>Delivery mode used and problems</td>
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<td>Reasons for previous pass and or failure and suggestions for improvement</td>
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<td>How many courses are you enrolled in?</td>
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<td>What delivery mode do you use?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>State some problems you faced in your studies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What improvements would you suggest for your situation?</td>
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5.9.3 The In-Depth Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the thirty DFL students at the two campuses of Lautoka and Labasa. This process was a means of eliciting more in-depth
responses from the participants. Macnamara, (cited in Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2007, p. 3) said:

*Interviews are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant’s experiences. When coupled with a questionnaire as a follow up, the interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic and further investigate their responses*

In all cases the interviews followed up on the questionnaire survey. Qualitative researchers often use elaborative interviews, or such follow up as mentioned above, to understand a participant’s perspective more deeply. As Silverman says, an in-depth interview provides an: “… opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another” (Silverman, 2000, p. 823). The unstructured interview questions can work in two directions. While the researcher is well served by such a tool, participants also have opportunities to raise or to discuss issues beyond the selected questions during the interview. The interview process allowed participants to provide an unlimited amount of information, with the goal of obtaining accurate responses and the participants’ points of view with regard to learning practices in distance education. Fontana & Frey (2002) stated that in this manner the interviewer and interviewee are equal in status throughout the period of interview.

The in-depth interview conducted in this research was conducted in conversation and discussion style. This method enables the researcher to explore general topics to help reveal the participant’s view and, at the same time, to respect the way the participants respond. Apart from understanding students’ learning practices in DFL, students voiced other issues that the interview questions did not directly address. In this way the participants were co-constructors of the eventual interview, adding to existing topics and questions as they saw the need.

Berry (1999) describes in-depth interviews as events that can be used to explore interesting areas in people’s lives. In this case, during the interviews some of the students did not answer questions directly, but diverted the conversation to other issues that they considered more important or relevant. In doing so, participants also influenced the direction of the conversations that occurred with the researcher. Dyson and Genishi (2005, p75) express this quality as achieving mutual understandings by sharing a view of the process and context of the conversation.
The qualitative interview is a construction site of knowledge. An interview is literally an inters view, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest.

Qualitative researchers, they remind us, use interviews to seek multiple views on the world (Dyson and Genishi, 2005).

5.9.4 Interview Questions and Procedure

The interview schedule had five sections, each dealing with a different aspect of a participant’s previous and present learning experiences. Full details of all questions asked are in appendix 6. The first section of the interview asked participants to discuss aspects of their learning backgrounds, how they learn and their learning histories. These questions were designed to allow participants to provide elaborated descriptions of their early experiences of learning, their motivations for learning, and how their present course work was progressing.

Examples of questions:

Can you recall what your schooling days were like?
Was learning for you in your early schooling the same as it is today?
How did you first learn to read and write?
What made you want to study here in DFL mode?
How do you think your study will benefit you?

The second section of the interview dealt with questions about course materials. Mostly this concerned the course book. The goal here was to understand the ways in which students understood and interacted with the official resources for learning.

Examples of questions:

How do you deal with your course materials (CM)? Is there a process that you follow?
What strategies do you use when you read the CM?
Do you find the course materials helpful in your studies?
Why? How?
Are the CM easy/difficult to understand?
Are the CM easy to access?
In the third section, the focus for inquiry was on students’ learning practices in relation to engaging with the print-based materials. Here, I was interested in understanding how the students worked with the materials, what resources they reported drawing on and what particular challenges they might meet as learners in their context.

**Examples of questions:**

- How do you cope with problems that come up in the course materials?
- What do you do to help you understand your readings?
- What source of power (electricity) do you use to read?
- How do you get help if you need it?
- How easy/hard is it for you to study like this? What are some of the things you find challenging?

In the fourth section of the interview, the focus was on understanding how learners manage the demands of assignments and how they relate to feedback provided by the teaching staff.

**Examples of questions:**

- What kind of feedback do you get?
- What is useful to you?
- How do you relate to assignment topics?
- How do you manage at assignment time?
- What challenges do you meet with assignments?

Section five of the interview schedule asked students to talk about their tutorial access and experiences.

**Examples of questions:**

- How often do you have tutorials?
- Do you attend tutorials? If not, why not?
- Do you get to tutorials on time?
- Do you find them useful/not useful? Why?

Participants’ interview times ranged from an hour to two hours and forty-five minutes in length, with the group interviews taking most time. There were three types of
interviews: the large group interviews consisting of ten students; the small group interviews consisting of three interviewees; and individual interviews conducted for seventeen students. Interviews took place either on campus at Lautoka or in the remote areas where students lived and worked. Two students were interviewed in their local exam centre, but to reach many other students connected to Labasa Campus, I travelled to their villages to see them at a time that was convenient to them.

5.9.5 Field Notes
Field notes were recorded in three phases: firstly prior to the interview, secondly during the interview, and thirdly at the end of the interview. The first recording of field notes was taken while observing the landscape and the physical environment prior to entry to the interview site. Additional information was recorded about students’ backgrounds, their work arrangements and their reasons for studying. During the interview the field notes served as a support for the audio recordings and included observations of incidents, words and expressions students made during the interview. The third phase of field recording was noted after the interview sessions as I reflected on what had been said and how participants reacted. Data collected through field note descriptions included: geographical and physical environments; economic, political, socio-cultural contexts; and the interactions that took place between participants and participants and the researcher.

The completion of three phases of field notes occurred mostly in remote school settings. The decision to use the field notes arose out of the need to recognise the importance of observing actions in socio-cultural settings (McKernan, 1991). Field notes, in reality, are observations: the researcher at a research site writes them during an interview and throughout the data collection (Patton, 2002; Wolfinger, 2002; McKernan, 1991).

All field notes are worth writing because the description of what is observed is still fresh in one’s mind. Quinn (2002) states that field notes contain descriptive information that will allow the researcher to return to an observation later during the interview analysis for information which the researcher may have forgotten or has only a vague recollection of. As McKernan (1996, p. 93) states, “Field notes often provide clues to fundamental issues of importance”, for those involved in the research and “…
instruments such as questionnaires …may not be sensitive enough to these underlying and subtle themes”.

5.10 Learning Materials

Materials that were used for learning in DFL were examined during this research study, details of which have been discussed in earlier chapters. The bulk of the resources that DFL students used in their studies were derived from the course materials or pre-packaged learning material given to students during enrolment week. These materials were used along with field notes, questionnaires and interview transcripts to help with understanding different aspects of the students’ comments. As I analysed the students’ comments about learning materials, assignments or tutorial notes, I was able to examine these sources closely to better understand each individual’s perspective. The purpose was not to review the course material quality, but to understand how students used it to negotiate learning in DFL. This was the essence of the research study and a major issue in DFL students’ learning skills.

The presentation of the learning material or course materials is a major constituent of distance education (Holmberg, 2005) and is fundamental to distance learning modes. It was essential therefore to examine the materials that constituted the coursework. Distance educators played a major role in developing programs and learning materials for prospective students who come from a variety of backgrounds, contexts and geographical locations. Holmberg stressed the importance of subject matter presentation as one of the key elements of distance education, the other one being interaction. He stated, “The presentation of learning matter must engage students in an intellectual activity that makes them try out ideas, reflect, compare and apply critical judgment to what is studied” (Holmberg, 2005, p.49).

Researchers have suggested that distance education learning materials must consider the separation between the distance education instructor and the student and be designed with awareness that the distance instructor has very little opportunity to observe, challenge, motivate and provide corrective feedback (Purnell, Cuskelly & Danaher, 1996). In the courses undertaken by the students at USP, print materials, audiocassettes, videos, CDs/DVDs/VCDs, computers, audio/video conferencing, radio and television,
were the resource media used to deliver learning to USP DFL students. Print materials were the most common and are relatively easy to prepare.

5.10.1 Print-Based Learning Packages
Print-based learning materials are designed and produced by distance learning specialists at the university. The print materials contained the course content, study schedule, assessment requirements and any other relevant resources as previously mentioned in Chapter One. Some courses had a reader, which comprised supplementary reading materials that supported the main course book. The readers were comprised primarily of photocopied journal articles and book chapters, which are compiled as supplementary readers for the external package. Audiotapes and CDs are sometimes included as resources. The following section presents a brief description of the learning materials made available to students in this study to provide aid to readers in understanding the array of materials students referred to in their responses.

5.10.2 The Introduction and Assignment Book (I&A)
The introduction and assignment book, or I&A as it is called at USP, contained the study schedule, which was a summary of weekly topics and activities highlighting the due dates for assignments, tests and examinations. It gave a summary of the print-based package and included audiotapes. It also featured course assessment details, rules and regulations for assignments, samples of assignment marking and major assignment activities. The I&A was essential for all courses and must be provided for all students studying through DFL. It was acted as a diary for DFL students and without it they could lose track of their weekly and monthly tasks as highlighted in this book.
5.10.3 Course Book

The course book included the topics and contents of what was to be covered during each week and in each semester. It also consisted of tasks or student activities for each week and samples of activities from previous years were also included. The topics for each week are characterised by units, beginning from unit one. All DFL courses have a course book and hence all students are issued with this. This was a vital component of the package as it had the core content of the course.

5.10.4 Reader

The reader is also known as the resource book and comprised readings required for each unit of work as outlined in the course book. The readings were extracts taken from textbooks that were relevant to each unit of study. Some courses did not have readers and students were expected to buy textbooks from the bookshops or borrow them from the library. In one particular course in history, the reader and the course book were combined into one book.

5.10.5 Audio Materials

Some courses offered audio materials either as audio tapes or CDs which were used as part of the I&A. The audio materials contained sample exercises or sample activities to help students with major assignments and the activities provided in the course books. If audio materials were blank, they are needed for major oral assignments that require recording.

5.11 Analytic Method

The process of analysis undertaken followed the case-study-research-methods approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995; Dyson & Genishi, 2005). My process overall was inductive and grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As Dyson and Genishi (2005, p. 111) state,

Through analysis we are not on the trail of singular truths, nor of overly neat stories. We are on the trail of thematic threads, meaningful events, and powerful factors that allow us entry into the multiple realities and dynamic processes.
In this study, I was on the trail of describing meaningful accounts of learning that constituted DFL students’ educational experiences in nested contexts.

Data from multiple sources was integrated and synthesised to develop case studies (Dyson & Genishi 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Students’ data was drawn from their questionnaires, interviews and the field notes. Field notes consisted of written descriptions of observations and casual conversations that were recorded in print before, during and after the interview session. Students’ comments were examined in light of their engagement with course materials. The major analysis task of this study was that of examining participants’ comments during interview. In the course of the study, I developed an analytic framework to examine the participants’ comments on multiple levels. This framework included three levels of analysis.

Digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed and reviewed thoroughly. Examining first the interviews and field notes, I began an iterative cycle of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Huberman & Miles, 2002) by developing profiles for student experiences at each campus. In other words, I surveyed the entire set of data in order to determine and describe the major features of the contexts for DFL that were reported by the students as significant. This consisted of the review of approximately 30 pages of field notes (single spaced) and more than 200 pages of interview transcripts for both campuses.

This initial analysis revealed that in many cases, the DFL students on each campus experienced DFL in some ways that were similar. Each student received course materials, was allocated time for tutorial interactions and had examinations and assignments administered regularly. As to be expected, some differences among student experiences on the two campuses also existed. For example, students on the urban Lautoka Campus were able to attend face-to-face tutorials more often because of access opportunities related to their proximity to campus. While students at Labasa experienced fewer opportunities for on campus engagement, they deployed local, school-based resources and other people outside of the university to help them negotiate learning. The similarities and differences related to learning in DFL on the two campuses are depicted in Figure 5.2.
Figure 5.2: Similarities and Differences in the features of students’ DFL experiences at Lautoka and Labasa Campuses

Lautoka Campus
- Urban & Semi urban students
- Regular satellite provided & sometimes face to face tutorial provided
- Transport & Communication easily accessible
- Accessible technology & libraries
- Regular electricity and power sources

Labasa Campus
- Rural & Semi-rural students
- Tutorial delivery problems
- Irregular transport services
- Limited access to technology and libraries
- Poor & unreliable infrastructure for mailing and communication
- Electricity supply issues power source via generators
- Regular social and cultural duties that impact learning

Common Themes
- Course Materials
- Assessments
- Language of Instruction
- Feedback on learning
- Technology driven delivery
Having mapped the terrain of major features of students’ DFL experiences on the two campuses, I began a second level of analysis. At this point I wanted to look more closely at individual students’ accounts of these features in order to characterise the ways in which students identified the first space resources they drew on, and how they used these resources to develop ways of reconstructing learning in third spaces via negotiating practices.

Utilising third space theory as a lens for further examination added a theoretical dimension to my description of what was happening for students of the Lautoka and Labasa campuses in relation to the DFL teaching and learning they experienced. Although my focus was on how students negotiated their learning in context, I attended to the full range of issues they raised in relation to their thinking about the official spaces and the university. In this way, I was able to gather information about their perceptions of the landscape of the second space provided by the university. I proceeded with this second level of analysis to establish where students described first spaces. How these related to the second spaces provided by the university’s approach to DFL and finally, examples of where students described a negotiated practice in a third or hybrid space.

Three coding categories of, First Space, Second Space and Third Space were developed through an iterative coding process. The codes were applied to the interview transcripts and field notes. For example, in the quest for incidences of first space resources and perceptions, I thoroughly reviewed the interview transcripts and field notes for indications where students identified, social, cultural and historical experiences and the resources from which they drew. In some cases, DFL students’ were explicit in relating the experiences that mediated their practices indicated by phrases such as: “at home we …”, “when I was small …”, “in the past …”, “my family …”, “my clan …”, “my father’s brothers …”, “my uncles …”, “in church …”, “at school …”. Students’ use of these phrases conveyed the beliefs and practices that assisted in their negotiation of learning provided in their second spaces. At other times, students would refer to traditional cultural learning or social practices by name.
In the case of Benda, a participant in this study, who uses the term ‘Talanoa’ to make reference to a culturally significant practice that he applies to a learning situation that is unfamiliar and difficult. This term is further explained in the next section of this thesis. In this way, he identified, through direct reference to a practice that he assumes I share knowledge of (as a ‘cultural insider’), an explanation of his actions in negotiating his own learning in context.

The code of Second Space was applied to students’ reports of University expectations of their academic learning and to the expectations outlined in course materials and learning guidelines. For example, Dama understood that part time study required extensive engagement with course materials. Kali recognised that studying in English was a requirement of his course and that often the University materials were difficult for second language learners to negotiate. Benda understood that the learning materials were written in abstract academic language, but he would have preferred the more collaborative, grounded routines of an oral tradition. In the course materials for Josh’s course there was an explicit expectation that students demonstrate academic literacy skills and independently pursue lines of inquiry introduced in lectures and tutorials.

The code of Third Space was applied to examples of where students described how they solved the problems of the second space using their first space resources. For example, Benda’s struggle to understand complex academic language resulted in him developing communicative networks in which he discussed course materials and ideas with others orally so that he might come to better understand it on his own cultural terms. Dama described her struggles to read after hours in an environment that lacked a regular power source. She created a third space by using benzene lamps, but when materials were difficult to read because of print quality she waited until the weekends when she could read at home.

Table 5.3 provides examples of the coding categories for first space, second space and third space codes.
Table 5.3 Coding Categories and Examples of First, Second and Third Spaces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>First Space (FS)</th>
<th>Second Space (SS)</th>
<th>Third Space Negotiations (TS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dama</td>
<td>Limited electricity supply in the evenings means as a caretaker of young children she must use the time with power to attend to her domestic duties first rather than her PERSONAL study.</td>
<td>Part time studies with extensive after hours reading and writing expected to process course materials.</td>
<td>Reads by benzene lamp light late into the night, Waited until the weekend when she can access electricity from her home in town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimbo</td>
<td>Rote learning experiences for memorisation in church schools i.e. memorising of bible verses to recite at the next Sunday school class</td>
<td>Course content familiarity is expected in the course assessment (example) in essay writing</td>
<td>Re-reads course booklet many times to ensure that content is rehearsed and remembered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benda</td>
<td>Personal history of success at school in an academic context of Indian schooling</td>
<td>Course content familiarity is expected in the course assessment (example) in essay writing</td>
<td>Draws on past experiences of note-taking, summarising and essay writing to succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kali</td>
<td>Learning and understanding through the Vernacular Language</td>
<td>Learning in a second language, English</td>
<td>‘versing’ the text or reciting the text in English as in verses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buna</td>
<td>Fijian communalect fluent but limited English</td>
<td>Learning in a second language English</td>
<td>Uses dictionary and internet for explanations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eunice</td>
<td>Family and social history and vernacular speaker</td>
<td>Academic commitments and language barrier in her second language English</td>
<td>Seeks peer group support to discuss the course content with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After identifying instances of students’ accounts of learning and how they drew on social, cultural and educational histories to make sense of the contexts of university DFL study, I proceeded to a third step. In the third step, I constructed several overarching or major themes (Aronson, 1994; Madda, 2010) by examining networks and cross talk among the themes already identified and placed them in coherent groups.

Figure 5.3 shows the major themes and sub-themes identified in the student interviews. I grouped all of the students’ comments from the two case studies into sub-headings, which I have labelled as themes and sub-themes and I have indicated the number of students that referred to each theme. Students only responded to what they wanted to respond to. I examined each participant’s transcript and found similar patterns and relationships emerging. I then gathered the data set and reassembled them into meaningful and understandable groups to show the related patterns. Using Aronson’s (1994) thematic analysis, the identified patterns were then interpreted. Aronson took all of the student comments that fitted the identified patterns and placed them with the corresponding group. For example, some of the students commented on ‘course materials’ as one student said:

Some of the things in the book...course book...is hard ...I mean I don’t understand...

Another student said:

...you can’t read ...the writing...er...so...small...’ or ‘ the teachers, the lecturers can compile their own rather photocopy them from the textbooks.

Table 5.4 provides details of the coding category and examples from the transcripts that were coded under this category. Table 5.4 gives an illustration of the coding system used as shown in the first two columns of the table. The third column on the far left of the table presents the examples of the themes and sub-themes from the transcripts to show how the data was broken down into connected parts.
Table 5.4: Examples of the Focus of DFL Students’ Negotiations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUB- THEMES</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION OF SUB-THEMES AND MAJOR THEMES</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Quality</strong></td>
<td>Learning materials package that DFL students receive during enrolment in courses that comprises a course book, an introduction and assignment book and/or a reader.</td>
<td>Some of the articles in the course book are illegible, print is tiny, pages are missing, and mismatches occur between course book and tutorial topics. Poorly structured course materials lacking in headings or sections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Materials’ Delivery</strong></td>
<td>Despatching of course materials to DFL students in remote regions.</td>
<td>Late delivery of course materials (due to infrastructure or cultural issues) resulting in withdrawals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance of Course Contents</strong></td>
<td>Contents of the course books are not relevant to students’ contexts.</td>
<td>Students do not understand nor value Western histories and express a desire to have content RELEVANT to them and their lives in today’s world. Need more references.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Language</strong></td>
<td>The learning package uses the formal genre, vocabulary and concepts in the English language.</td>
<td>Accustomed to oral, informal vernacular language and not English e.g. “Sometimes the terms they use, I do not understand”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tutors</strong></td>
<td>Tutors facilitate students’ interactions with the course and mediate learning.</td>
<td>Students reported that tutors were absent, sometimes with difficult to understand accents or were unsupportive of their learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tutorial</strong></td>
<td>A non-contiguous interaction between tutors and students to facilitate learning and to support and motivate the learners.</td>
<td>Lack of tutorial results in lack of knowledge and interest in study. Late/no notification of cancellation. Difficulties in attending scheduled tutorials. Need orientation and support from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assignments</strong></td>
<td>Returned comments or criticisms on assignments and projects that students rely on to allow them to take appropriate measures to reinforce the areas identified in the feedback, before attempting the next assignment or examination.</td>
<td>Students expect meaningful and constructive comments on their assignments but are disappointed when comments are vague or untimely. Assignments were too long or too difficult to understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Theme: Access to Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication &amp; Technology</strong></td>
<td>Quality access provided by technology and provision of public services such as telephones, postal services etc. to remote and rural areas.</td>
<td>Vodafone services are not available in many remote areas, but if they are students have to find the right spot where the service may work e.g. a student has to go to a hill for the service to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provision of internet services that are reliable, and available to all students in urban and remote areas.</td>
<td>Students including those in remote areas would like to have access to internet in their remote areas. Poor reception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transport</strong></td>
<td>Means of transport to access DFL campuses or regional centres.</td>
<td>Irregular bus services and sometimes no public transport for weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Campus facilities</strong></td>
<td>Campus facilities impacted student learning by way of the quality of facilities and the access students had to them.</td>
<td>Library opening hours and locations. Computer facilities. Tutorial rooms. Library too congested. Need alternative library.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.3 shows a hierarchy of major themes and sub-themes identified as the focus of negotiations.
Figure 5.3: Focus of Third Space Negotiations (Themes and Sub-themes) identified from Lautoka and Labasa Campuses

Course Materials
- Text Quality
- Language of Core Text
- Material Delivery
- Relevance & course content

Access to Learning
- Campus Facilities
- Communication and Technology
- Transport

Interactions for Learning
- Tutors
- Assignments and Feedback
- Class Shares
5.12 Reliability
The consistency of the application of codes and checking of coding categories was also completed by a research assistant — an experienced teacher in DFL — with greater experience (almost ten years) than I have in this field. This was to enhance the reliability of the categorising method and to guard against researcher bias. The research assistant was given the transcripts and the theme codes and asked to note examples of agreement or disagreement with the application of codes or descriptions of themes and sub-themes. The research assistant agreed with the identification of the themes in the data and his comments on refinement to the coding categories and their descriptions were valuable to this study.

5.13 Conclusion
A major focus for this work was to understand the ways in which students negotiate their learning in DFL environments. Theoretically we might expect that as students meet new experiences and challenges in their second spaces, they draw on their first space resources to make sense of these challenges. The result is a negotiated version of the learning offered by the university. My intention was to identify what factors guided or affected the students’ learning practices in DFL. In some instances the DFL students were explicit in expressing these issues or factors while in others, students’ comments were implicit and required more interpretation. These issues or factors in DFL students’ contexts allowed me to identify DFL students’ practices and how within these contexts they negotiate learning in the different courses they enrolled at USP. By understanding these contexts, I am able to pinpoint the ways students negotiate learning in DFL.

In Chapters Six and Seven of this work, I summarise the data from each group of students to identify major topics that each group discussed. By interpreting the patterns, amalgamation of each thematic network is achieved in relation to the original questions and theories grounded in the research.
Chapter Six: Case Study One — Lautoka DFL Campus

6.0 Introduction
This chapter presents the case study and learning stories of the fifteen participants at the USP Lautoka Campus. I begin by providing the geographical and historical context of the campus and the region that it serves. The chapter also focuses on a discussion of the campus facilities, the communication systems, the campus sub-centres, the courses that are offered at the campus and the backgrounds of the DFL students in Lautoka. In the latter part of this chapter, I provide an account of the students’ experiences or learning stories.

Participants at this campus aggregated themselves into a few groups as they requested. The Pido group comprised ten students, three students preferred to be interviewed together and two other participants, Josh and Tuwa, each sought a one-to-one interview. Much as I wanted a more personal one-to-one interview, most of the participants were adamant about being interviewed in their preferred ways. I was compelled to adhere to the ethics that granted me approval to conduct this research.

At the Lautoka campus I analysed the participants’ responses to interview questions and questionnaires regarding the learning practices they negotiated in DFL. I engaged thematic analysis to search for themes that emerged from the data collected from DFL students at USP and examined their third space negotiations and interactions in order to understand the practices they engage in during their course of study.

6.1 The Background of the Lautoka Campus
The USP Lautoka campus is centrally situated in the central business district (CBD) of Lautoka, the second largest city in Fiji. It is located on the western side of the island of Viti Levu, the largest island in Fiji. This USP campus serves the Western Division and three of the twelve provinces in the country. The Western Division has a population of 297,184 people (FIBS, 2008, p. 20), which represented more than a quarter of the nation’s total population at the 2007 census (FIBS, 2008). Lautoka City itself has a population of 43,274 people (FIBS, 2008) and is situated in the fast
growing Province of Ba. Ba Province has the greatest population of any province in the country and is a tourist haven, notable for its many hotels, motels, backpacker hostels and other tourist attractions, which contribute to the national economy.

6.1.1 Geography and History

The Lautoka campus caters for a geographical area that covers the north and north-west regions of the main island: Viti Levu and shares a land border with the Central Division and sea borders with the Northern Division. The land borders are surrounded by tropical forests and mountainous peaks of up to 1,324 metres. Three major rivers cross this area and cut valleys into rugged terrain forming deltas on which villages are situated. Schools are often established in these remote areas and teachers studying at USP via the DFL mode experience many challenges that impact on their studies in these environments. On the seaward side, the campus serves students, particularly teachers, located in the outlying Yaswa Group islands — an archipelago strung like beads on the western side of Fiji (See Map 6.1). The Lautoka campus came into existence in 2001 as a sub-centre for the then Fiji Centre in Suva and it became a full campus of USP at the beginning of 2004. It has continued to operate as one of three campuses of USP located in Fiji. Lautoka campus is strategically located to serve interested students who live in the western division. It serves six major towns in the country and attracts many civil servants and private sector employees who work in these towns and in the city of Lautoka.
Map 6.1 - The Major Divisions in Fiji

Source: Ministry of Lands, Fiji.
6.1.2 Facilities

Providing campus access to DFL students is one of USP’s many challenges in this region. Lautoka campus has the capacity to provide its students with access to learning in a variety of forms. The campus has a computer laboratory reserved for classes that are conducted during the daytime. Students have access to internet whenever the computers are available for use. Recently, a video broadcasting room was set up to seat seventy students. The campus now has a lecture room to hold lectures, public seminars, in-house meetings and workshops. An activity room for cultural and leisure activities is also available. Face-to-face tutorials and satellite tutorials are held at the Lautoka campus on a weekly or fortnightly basis and students are invited to attend whenever it is convenient for them.

6.1.3 Sub-centres and Exam Centres

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Lautoka campus is strategically located and the sub-centres are built at strategic sites to support student learning through access to tutors, library facilities and communication technology. McIsaac & Gunawardena (1996) acknowledge locations of campuses as an important factor in distance education studies. Examination centres are selected as venues for DFL tests and examinations. Lautoka campus has two sub-centres in the towns of Sigatoka and Rakiraki and four other examination centres in Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, and Tavua towns, all serving DFL students in the Western Division. These examination centres are shown in Map 6.2. A school is selected in each township to be a venue of USP activities, such as enrolments and tutorial visits. The school’s principal or head teacher coordinates affairs of the sub-centre, including support to DFL students in the area. The examination centres provide venues for student services such as enrolments, tests and examinations. A section of the school library is used for USP students’ library books: particularly reference books. Provision of a library section exists at the sub-centres but they are not available in most examination centres.
Map 6.2: The Western Division - Lautoka Campus and Examination Centres

SOURCE: Adapted from Wikipedia Satellite Maps

**Key:**
- 🌟 Main Campus
- ⚪ Sub-centres
- 🔴 Examination centres
- ⭐ USP Headquarters
6.1.4 Transport

Travelling to the Lautoka campus is easier than travelling to other more remote sub-centres and examination centres. Lautoka campus is centrally located and within a short distance from all means of public transport, including buses, taxis, vans and boats and is forty minutes away from Nadi international airport. The majority of students enrolled at Lautoka campus travel to the campus by public transport while some use private vehicles. Those that live near the campus walk or catch public transport which is available from town to town. Students who live at greater distances walk or hire a public transport to get to the main roads where they catch public transport to Lautoka City. Buses only travel on main highways and roads, while vans and trucks will travel on back-roads or road-tracks. Although transport is available, it often runs behind the scheduled times. This is a difficulty for DFL students who wish to arrive to classes or tutorials on time. A student living or working in remote areas such as Nadarivatu would have to travel thirty kilometres — taking one and a half hours — to Tavua town where public transport is available to take the student another ten kilometres to Rakiraki town for enrolment. There is only one bus to Nadarivatu that leaves Tavua town at 2.30p.m. each day and it returns the next morning. The road to Nadarivatu is long and winding, climbing 366 metre to Nadarivatu Plateau where a government station and a secondary school is situated. A few DFL students work at this school.

Students who live on the western islands in the Yasawa Group (refer to Map 6.1) use boats as their main form of transport between islands, so DFL students in these islands travel to Lautoka campus by boat. Local boat services from Lautoka to the Yasawa Islands are irregular; approximately ninety percent of the boats are open and many do not have safety equipment for their passengers. There are marked differences between these boats and the catamarans and ferries that service the tourists industry. In the past, the open boats were the means of delivering course materials, test and examination papers to DFL students located on the islands, but in 2004 this ceased because it breached the security of the test and examination papers. From 2004 only the students who live on nearby islands can enrol in DFL studies. They must collect their course materials from the campus and come to the campus
for tests and examinations. The absence of regular ferries between islands makes it very difficult for students from the outer islands to enrol in DFL studies.

6.1.5 Use of Technology for Learning

DFL at USP utilises information and communications technologies in all twelve campuses in the region including Lautoka (USP, 2008c). Online learning and web-based resources are features of DFL courses. The Lautoka campus is linked to the USPNet, a satellite-communication network that serves the twelve USP campuses in the region. It provides DFL students with technology for video broadcasting, teleconferencing and satellite tutorials. Internet class sharing, discussion boards and chat rooms are provided as a means of interaction between other students and teachers. WebCT and VBC online courses are also available. Lautoka campus is linked to other campuses via landlines owned and operated by the University of the South Pacific. Two new computer laboratories, a new library with computers, offices for staff administration, a satellite and video broadcasting room, tutorial rooms and internet services are also provided for DFL students and staff. Only a few students have personal computers with internet access at home or school, so the technology offered on campus is often their only access. While computers are available for students to carry out internet-based research, bookings for these computers need to be completed two hours prior to accessing them.

It is apparent from Table 6.1 that more than two thirds of DFL students (approximately 370) in this area use the print-based materials rather than contemporary communication technologies (internet etc.) for learning. Communication technologies are used mostly by those students who live near the campus vicinity or who would have easy access to the campus facilities. Although every student that enrols at USP is eligible to use the internet, the great majority of them cannot access it from the locations where they work or live due to the inadequate infrastructure that exists at these locations. Print-based courses are useful to students who live in areas without electricity or solar power and in remote areas in the Western Division, where regular access to technology is not an option.

481.6 Equivalent Full Time students enrolled at Lautoka campus in five course-delivery modes. A number of students were enrolled in two or more courses, but the
majority of students undertook studies using the print-based mode. This is shown by a number of participants at this campus: Mayflower, for example, was enrolled in three courses all in the print-based mode and Fish also enrolled in three courses, two of which were internet-based modes.

6.1.6 Courses

Because of the region it serves, most courses offered at the Lautoka campus are DFL courses. In 2007 a total of 517 courses were offered at the campus. At the Lautoka campus, more students enrol in degree-level courses than in any other level and there are more part-time students than full-time students. In 2007, 142.9 (EFTS) of the students were enrolled as full-time students and 338.7 were part-time students as indicated in Table 6.1. Many secondary school students enrol in foundation and pre-degree programs, while in recent years a growing number of DFL students enrol in postgraduate courses. The different levels of courses are shown in Table 6.2.

During enrolment week, staff members from the Lautoka campus travel to the sub-centres such as Rakiraki and Sigatoka to conduct enrolment procedures and to distribute the learning packages or course materials. This was customary for all campuses where a team of officials travel to these two towns situated at opposite ends of the Lautoka campus regions. This was beneficial for students who would have problems travelling to the main campus in Lautoka for enrolment during working hours. As many of the students were teachers, the travelling staff made enrolment accessible and easier by delivering the course materials to those students who enrolled in these remote towns. It saved the staff and students, time, money and the need to access transport.

Sub-centres are located in primary and secondary schools centrally located in these town areas. Most of the courses offered to students in these remote towns were print-based and those who enrolled in print-based courses would receive their learning packages during these trips. Students who live near the Lautoka campus would obtain their course materials during enrolment at the campus, while those who enrol either online or via postal services receive their learning package through postal services or air mail. Table 6.2 presents some of the courses offered to students at the Lautoka campus. A student living or working in remote areas like Nadarivatu would have to
travel for one and a half hours through rugged terrain to Tavua town where transport for Rakiraki town would be available and this is where the student could enrol.
Table 6.1: Equivalent Full-Time Students (EFTS) at Lautoka Campus: Types of Attendance and Course Delivery Mode – 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lautoka Campus</th>
<th>Type of Attendance</th>
<th>Course Delivery Mode</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full-Time</td>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>142.9</td>
<td>338.7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2: Equivalent Full-Time Students (EFTS) and Level of Courses at Lautoka Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Degree</th>
<th>Sub-Degree</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>PostGraduate</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>131.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Equivalent Full-Time Students (EFTS):** This measures the student workload for an 'equivalent full-time student'. For example, a full-time 100 level student is expected to take eight courses as his/her full-time workload; therefore the weighting per 100 level course is 0.125. A student taking four, 100 level courses would thus be 0.5 EFTS. For the 2007 data, the following conversions were utilised:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Level</th>
<th>Courses per year</th>
<th>EFTS per course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-degree/ Cont. Ed.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate/Dip./Professional Law</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 Level</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200/300 Level*</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400 Level</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: USP, 2007b, p12)
6.1.7 **Tutorials**

In addition to print-based materials, in-person and online tutorials are offered in many courses. Tutorials by centre lecturers, visiting tutors, and lecturers from the Laucala campus in Suva, are scheduled weekly, fortnightly and monthly at the Lautoka campus. All students have access to internet and emails and are informed via email of the tutorial times, but access to email is only available at the Lautoka campus or where internet services are available. Students in remote areas do not have the same privilege of access to internet services that urban students have. Video Broadcasting is available for VBC courses and video-conferencing provides two-way interaction between the teacher and the student but again these are only available to students who have easy access to the campus. Satellite tutorials are conducted at the campus through the USPNet satellite communications system (USP, 2008a). These satellite tutorials, or tele-tutorials, provide audio-conferencing that is delivered from one of the three major campuses at Laucala (Suva, Fiji), Alafua (Samoa) and Emalus (Vanuatu) (USP, 2008a).

6.2 **Students at Lautoka campus**

All of the participants at this campus are students living or working in the Western Division. The majority of the participants are first-year degree students aspiring to become teachers in secondary schools and a few aspiring to become lawyers, while others are foundation studies students who aspire to study at degree level after completing their current programs. Four participants are already teachers with a teacher certificate: three are enrolled in degree programs while one already has a Bachelors of Arts degree. Many NGO (non-government organisation) workers and government officials, based in Lautoka, undertake diploma or degree courses offered through DFL at the USP campus as part of the professional learning requirement of their workplace or out of self-interest. Distance education offers these people an opportunity to begin or continue their university studies at the Lautoka campus.
Prior to the participant interviews, a meeting with the Director of Lautoka campus was scheduled as this is the usual protocol for any research studies held at this campus and is a requirement of the ethic’s standard. Notification about this research study had been sent out to students by word-of-mouth and a meeting was scheduled as a result of this. During this meeting, all information about the questionnaire and interview process was communicated to the students and time was given for students to ask questions regarding this research study. Finally, some students present at the meeting voluntarily expressed interest in participating by filling in the questionnaire as well as being interviewed. These have been described in detail in Chapter Five of this thesis. Although many students were present at the first meeting conducted by one of the senior staff of the campus, fifteen decided to take part in the study. Table 6.3 presents the backgrounds of the participants at the Lautoka Campus.

The fifteen participants’ ages ranged from eighteen to forty-five. They signed an agreement for anonymity before commencing with the questionnaires and the interview. Participants filled in the questionnaires at different stages of the interview, for example, before the interview, during the interview or after the interview as they were at liberty to do.

The three students that requested an interview as a group filled in the questionnaires prior to the interview and then approached me for the face-to-face group interview session. During the introductory stages of the interview one of the participants left the room and the other two participants stayed but within a couple of minutes into the interview the two participants asked if the interview could be discontinued and rescheduled for a later date. A rescheduled interview time was made, but the participants did not show up on the day and they also did not turn up at any other time. The only data collected from them was their response to the questionnaire and the agreement they had signed for participation in this research study.

Tuwa and Josh were mature participants who requested individual face-to-face interviews. They completed the questionnaires and Josh offered to have the interview immediately while Tuwa suggested being interviewed on another day. Josh was revisited a few more times while Tuwa had the one interview only. Tuwa’s interview session was short, about eighteen minutes only, as he had to leave for work. Josh is
selected as a key participant in this research study because he presented data that is representative of what many students in DFL experienced in their studies.

Fifteen questionnaires were collected from fifteen participants at this campus and only twelve students attended a full interview session. Thirty questionnaires had been sent to the campus four months prior to conducting the interview but unfortunately, these were not sighted by anyone nor were they handed out to students. However, a handful of questionnaires were available and were handed out to students a day or two before the interviews were conducted so they could familiarise themselves with the interview questions.

Findings that emerged from the questionnaires and interview data evidently reflected the participants concerns about learning in DFL mode at the university. Three major themes emerged as represented in Figure 6.1 and sub-themes emerged in relation to each major theme. The three major themes resonating from the participants’ data included course materials, interactions for learning and access to learning. These are explained in further detail in the following paragraphs. Each theme and issue impacted students learning in DFL.

6.2.1 Themes in Student Interviews: Factors that Influence Negotiations of DFL

The foremost goal of all the interviews was to identify and examine the way that the students negotiate learning in DFL, particularly focusing on the print-based materials that support learning. Most of the interviews were conducted only once, but one or two students in Lautoka had two or three interviews as they regularly attended the campus. The student interviews used in this analysis were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Questions included were related to students’ learning practices in DFL as illustrated in the methodology Chapter Five. This methodology chapter gives a more detailed account of the analysis methods used to develop the themes presented.
Figure 6.1: Themes Emerging from Participants Responses to Questionnaire and Interview items at the Lautoka Campus

- **COURSE MATERIALS**
  - Language of the Text
  - Text Quality
  - Relevance of Text

- **INTERACTIONS FOR LEARNING**
  - Tutorials
  - Class Shares
  - Assignments & Feedback

- **ACCESS TO LEARNING**
  - Communication & Technology
  - Campus Facilities

Themes:
- Too Long (8)
- Difficult Vocabs & terms (14)
- Understood fully (4)
- Difficult/ did not understand (11)
- Illegible prints (3)
- Relevant (4)
- Partly relevant (8)
- Irrelevant (3)
- Regular (3)  Irregular (8)
- No tutorial participation (4)
- Need for face to face tutorial (12)
- Tutorial content different from course material & I&A (6)
- Out of date (8)
- Do not use class shares (4)
- Too lengthy (3)
- Difficult/Not understood (10)
- Too many (2)
- Poor reception in satellite tutorials (5)
- Cannot understand accent of tutor on satellite tutorial (5)
- Late notification of tutorials & changes in course materials contents due to technical problems (10)
- Orientation needed (9)
- No orientation needed (3)
- Library too congested (9)
- Insufficient references (3)
- Need for alternative library facilities (3)
6.2.2 Negotiating Learning on the Lautoka Campus

Given the backgrounds of DFL students studying at the USP Lautoka campus, it is inevitable that their experiences within these contexts will impact the way they negotiate learning in DFL and this will ultimately affect their success or failure. It is in this light that I first present a group of ten students called the PIDO group and secondly, Tuwa, who was not present in the large group interview. Their interview data are used to examine the trends of a group of students. It serves as an overview of how individual students construct and negotiate learning by using their cultural knowledge, as well as academic knowledge to make sense of the curriculum. In this process, hybrid spaces are created and new ways of learning arise.

Finally, I present Josh, an individual case in this research study who demonstrates how he actively negotiated his learning in DFL. Josh’s learning story is used as a synthesising device to bring together and exemplify a number of themes evident in the reports of learning from many of the participants at this campus. Josh drew from his first space, the space of prior literacy and learning practices, and from his second space, the space involving the institution of USP and its academic practices. In Chapter 4, Gutierrez et al. (1995) is cited as referring to these spaces as ‘unofficial space’ and ‘official space’. In negotiating learning Josh drew from these two spaces and created a hybrid or third space. Within this space Josh uses his cultural knowledge and experiences from everyday life to help him understand the curriculum content of the 112HM: Contemporary History – The modern world, 1750 to the present course. The last part of this chapter analyses how Josh used outside knowledge to interpret and understand the course materials he uses in the 112HM course.

6.3 Learning Story One: The PIDO Group Background

The name PIDO was developed solely for the purpose of this research study. The PIDO group is the name of the group of DFL students in Lautoka who wanted to be interviewed together. The group comprised ten students who enrolled through the USP Lautoka campus and had either just left secondary school or had been studying at USP for over one to two years. They chose to be interviewed as a group, rather than on an individual basis. The first ten names listed in Table 6.3 are members of the PIDO group and the table also details the background of each participant. Most of the students were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one, while the oldest participant was between twenty-eight and thirty-one years old. Seven
participants were male and three were female. The PIDO group had common issues that were expressed during the interview most of which related to issues centred around course materials, access to learning and learning interactions.
Table 6.3: Research Participants’ Background at the Lautoka Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Program of Study</th>
<th>Courses of Study</th>
<th>Years of Study</th>
<th>Previous Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>BAGCE</td>
<td>101EN 101NM 102NM</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Certificate in Foundation Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>Part-European</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>101EN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Certificate in Foundation Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Napsy</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>101NM 102NM</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Certificate in Foundation Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ford</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>BCOM</td>
<td>FL02</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Skirt</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>BAGCE</td>
<td>101EN 102VV 102GE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Certificate in Foundation Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>FP03 FC03 FM03</td>
<td>1 Semester</td>
<td>Fiji School Leaving Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mayflower</td>
<td>Part-European</td>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>FP03 FC03 FM03</td>
<td>1 Semester</td>
<td>Certificate in Preliminary Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>FP03 FC03 FM03</td>
<td>1 Semester</td>
<td>Fiji School Leaving Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Elisha</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>LLB</td>
<td>101EN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Certificate in Foundation Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>LLB</td>
<td>101EN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Certificate in Foundation Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>PGCE</td>
<td>112HM</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jike</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>BED PRIMARY</td>
<td>003TE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>BED PRIMARY</td>
<td>102MA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>BED PRIMARY</td>
<td>003TE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Teacher Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Tuwa</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>101GI</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Certificate in Trades</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3.1 Data Sources

All of the participants or DFL students filled in the questionnaires providing personal information about their backgrounds. A few of these students did not complete the latter sections in the questionnaire. It was not compulsory for the students to fill in the questionnaires because the initial intention of the questionnaire was to familiarise students with the nature of the questions that were going to be asked during the interview. Students could volunteer to fill in the questionnaires if they wished. Field notes and course materials were used as additional sources of information about their contexts for study. The students were first briefed about the nature of the interview prior to the commencement of the official interview sessions.

Since the PIDO group had a large number of participants, each question was asked one at a time and each person would respond to the questions one after the other according to the order of seating arrangement in the room or as they were prompted to respond. Students were given the opportunity to comment or respond to other participants’ comments or responses during the interview and could contribute to other discussions if they wished to comment. The students were asked questions concerning their backgrounds and histories, their courses of study, their aspirations and reasons for study, and their personal challenges to learning in DFL.

6.3.2 Overview of PIDO Group Courses: Second Spaces

Three of the students in this group were first year students studying Foundation courses: one was a second-year university student who had completed preliminary studies in the previous year and was now studying Foundation courses with her two friends. The majority of the participants in this group were first-year degree students undertaking twelve DFL courses at USP.

6.3.2.1 PIDO Group Course Materials

The students in the PIDO group were enrolled in a number of courses and 101EN is compulsory for students in the first year of their degree studies. It is a course that students are expected to study to help them achieve proficiency in academic speaking, reading and writing. This is seen as a means to support their language needs in the various courses
they undertake at university. English is the medium of learning used at USP and since the majority of USP students are second language speakers of English, such a course is necessary. The course is designed to provide flexibility to cater for the practical language requirements of students studying at USP (USP, 2008d). Each year this course is offered in the first and second semester. It is a compulsory course for most degree programs offered by the Department of Language and Literature in the School of Education at USP. The aim of the course is to help students to develop writing styles that are appropriate to university studies; to assist students to read effectively and to enable them to evaluate a number of texts; to help students speak with confidence in seminars and tutorials; and to assist students with their listening and researching skills (USP, 2007d, p. 2).

The second space provided for the PIDO group included learning packages with several components. The students in the Law degree courses, for instance, are offered online and satellite tutorials, which are provided from the main Laucala campus through the USPNet, a satellite network that belongs to USP. Students who are aspiring to teach enrol in courses that they are interested in teaching. Teachers in Fiji need to learn one of the vernacular languages as part of their training, so they would choose to enrol in a language course in Fijian, Hindi or Urdu. The learning package for 101EN includes a course book, a course guide known as the Introduction and Assignment (I&A) book, and three audio tapes and a video tape. Most courses offered through DFL comprise only two or three books, which were described in Chapter Five of this thesis.
This course focuses more on the practical skills required in studying at university and is less content oriented. There are ten units in the course content, which are aimed at guiding and preparing students’ writing, reading, listening, speaking and research skills for university life. These are shown in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Summary of Course Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Course Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The 12 steps of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Writing II: Continuing the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Research and Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reading and Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Taking notes from written sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Writing III: Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Report Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Seminar Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Listening to lectures and taking notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contents of the course books are based on the ten units of study highlighting the aims of the course. At the beginning of each unit a concept map presents the core concepts that students will meet during the semester. A study organiser is presented outlining the topics and the objectives and activities for each topic. Table 6.5 shows an example that illustrates a part of the study organiser provided in the 101EN course book.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning to write as an academic</td>
<td>To appreciate differences in language: Abstract versus concrete Subjective versus objective Emotional versus balanced</td>
<td>Activities 1.1, 1.2, 1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Understanding the proposition</td>
<td>Carry out a CLD analysis CLD is explained in the book</td>
<td>Activities 1.4, 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Recognising a proposition</td>
<td>To recognise a proposition in a topic</td>
<td>Activities 1.6, 1.7, 1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students are expected to acquire certain prescribed skills in their second space of learning. The advanced organiser, for instance, presents the topics, the objectives and the activities that correspond to the skill. In Activity 1.1 students are shown examples of abstract ideas as opposed to concrete objects. In Activity 1.2 a written extract is given in two different genres: formal and informal, and in Activity 1.3 students are required to replace emotive words and phrases with rational terms used in academia. All three activities are knowledge based depicting the kinds of expectations required of them in their second spaces. These knowledge-based activities did not allow them to negotiate learning, but only provided them with the expectations for learning the skills required in writing.

The contents of the course book are relevant to the aims and objectives of the course and enrolled DFL students would have found it easy to follow. For example, in Unit 2 on writing, students are expected to understand what a topic sentence is and the course book illustrates how this can be achieved. Instructions are clear and easy to follow as in the example in Table 6.6.
A bedroom was the social centre of a wealthy house in the 16th century.

Bedrooms have become more practical in design.

My bedroom is my favourite room in the house.

A bedroom has many uses.

Each of these topic sentences concerns “The Bedroom” yet they all have a different focus and this leads us, the reader, to expect something to follow. We read expecting that something particular will follow - something explaining what, or how, or why.

For example, look at the first one again:

A bedroom was the social centre of a wealthy house in the 16th century.

I know that the only topic can be the bedroom - it can’t talk about the bathroom or the dining room - but I also expect the writer to tell me how or in what way was the bedroom a social centre.

That is the focus or the controlling idea.

(USP, 2007d, p.11).

This illustration had instructions and information that are simple and clear and would easily be understood by DFL students both in urban and rural areas. As Fish, a participant, implied about the lack of information that was given in one of the courses he was studying and comparing it with the 101EN course instructions:

if we were to look around for words ... to understand ... to get the simplest meaning... it’s very hard to get what we looking for to get clear information...so what makes us get information ...we get information from one another ...(meaning the PIDO group) like in 101EN if they could be like tha t...it’s clear and easy ...

Fish found the instructions in 101EN easier to understand and follow then the instructions in 101NM or 102NM, which he was referring to in this interview. He had difficulties in understanding instructions given in 101NM. For Fish to understand the instructions in the NM courses he seeks his group members, friends, or other class mates to obtain more information and to enable him to understand the meaning of the instructions given in the course book. Many DFL students expect clear instructions in their course books and in this instance the provision of clear instructions was required in Fish’s second space. Fish negotiated this learning difficulty in 101NM and 102NM by seeking friends’ or group assistance to help him make meaning of the instructions. Culturally, Fish was used to a
communal way of completing tasks and explained his request to be interviewed in a group with people familiar to him. Fish was a young Fijian boy used to the support of a family and communal system of living. It is this cultural practice that he drew on to enable him to understand the instructions given in the official second space of learning. The practices he created were not his first space but neither were they an official space in second space: rather his practices were ones he created to negotiate his own learning.

Most students in DFL speak their mother tongue, either Fijian or Hindi, on a regular basis and the idea of using simple English in 101EN is to alleviate some of the linguistic barriers to learning that many Pacific Islanders face in DFL. 101EN does help students’ second spaces of learning by using simple English (not academic language) in the instructions. Three tapes are included in the learning package. Tape 1 is for reading and interpreting texts, tape two is for listening to lectures, and tape three is a blank for recording a seminar presentation that the students have to present as part of an assessment. This will be explained in the next section.

### 6.3.2.3 Assessment Tasks

Five assessments are required from all students at the end of the semester. These include an essay, an oral presentation, a research project or assignment, a mid-semester test and the final examination. The course work, which excludes the final examination, is worth sixty per cent and the final examination is worth forty per cent. The final section of the I&A contains details of the assessments and the requirements. Assignment one is an argumentative essay, worth fifteen per cent of the total marks, and lists four topics relevant to the Pacific: the students choose to argue for or against their chosen topic. The second assignment, also worth fifteen per cent is an oral presentation which students’ record on the blank audio tape provided in the learning package.

These assessments include a seminar presentation, a recording of the seminar, and written notes of the presentation. The final written assessment, worth fifteen per cent is a report and an essay on any one of the given topics. Students choose to either complete the report or the essay. The students are expected to do these exercises by applying what they have learnt from the course books to the questions in the assignments. A sample student essay is given in the I &A to assist and guide students in their essay writing. In the second assignment, the following instructions are given in the I &A:
Record your seminar presentation on a regular tape or CD. DO NOT use Dictaphone tapes or any other mini-tapes as the markers do not have the equipment to listen to these and a failure to provide an audible recording will cost you many marks. (USP, 2007d, p. 27).

Students are expected to record an oral presentation by themselves, that is, they make their presentation in front of friends or in front of a mirror and they record their voice at the same time. Students are used to realistic settings in their first spaces and to record their presentation in this way seemed artificial, yet they are required to record their own presentations and send it to USP. A realistic situation is experienced when students can engage with a live audience in a real world and not in an artificial setting and engaging with an artefact as was expected in their second spaces. The PIDO group was concerned about their learning in DFL studies as was fully expressed in the themes and sub-themes drawn from their interview data. They were connected to their learning needs and how they negotiated learning in distance and flexible learning modes. These are explained in the next section of this thesis.

6.4 Negotiating Issues with Course Materials

During the interview, concern over course materials was a recurring theme. DFL students’ perceptions of the course materials and textbooks are defined by their personal experiences. Napsy, one of the students, said:

In order for you to understand every concept regarding your studies materials...we have to understand every points that is uh...available on that course material and you have to make your own points and keep making your own points that you can come up with so that we understand it.

Napsy was explaining the second space requirements he negotiated in order to find meaning. First, he needed to understand the main points or ideas in the course materials. Then he had to note down his own ideas and interpretation of those ideas. He inferred that one had to understand every concept included in the course materials and in doing so he had to think, create, and write down whatever was within his capability to enable him to understand the concepts. When asked about what he would prefer as an alternative to this he said:
If only they (meaning the course convenors) can read it out more and more...and ...so that we become familiar to it and every time tell us very simply... then we can understand...otherwise we won’t tell...

The course Napsy was referring to was 101NM and he was particularly referring to a satellite tutorial, which he thinks is where the tutor needed to repeatedly read out the contents of the course so that he could understand. Repetition of learning materials seem to be of great value to Napsy as has been alluded to in both of these responses.

This is also revealed in Josh’s learning story in section 6.7.3 of this chapter. Tuwa was asked to comment on how he dealt with the course materials in his study and he said:

For me I find it hard...but when I learn and learn almost everyday...then I can know...and I’m not really educated but I have to try and try...like I’m working ...sometimes I can understand but I have to read and read over and over again.

Napsy, Josh and Tuwa were not the only students that demonstrated repetition as a learning strategy. Others in the PIDO group intimated this as well as the participants in the second case study. These are indicative of the processes of rote learning that Mugler & Landbeck (1997) referred to in their study. Rote learning is the act of using repetition to memorise knowledge. Understanding would eventually happen after committing to repetitive and memorising actions. Rote learning was often viewed as bad practice, although some would argue that it is a necessary step in learning subjects. In an earlier study of the USP students, Mugler and Landbeck (1997) found the persistence of rote-learning among these students and their preference for this style of learning against other learning styles. USP students had cultural differences with culturally preferred learning styles, which were important to the students. Mugler and Landbeck (1997) relate how the different cultures emphasised different teaching and learning styles. For example, in their study of a Samoan high student, their findings revealed that the student preferred a learning style that was collaborative and participatory in nature. Rote learning is often blamed on the authoritarianism of Pacific societies and may also be contributed to by a cultural and religious practice of repetitions. It may also be that DFL students take aspects of their cultural and religious practices to negotiate learning in their second spaces. Cultural practice of repetition is a way of negotiating learning by taking aspects of cultural practices to negotiate learning for the new concept. The aspect here is repetition. Dahlin & Watkins (2000), described the role of repetition in the process of
understanding as one that students sometimes combine with ‘attentive effort’ (p. 65) to try and discover new meanings in the materials they studied in order to deepen their understanding. This is sometimes consistent with the traditional and cultural practices. Repetition was evident in two thirds of the student responses during the interview.

Napsy was studying the 101NM course, which is an internet-based course and was compulsory for the students in the law program. He was familiar with the use of internet and the new technologies as he indicated in his questionnaire and yet he still had problems with the course. Napsy lives in a village setting that has many advantages including: availability of different modes of transport and communication; accessibility to the internet and contemporary technological developments; and an excellent infrastructure all of which are conducive to learning. Yet Napsy travels to Lautoka campus almost daily to seek his group members to study with even although he can access the internet in his village. Napsy is reflecting participation in a shared discourse that he cannot ignore because that is the way his culture operates. Nunan conducted a study, cited in Chand (2007), and found that students valued traditional learning activities more than communicative-oriented activities. Pacific people traditionally learn from each other through interaction (Thaman, 1994a). Napsy’s notion of a learner, independent of a teacher, is a difficult one and constant personal contact with the tutor is probably what he requires the most. Thaman (1994a) said that despite the advantages that satellite tutorials bring to Pacific countries the “physicality of place is irrelevant to social interactions” (p. 15). Napsy needed the personal interaction with human beings rather than through a machine.

Of the PIDO group only two students lived in Lautoka while the rest travelled to the Lautoka campus three or four days a week to meet and discuss their studies with their friends and peer groups. The trio all travelled to Lautoka to meet each other for this same reason. The majority of the participants indicated their need of person to person interaction in their studies. The cultural practice of meeting together in communal groups and sharing responsibilities and the ‘talanoa’ sessions as mentioned in Chapter five are what the students use to negotiate learning (repetition) in their second spaces. In this way they create a third space, taking first space cultural learning and interaction (talanoa) practices and using them to recontextualise formal university study in a third space.
Elisha, another student, commented on another aspect of course materials and said:

*The course materials I came to see in USP is different compared to the high school... high school stuff that we’re used to. Er ...mm ...coz in high school we’re used to writing two hundred words but coming up here to university level we have to write 1,500 words. So it’s a challenge ...trying to add more words ... and we keep on adding to the things we’re doing and the course materials doesn’t really help us. It makes it ...kinda makes it hard for us to put stuff together ...and our assignments too...*

Elisha compared writing in school with writing in university in terms of length of writing and expressed anxiety about it.

*In schools the length of essays are small while at university level the length of essays are longer.*

Likewise Elijah echoes the same sentiment and says:

*I’m a student, straight out from high school ... In high school ...you write an essay of 300-400 words but now when I come to the ...this ...some of the essays I have to write is composition of 3000 to 5000 words. It’s very difficult!*

Elisha and Elijah reflect the South Pacific cultural practices inherent in their oral literature designed as performance-based rather than to-be-read texts. Written genre is constituted as a genre in academic practices provided in the second space of DFL learning. Intellectual focus on the force of alphabetically written words has formed an important element in Western culture while many Pacific cultures are characterised by oral and visual representations (Finnegan, 1990). Many students in the Pacific do not have a flexible mastery over the written forms of language even in their own vernacular languages because they did not play a significant role in Island societies (Mangubhai, 1989). Mangubhai said that, when quality reading materials are available and opportunities provided for reading and writing more creatively, then students will enjoy the process of writing. Mangubhai (1995) stated that much of the learning in the South Pacific was restricted to reading and there was very little emphasis on the development of writing skills in early days of schooling. More than half of the students’ responses during the interview indicated that the writing activities required of them were too long.
Culturally, oral practices have been ways that Pacific people learn. This is their first space cultural practice and their second space practices as delivered by the university comprise a written genre that is new and foreign to them. It is difficult for the students to negotiate learning between these two foreign spaces that differ significantly from each other. A number of students reported writing essays that reflect story-telling style. They use their first space of traditional storytelling to align it to the writing that they complete in their second space of learning. For example, when Tuwa was asked about the challenges he faced with assignments he said:

*The assignments are difficult ... to write because I can’t write ... write well I mean ... I just write and write like I’m ... stories ... saying stories ... its very hard because I don’t know much in English.*

In this way Tuwa created a third space in which he used the familiar cultural practice of storytelling to negotiate and reconstruct a difficult and foreign university practice. The result was a kind of hybrid textual practice. He relayed how he usually did not get good grades. Tuwa was one of many students in the region that experienced this problem of writing in a language and a style that they were not familiar with.

Other issues raised by the students at Lautoka campus related to course materials that were important to their learning negotiations. They included contents of the course materials that were vague or had missing links as Skirt indicated:

*... When you look at the course materials and ah! ahh! Course book, it has nothing to ... no proper examples ... not clear ... what they want us to do ... what they ask in the question you cannot find it in the your course material ...*

Mary likewise stated:

*What they give in textbook, they don’t change in course material and sometimes what they give in course materials, they can’t find...*

Eli related what happened in his course of study:

*In our course material, the first 1 to 3 units corresponded with the new text that they introduced. They said the readings were from the new text and then when it came to unit 5, the readings that was on the course material’s totally different from the page that was given in the textbook. For example, page 380 is on aah!*
'Controlling’...we go to 380 but it’s not on ‘controlling’...we find it hard to find the correspondence.

Skirt, Mary and Eli clearly show how this issue of lack of clarity and discontinuity in course materials can affect how students negotiate learning in DFL studies. Lamy & Hassan cited in Holmberg (2005 p.49) state, “… distance learners cannot easily be persuaded to undertake solo or interactive reflective work if task presentation is not completely explicit”. Courses that are developed need to meet the requirements, needs and interests of the students and presentations in the course materials need to be explicit enough for students to follow easily.

One of the biggest issues regarding course materials raised by these students was the difficulty in understanding the course book contents and the textbooks or readers provided in their learning package. Figure 6.1 shows that more than half of the students that participated in this study at this campus commented on the difficulties they encountered in understanding the contents and instructions in their course materials.

Napsy said: 
I don’t understand some of the things in my course material.

and Mary said: 
In the course book you won’t understand the thing ... when you read it, no proper examples, nothing! In the course book, it’s just text! Giberrish!

Fish subsequently said:

We hardly know what the words mean unless we go through hours of researching the library... I think that’s one way to look at our textbook... course book.

Mary said:

Sometimes they use the big vocabs eh...like some vocabs you just don’t understand...but its difficult when you’re just new into tertiary level

Tuwa said while referring to the course materials:

The language is very difficult to understand, I myself struggle...but I try my best sometimes I get it but ... I don’t know mostly...I keep trying..and trying I have to ...
...yes I have to...
These students have expressed their concerns with the course materials and have indicated their need of simple language to understand the course materials and the need for components of the course to be in a language that will allow them to follow the exposition, do the exercises, solve the problems set, and hence enable them to understand their learning materials. Fourteen of the participants in this research study use English as a second language in their second space and were expected to negotiate learning in this language when culturally their first space language was either Fijian or Hindi. How then do students like these negotiate learning? They negotiate learning in a number of ways: by researching as Fish indicated and by going to the library to look for further information. Mary said:

*The big words they use, if they only use the kind of words ... the kid’s stuff ... we learn ... it’s easy to know and tell ... like we use in vernacular ... and that way we will learn ...*

Tuwa also said:

*I wish if they can only translate in Fijian ... then I can know and ... then ... and it’s easier to understand then we can find the answer to our work.*

These participants have indicated that in their second space of learning they are required to use their second language, English, to understand the contents of the materials of learning. They expressed their preference for a blend of cultural language in their first space of learning, but often this is impossible because the two languages are different. The result is the creation of a third space of negotiation, that is, translation, which the students use to make sense of their learning materials. Ford, a more mature student in the group, negotiated learning in a different way from the others as he said:

*The problem that uh...most students face ... is understanding that you need to be developed in whatever situation you are in to get to higher levels that uh ... many are expected to ... to achieve. In other words we need to develop our skills individually as a group ... based on series of uh ... social indicators ... that we can learn from seminars ...*

He further added:
I’m doing a sociology course ... I have no problems with understanding that! ... I am religious and my views with the views they come up with are so different I see their views coming from a world order and they’re writing from there. There is a difference in my race from them ... their views and my views. I’ve seen education proceed from high school until now. I began to acquire much knowledge from my society or that lifestyle ... where I learn skills ... and you have to know it... and that has helped me where I am now.

In essence, Ford expressed that he acquired knowledge from his religion, culture, society and early education. He reflected on his cultural and religious practices in order to make sense of the learning he experienced in DFL studies. Ford referred to ‘group’, ‘social indicators’ and his religious views, which reflected the socio-cultural practices of his society. The skills he learnt were derived from the society he grew up in. Kedrayate (2001) describes traditional Fijian education as being community based: that is associated with daily activities of the community. Parents and elders in the community shared their knowledge and skills with children to prepare them for adult life and their subsequent participation in communal activities. The skills that children learnt were confined to their traditional roles, for instance, boys learnt skills in hunting, fishing and farming by observing and imitating their parents and elders. Ford stated that he acquired the skills and knowledge in education in much the same way he acquired his cultural practices. In engaging with the materials of learning used in his DFL studies he used cultural practices from traditional education to negotiate learning in the second space represented by his USP course. He blended his cultural knowledge and practices in his first space and created his own third space of negotiation to enable him to engage with the course materials in his second space.

Students, like Ford, learn that membership of an academic community, particularly at the university level, depends on their engagement with complex ideas and not just with their own experience. Ford mentioned that in his DFL studies, the course materials made it clear that students must pursue individual intellectual work and assume a measure of responsibility for their own learning. Students’ cultural backgrounds and knowledge impact on their reconstruction of the materials of learning they use in DFL. Those who embrace reading and writing as tools for learning — about their own lives and about academic subjects — are equipped to take advantage of what they are offered
(McLoughlin, 1995) while others need specific skills to negotiate learning. Students need to be active makers of meaning and to be taught strategies for good reading: that is to think critically, to argue, to compare, to own an idea, and to remember. The various academic courses provided by the universities are structured in ways that assume that students will demonstrate effective critical reading strategies and assign additional reading with specific instructional guidance to improve reading abilities (McLoughlin, 1995). This is a major impediment for the participants enrolled in current courses, but this is what students currently draw on. Skirt, a participant in this study related how the study guide she used provided scant scaffolding to help her acquire the skills she needed. Skirt says:

*I’m taking this unit and its erm... I’m having a hard time just reading it coz I didn’t do it in primary school... I’m having a hard time reading through it ...I really wish they make it more simple, simple for those like me that never took it in primary school. The words are very hard and you can’t even read it. I mean I can read it but ...I cannot understand it but I wish they’d make it more simple... In Form 7...teachers read the books and they break down whatever’s in the book into simple sentences and you follow easily coz ...and then you do your own research

Study questions could have been provided that would guide students through unfamiliar texts, developing short reading quizzes, and promoting discussions about the reading are mechanisms that will lead to improvement of student critical reading competencies. If students learn through rote learning methods, or memorisation, the opportunity to practice critical reading strategies is lost because rote learning — as critics assert — involves learning facts without developing a deeper understanding, which makes it impossible for students to grasp the meaning to apply and transfer the knowledge to other areas. Other issues related to course materials raised by participants of this study included relevance of the content materials. Eleven students at Lautoka campus indicated that they found the course contents either irrelevant or partly relevant and only four students found their course contents relevant. This is shown in Figure 6.1. In referring to her course materials Skirt says:

*... most of the information that is given there is not based on what we want aah...Some of the things that’s put in the course books and textbooks I think its not supposed to be there..No seriously!...what I’m meaning is, we not gonna need it, we really don’t need it and we not gonna use it.
Skirt’s concept of information in this context is related to any information, news or facts that is given in her course material as she later revealed:

*The information in the book...I mean the things in the course material...yes...contents*

As Josh related in his learning story, the students’ second space of learning as provided by the university was foreign to the students. The students’ preference for learning was for contents that they could relate to or that they could contextualise. As indicated by Skirt students wanted familiar and relevant content that was similar to their first space of cultural context and that they find useful to them in life. To learn something about a decontextualised and unfamiliar content was a difficult task for them. The students have shown that the way they negotiate learning is to contextualise the contents using their first space knowledge and practices to engage their second space of learning provided by the university and in this engagement sequence they create a third space where negotiations of meaningful learning occurs. The courses materials played a major part in DFL students learning and students engaged in the learning process in a variety of ways, as the participants of this research have shown the third spaces they created helped them negotiate learning in their DFL studies.
6.5 Interactions for Learning

Students also expressed concern about tutoring style and tutor availability. Elisha explained:

“I’m also a first year law student and uhm I’m doing my elective now, and we are just don’t have any papers here. Even the electives the units that we are doing, uhm we don’t have any readers, we have to wait for the tutors to come from Suva here in Lautoka. And that’s like uhm tutorials that’s like probably twice in one semester, that’s what we get and satellite tutorials for if we want ….we just had I think two satellite tutorials, that’s what we get. And we need tutors to come down here. We don’t even know the person responsible for the ….coordinator of the course in here in Lautoka, we don’t even know him or her or whether he comes down to the…for the tutorial…

Elisha has raised a number of issues regarding tutorial support in DFL studies. Students had to wait for tutors to come from Suva to supply them with extra reading materials. Secondly, he mentions that tutorials are not conducted regularly, as the students would prefer, and that face-to-face interaction with the tutor or lecturer was desirable. Other students in the group acknowledged the same need. Elisha was studying most of his courses via the internet. Even within the context of an urban environment and a campus endowed with technological equipment, face-to-face tutorials were the preferred choice for these students. When asked whether he understood the contents of the course materials, Elisha added:

“That’s a bit different because the first year law students, we do our electives so we just select any units we do, but I mean we don’t really understand. That’s because the main problem is that we don’t have the tutors there, who we can...explain.

Eli commented on the tutorial participation during the satellite tutorial:

Sometimes I don’t understand some of the things like in my course book and overall some of the my lecturers when they speak out in the satellite tutorials, we don’t understand them because they mostly from a foreign country

In both Elisha and Eli’s situations, the tutorial was an issue that needed attending to. Elisha did not have a tutor attending to his individual needs and Eli had technology that did not provide specific or current tutoring. Eli on the other hand had problems with
understanding the tutors’ accents. In comparison to these three students, Mary had a tutor, but she also had issues:

_The foundation science students... we in DFL... the problem is with the lab. Now when you go for the labs .....you have to like... know what to do in the pre-lab... before you enter the lab. Now some of the questions in the pre-lab when...when you look through the course material and ah and ah course book, it has nothing to...What what they ask in the...lab, laboratory manual you cannot find in your course material and in your textbook. And especially for physics last semester I was taking physics, now the physics teacher he was not helpful at all._

Mary further added:

...for our labs it would be just three hours eh, he would come for like just one hour and we would just do the lab and he would go. And at the end of the semester, he would say give the entire lab. And what we have for the tutorial and all that we’d have to find our own and ah even the course book you just won’t understand the thing when you read it. No proper examples, nothing! My friends often help me more!

Later Mary said:

_Others have tutorials like us but...we don’t get help, real help from him (referring to the tutor)_

The responses that Elisha, Eli and Mary have made indicate that there are issues about tutoring that need to be considered if universities want to maintain students’ interests in DFL studies. The data in Figure 6.1 show the issues that were raised by the participants. Eight students did not have regular tutorial, four did not have any at all and only three had regular tutorials. Other data illustrate the various issues that students had to contend with in their DFL learning.

Whether the students were relaying the truths in their comments may not be as important as being aware of the circumstances and if they received support it could steer them in their struggles and help them negotiate learning in DFL. DFL students in Lautoka mentioned that the most convenient way of dealing with tutoring problems was to seek assistance from friends and class-mates. In the absence of tutors or tutorial participation
via face-to-face or internet interaction, DFL students found this the most helpful way to negotiate learning. Twelve students (as shown in Figure 6.1) expressed a need for face-to-face interaction and more than half of the students had irregular tutorials. The university provided class shares and satellite tutorials in the students’ second space that helped DFL students interact with their tutors via internet and audio technology. The students’ responses indicated that they wanted face-to-face interaction, which they often use in cultural practices. Mary stated that her friends helped her and Fish earlier in this section said that he sought his peer group for help. Students again reflected on the way they negotiate learning by collaborating with others. Collaboration occurs in the third space they created to negotiate and engage in meaningful learning.

6.6 Lautoka Learning Story — Josh’s Story

Now having examined the challenges experienced by a group of students on the Lautoka campus, this study will focus on Josh. Josh is a mature teacher and student in his mid-forties and his learning story is one that represents the many issues and problems that DFL students can experience even in an urban campus like Lautoka.

6.6.1 Josh’s Background, Beliefs and Values

Josh is a Fijian born on the mainland, but raised on an island where he attended the village school. He spoke a Fijian communalalect of the Eastern Islands and English as his second language. Josh had obligations within a nested context of family, community and school. As one of the few educated people in his wider family and community, Josh felt an obligation to further his education in order to better provide for his family and make his mother proud.

Josh was a school teacher in a boarding school and he felt a social responsibility for the students and school community he served, which was of great importance to him. He had obligations for pastoral care at his school and this often kept him working after hours in school supervising prep sessions and attending to the needs of the boarding students. Josh had a working wife and a young child. He was dedicated to his work and had an aura of determination and passion for his family and work. He was a graduate of USP and taught as an associate teacher for more than a decade in social
science departments. He had aspirations to attain the post of a head of department in social sciences (HOD social sciences) in a secondary school. The HOD social science was required to have completed 112HM and 111HM at degree level to qualify for this position. Josh had successfully completed the 111HM course and pursued the 112HM DFL course as a requirement for this promotion (Field note: Josh, 2007).

6.6.2 Josh’s Educational Goals

Josh’s choice to pursue further studies was motivated by a range of reasons including family reasons and survival as he says:

*I want to start studying again...life has to move on for my children...*

*It’s tough life and difficult. But we have to do it.*

Josh was motivated to study and to seek success. Ayersman and Minden (cited in Holmberg, 2005) remind us that such individual choices can often strengthen study motivation and facilitate learning. Josh’s behaviour was determined by his goals: to set an example for his children and earn a promotion by furthering his education. The CFMC or Community Foundation for Monterrey County (2006) states that one of the most useful techniques for adult learners to maximise their retention of information includes setting goals. For instance, learning in the workplace involves relevant skills for studying as well as taking parenting classes etc. By setting a tangible target, adults can see the steps they are taking towards progress, which encourages self-esteem and increases motivation. Josh believed that education was the key to a brighter future for his family and was determined to set that example for his children. This was clearly his motivation for finishing his studies facilitated through learning through distance education. Holmberg (2005) hypothesised that if students are emotionally involved in their study, this would promote deep learning and attainment of their goals. Sewart (cited in Holmberg, 2005, p.168 ) earlier concluded that “… it is motivation above all else which, despite physical and general, social and environmental problems, brings success”.

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6.6.3 Josh’s History as a DFL Student

At the time of this research, Josh was enrolled in a DFL course at USP’s Lautoka campus. He was enrolled in two campuses in Fiji due to job and campus transfers but Josh moved away from Laucala campus, where he had gained his first degree as a full-time face-to-face student, because his wife had to take a post in another town. In Fiji, the Ministry of Education can transfer teachers and married couples are often both moved when one spouse is transferred; however, Josh explained that this transfer caused a number of traumatic changes and consequences in his life and he abandoned further studies. A few years later, things changed for the better when Josh and his family requested another transfer and his passion for education was renewed. Consequently, he enrolled in DFL courses at the Lautoka campus, where his role as a learner and teacher fundamentally changed.

6.6.4 Josh’s Course: 112HM

At the time of this study, Josh was a student in the course 112HM Contemporary History–The modern world, 1750 to the present. This course was offered by the division of history in the faculty of arts and law at USP and it was designed to expose students to a range of topics in contemporary history to help them develop skills in historical analysis. (USP, 2007e)

The second space or official space provided for Josh through this course comprised several different components. His cohort was provided with a course reader, a course guide, and an assignment booklet, access to satellite tutorials on the Lautoka campus, and access to a class shares internet-based discussion thread. Contact was made by the course lecturer and tutors through email to advise students and to give feedback on learning.

Josh was taking this course in history because he had aspirations to become a head of department in social sciences in the high school at which he was working at the time of the study. The 112HM course promised him both content area knowledge in contemporary history as well as the promise that on completion he would have a chance of promotion in his school. In order to navigate this professional and learning challenge, Josh had to engage with the course provided in ways that worked for him. Later in this
case study, there will be a more detailed discussion of how Josh drew on his first space resources to negotiate third space solutions to the second space challenges. In the next section, the course materials package and learning resources provided by the USP to help Josh learn are described and discussed.

6.6.5 Course Guide and Assignment Booklet for 112HM

According to the introductions in the course guide and assignment booklet, the course provides students with an opportunity to understand the dramatic and irreversible changes that have taken place in the modern world since 1750. These include: the rise of the modern nation-state; the importance of national and ethnic identity; the emergence and popular appeal of political ideologies and social ideas, culminating in a series of often radical and violent revolutions; increasing urbanisation and reliance upon technology; the emergence of global capitalism and industrialisation; the growing potential for catastrophe and cataclysm on a global scale; and cumulatively, what might be called an ongoing globalisation process (USP, 2007e, p2).

The course guide also explains that the course is designed to examine the significance of these topics to students and to provide them with a good understanding of the world in which we live. Another goal of the course is to teach students the nature and relevance of history as an academic discipline, which they may wish to develop further through study, at USP, of other history courses focused on the wider world and the Pacific region. Several course aims and objectives are listed for students who are expected to demonstrate academic literacy skills such as: pursuing lines of inquiry introduced in lectures and tutorials, reading analytically and responding to texts provided online, as well as producing written professional presentations.

In addition, students are expected to gain some understanding of historical content and knowledge such as: how causation and explanation in history are tracked, and the inter-relations between political, economic, and social processes; most importantly, students will begin to think like historians. They will develop important skills including: information gathering; interpreting a variety of historical evidence; explaining historically; and communicating ideas clearly, concisely, and logically (USP, 2007e, p3).
These aims describe for students what they are supposed to be able to demonstrate upon course completion. No doubt, if the course is engaged in fully as designed (print materials, tutorials and online interactions) then some, if not all, of these skills might be explicitly taught and practised with support. However, as outlined in the learning stories of this case study many students have living circumstances — as a consequence of Fiji being a developing nation — that present challenges to engaging in the course as it has been designed. The topics for Josh’s 112HM studies are listed in the course guide and assignment booklet. These are shown in the Table 6.7 below.

Table 6.7: Topics for 112HM

| 1. Europe and the world to 1750  |
| 2. Europe and the world in the mid eighteenth century |
| 3. The Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment |
| 4. Modern revolutions (English, American, French) |
| 5. The Industrial Revolution |
| 6. Nationalism, liberalism, and socialism |
| 7. Italy, Germany, and the balance of power |
| 8. The new imperialism |
| 9. The rise of the USA |
| 10. The First World War |
| 11. The Russian Revolution |
| 12. The Great Depression |
| 13. Totalitarianism: (Communism and fascism) |
| 14. The Second World War |
| 15. The Cold War |
| 16. Decolonisation and the Third World |
| 17. The Arab-Israeli conflict |
| 18. The end of the Cold War |
| 19. The postCold War world: Political problems |
| 20. The post Cold War world: The population explosion |
| 21. The post Cold War world: Environmental issues |

The course and assignment booklet warns students to engage in the topics in order as they follow a ‘logical sequence’ USP, 2007e, p3). One might easily argue that this logic is
based on chronology of Eurocentric or western world events, beginning with an account of European history to 1750 and ending with environmental issues in the post-Cold War period. It is this, as will be discussed later, that caused Josh some issues in understanding and processing this course’s content. Only topic 16, Decolonisation and the Third World, seems to possess the promise of a Pacific perspective. This course on contemporary history includes little reference to events of recent years and fewer still relate to the context of Fiji and the Pacific Nation States.

6.6.6 Teaching and Learning in 112HM

The course guide and assignment booklet continues on pages five to seven to present a weekly teaching schedule for students and details of the two-hour satellite tutorials or teletutorials (remote audio presentations) that they should attend weekly at the Lautoka campus. Students are advised in this section that the teacher will be checking on their work by asking individual students questions, monitoring student progress on the individual assignments, and making sure that students are adequately preparing for the exam. Only if they address all expectations will they receive the 20 per cent coursework credit for attending the teletutorials. Although the tutorials were compulsory, Josh’s case shows that he, and many other students, had some genuine issues with attending and this was a significant influence on the way in which he came to negotiate his learning in the course.

6.6.7 Assessment Tasks and Academic Conduct in 112HM

The final section of the booklet contains details of assessments and appropriate academic conduct. Josh had to complete three pieces of assessment. The first was a précis exercise in which students had to summarise a five-page article presented in the course reader. This assessment was worth 10 per cent of the course grade and students were provided with models of précis writing. Students were also provided with a rationale for how important summary writing is and reminded to write in: “… ‘good prose’. Weigh your sentences carefully, learn to recognise unnecessary words and eliminate them, do not use a phrase if there is a word that means the same thing” (USP, 2007e, p16). The second assignment, worth 20 per cent of the course grade was to write a short academic essay. The purpose of the assignment is to: “… ensure that you have understood how to write a
short essay.” (USP, 2007e, p22). Texts are provided as sources and students are told to select five other supplementary texts to include as further sources. The students must integrate the sources to answer a question of cause and effect: “What effects did the Industrial Revolution have on World History during the nineteenth Century?” (USP, 2007e, p22). In neither of these two assignments is there advice on how to approach the tasks to ensure success. It seems as if students will either know how to write a summary or integrate multiple text sources to answer an overall question before they commence the course. The tutorial outline, that details the context covered in teletutorials, indicates that the students will only have one class on writing and reading skills associated with producing assessments of this kind. All other tutorials have a topic title next to each date, indicating a content focus for the lecture and discussion each week. In the earlier sections of the booklet, students are cautioned on academic conduct related to plagiarism and dishonest practice. Advice is presented on what constitutes plagiarism and how the use of group discussion must result in students producing work that is unique since “… similar assignments will be seen as plagiarism” (USP, 2007e, p13). Josh and many other students in this study often relied on fellow students to assist them in understanding course content and preparing for assignments and exams. This and other culturally relevant practices for Fijian learners — such as repetition and recitation of the knowledge of others — had to be reconstructed in the circumstances of USP where community-oriented results were frowned upon. This section reminds me, as a Fijian learner and teacher, that learning practices are cultural practices. Josh and the PIDO group provide some perspective on this.

6.6.8 Course Reader for 112HM

The 2007 course reader provided for 112HM had twenty-eight readings. The reader was developed in 1990 and had been reviewed, most recently in 2006, by members of the Division of History. Fifteen different extracts were used to cover all sections of the course and these ranged in topic as dictated by the course outline. All texts referred to were from English or American text-book accounts of contemporary history. There were fourteen texts to be used as sources by the students in 112HM: of these, approximately a third (five) are texts that had been published between twenty-one and thirty-seven years prior to the course commencing. Half the texts had been published between ten and twenty years prior to the course being offered and the remainder — around a sixth of texts (two) —
were what scholars might consider to be ‘recent’ texts: published with five years of the course starting date. As might be expected, students of this course may question the relevance of course materials that were: focused on a history other than their own; written by people of different social and cultural perspectives; and produced by a generation that experienced the world in quite different ways. The learning stories in this case study at the USP Lautoka campus develop these themes through the students’ own words and perspectives.

The USP resources for learning provided a second space in which Josh existed as a student of 112HM. His engagement in this course however, was not just dependent on what the university provided, but also on the social, cultural and educational resource set on which Josh could draw to negotiate his learning. This negotiation between first and second spaces created Josh’s third space — the place where his learning practices became hybridised. The remainder of this chapter presents Josh’s experiences of negotiating participation at USP.

6.7 Issues in Josh’s DFL Experiences: DFL mode versus Face-to-Face Mode

Josh had many issues in his DFL studies. Firstly, he experienced a transition from a face-to-face learning context to a distance-learning mode. Learning from a teacher in a lecture room was different from learning through distance education. In examining such differences between face-to-face learning and distance learning, Pane (2009b) states that classroom learners benefit from more exposure to the language and correction and had more opportunities to seek explanation, help and interact in response to the teachers’ questions. In DFL, Josh was expected to teach and learn by himself. Print-based materials were the only medium for communication and learning and he found the transition difficult. Josh explained that when he was a full-time student at USP Laucala campus he had everything he needed, but quickly discovered that this was not the case for DFL students at the Lautoka campus. Josh summed it up by saying:

*At USP it had everything!...It had books...we need...many ways. Here we have to look for things. E dredre sara ga! (It is so difficult.)*

He later told a story of learning arithmetic by collecting and counting seashells in his village, a challenge he now saw as simple when compared to the difficulty of distance learning (Field notes, 24/10/07). So Josh had to find ways of negotiating the differences
in these two modes of learning. For example, when he had difficulty, he sought help from friends. Josh repeatedly said:

*I take it to teachers and friends!*

Conceptions of literacy help us understand literacy as much more than just a set of skills and learning as more than that the acquisition of these skills. Learning is conceived as an appropriation of available cultural resources or literacy practices rather than the individual’s construction of mental representations (Gee, 1990). These conceptions of literacy view learning in terms of participation: students being apprenticed to sets of specific social practices, which will enable them to appropriate the practices required in participating effectively in particular communities. Within the DFL community, Josh had to adapt to a new mode of learning, one that held many challenges for him. The issues Josh faced and the negotiations he made in order to learn in his DFL course are described in the following paragraphs.

### 6.7.1 Transport

Josh’s 112HM course had satellite tutorials available to him and his classmates every Wednesday evening. Josh was a teacher at a boarding school in a suburb of Lautoka. He had no car and he also had commitments in school with student prep that detained him until quite late after school had finished. On Wednesday evenings it was possible for him to get to Lautoka campus to engage in the teletutorial, but the schedule of public transport made it impossible for him to return the same night. Transport has always been a major problem in most places in Fiji but, although Lautoka city has serviceable routes and transport within the city and surrounding areas, Josh still experienced problems. He lived near the city and used public transport as a means for travelling to and from the campus, but public transport was irregular and almost always did not adhere to scheduled times of departure and arrival. Most of these public bus services terminated between 5.00pm and 6.00p.m. consequently Josh would finish work at 4.00p.m. and reach the campus a little after 4.30p.m. but would have to board the bus by 5.30p.m. — before his teletutorial had even began. As the university library often closed in the late afternoon Josh would have just a couple of minutes before it closed to make use of the campus library. As a result, Josh’s access to learning resources for
112HM was seriously limited; he could not attend tutorials nor could he easily access the library to source other texts that may have helped him develop his knowledge.

6.7.2 Language

English was Josh’s second language and although he spoke it moderately well, he said: “I’m not so good at speaking English but I ... mm ... can manage. But I still have to read and re-read the books to understand”. Josh was fortunate that he was able to manage the English language, an advantage that was useful for his DFL studies. A significant number of research participants were not as fluent as Josh in English, which highlights the various language problems that many Pacific Island students face in DFL studies. Swain (cited in Nunan, 1996) reviewed work carried out in Canada and argued that “… comprehensible input is a necessary but not sufficient condition for acquisition and that learners need opportunities to interact as well” (Nunan, 1996, p.140). Second language speakers like Josh did not have much interaction in English for he had always taught in Fijian schools where the language used was most commonly Fijian. Nunan (1996) supported the view that learners who had a lot of interaction in the second language were more fluent than those who only received instructions without interaction.

Because English was his second language, Josh commented on the difficulty of the language in the books he used in his study. He found the vocabulary difficult to understand, as he said:

*Even myself most of the textbooks here I didn’t read, I didn’t you know how ... to go through them because of the words. Very difficult!*

When he was asked how he dealt with it he stated:

*Uh, sometimes I read it three times and then I ... I keep it. Sometimes I take it to my friends. Teachers, eh? We discuss in front of the teachers they normally ... especially those who take it ... those who have already stayed with the same course, eh?*

He further elaborated:

*I take it to teachers who take the course and friends who do the course with me.*
In an earlier study of students’ learning at USP, conducted by Mugler & Landbeck (1997), one of the students in their study described the process of learning and similarly iterated the phrase, “… and you keep it there …” (p. 230). Mugler & Landbeck (1997) indicated that learning can occur at different depths: at the extreme end of surface learning is rote memorisation that they referred to as knowledge stored in memory but later retrieved for examinations. Josh also showed the process of negotiation as one that involved a ‘step-by-step’ procedure or as Mugler and Landbeck (1997) say a chronological process. Examining the way Josh deals with the issue of language reflects his challenge in academic learning. In the context of this study, Josh stored knowledge for retrieval at a later time when he probably understood how to deal with the contents and challenges of his course materials. In reality, negotiation of meaning was dependent on memorisation or rote learning: the forms of academic literacy Josh was most comfortable with.

In such situations, establishing a common definition of academic literacy and learning is important to student success. This may be more a complex undertaking than might initially be expected. Green (1999) describes academic literacy in broad terms explaining that it involves using language for thinking and meaning and not just the ability to read and write. These latter skills are basic skills already in the conscious mind. To develop greater understanding, Green (1999) considers literacy to be an ensemble of social practices that involve three dimensions and further suggests that these are dimensions which overlap and are interdependent. Operational literacy is the first dimension and is the stage of competency in a given language and particularly in written language. Operational literacy involves writing in clear sentences, spelling words correctly, and using punctuations effectively and correctly. It also includes how to make the computer work from the basics of turning on to searching databases or operating CD ROM (Nixon, 2003).

Cultural literacy is a second dimension, which is learning a discourse or culture or learning how to communicate in the language of a specific group of people. Cultural literacy is incorporating ideas from others into your work, structuring an essay in an appropriate form, writing introductions and conclusions also in appropriate styles, and
acknowledging ideas of others, which is also referred to as referencing. For example, learning and understanding what to say in science is different from what is used in English. A further example is that the culture of the Bachelor of Education differs from that of the culture of Bachelor of Economics. In essence it includes understanding that we use texts and technologies in particular contexts to make meaning and to do things in this world (Nixon, 2003). In South Pacific contexts, students’ from different cultural groups have different ways of thinking, learning and communicating in their everyday language. They appropriate these in the context of their learning in academic settings as Josh has indicated. Josh states that when he has difficulties understanding the readings given in the course books he:

I sometimes take it to friends ... especially those who take it ... those who have already stayed with the same course and we discuss and talanoa ... 

Josh uses ‘talanoa’ or ‘story telling’ as mentioned in Chapter Five as a cultural practice of sharing and discussing information in learning.

Critical literacy is the third dimension referring to understanding how knowledge is made and how it can be transformed. It involves analysing assignment questions, reading academic texts, and reflecting critically on ideas and experiences. It involves the ability to critique resources for particular purposes and emphasises learning as people participate in social and cultural practices. According to Green academic literacy is the combination of these three dimensions, but placing more emphasis on critical literacy as vital to academic literacy. Because of Josh’s first space experiences and former learning modes, his challenges with the language of texts emerged not just because English is his second language, but also because he is not as familiar with the critical and academic literacy skills required in his second space as a DFL student.

### 6.7.3 Course Materials

This study looks at the challenges Josh faced as a DFL student with social and cultural challenges, as well as academic challenges. Family and work obligations, his personal values, and goals all make up his first space. The academic expectations set for him as a USP student — English-based learning, analysing and writing — comprise the second space. To conclude these observations that focus on Josh, three examples of how he
negotiated his first and second space to create a hybrid or third space will be presented as examples of how he could use his first space knowledge to make sense of his second space course work. The first example comes from Josh’s concern with the course materials and textbooks they used in DFL. Throughout the interview he described his learning package as comprising:

_A course book and I & A (Introduction & Assignment) and readings ... The readings ... they just ... most of the things there they just photocopy it from the other tests and they compile them and they give it to us ..._

Josh’s preference was for simple notes that he could understand as he said:

_If ... for the teachers, the lecturers can compile their own notes rather than photocopying it from the textbooks. They think ... they can just do their own notes and base it on their course work so that students when they come into their course like this are more focused. Focused (emphatic) on the work, eh? So it’s easy for us to understand so that they can pass ... pass well ... one of the hindrances of the program in terms of education._

Because of language difficulties, Josh was averse to photocopies of learning materials. He preferred simplified notes and he wanted course convenors or course designers to provide a comprehensive version of the contents. As a second language speaker of English, he had difficulties in reading and understanding the articles in the course reader written in his second language. He further adds:

_Even myself when I was aahh undergraduate at USP, most of the textbooks here didn’t read, I didn’t ... you know! ... go through them because of the words. The wording eh? You ... very difficult ..._

Josh stated that one of the strategies he uses to understand the topic is:

_Sometimes I read it three times and then I ... read again and I keep it._

When asked about what he meant by these words he said,

_I remember it and ... I keep reading it ...then I understand._

What has resulted from Josh’s scripts have a lot in common with what Freire (cited in Tuinamuana, 2007) stated about the pedagogical practices in Fiji schools. Freire stated that pedagogical practices were dominated by ‘banking education’, which is the
equivalent of a transmission mode of teaching where ‘deposits’ are made in students’ heads by a ‘depositor’ or teacher and later on retrieved and regurgitated by students when they need it (Tuinamuana, 2007, p.115). Formal education was imported by the British colonisers and the Christian missionaries (Manghubhai, 1989; Tuinamuana, 2007) and the pedagogical style best suited to the teaching and learning of religious facts was the transmission-reception pedagogical style (Tabulawa cited in Tuinamuana, 2007). Tavola (1991) also reports on how missionary inspectors, who toured the schools in their circuits, found children chanting lessons in unison to the same rhythms as traditional chants (p. 9). These chants and recitations became a part of the school system when formal examinations were introduced in the early days hence encouraging rote learning as a method that students used to learn concepts and knowledge.

Because Josh was used to learning orally or by rote memorisation in the first space, the challenge of learning DFL course materials constituted a second space of learning. In paraphrased notes, his expectation was that the words will be simple and hence the meaning will be understood. Simplified notes also helped him understand what to focus on and what is expected of him within the second space. Remembering and keeping information and storing it in his head enabled him to learn the concepts and understand them.

Another example of third space negotiation arises when Josh explains that although there was a glossary in the course book, it was insufficient. Consequently, he would refer to other sources from his school library, not from the campus library, as he said in this interview:

*I normally refer back to some books from the school library or the library in Lautoka ... town...for vocab meaning ...*

When asked why he used the city library, Josh just grinned and there was no forthcoming response, but he was adamant about using this other library. It can only be deduced, as he refused to make further comments, that in the end he was more comfortable in the informal and familiar first space library setting of the school where he worked, rather than in the formal university library offered in the second space.

One final example of third space negotiation examines how Josh used his first space knowledge to comprehend the content of course materials. When studying his course work he stated
I normally read all the Readers book and I make research from the school (at the school where he was teaching) library and from the library here in Lautoka, open discussion with my friends, my teachers and then I write my assignments ... I write notes ... I share with friends

In response to whether he understood the contents of the book, Josh drew from his first space knowledge:

But when ... when they come to ... contents ... coz most of the things there in my course book deal with European countries. And uh! Sometimes ... they have to (emphasis) ... localise it using regional examples ... and that’s the difficulty facing at the moment. If they can er ... sometimes they give us questions on er ... like we study European history but when they ask us some questions to answer based on the regional aspect of it ... This is, you know, going to take time to understand how to inter-relate the different factors that happen in the European. European versus ... Vanuatu.

Josh finds the second space academic expectation of analysing the text to be very difficult. By localising European countries and comparing them to Pacific countries such as Vanuatu, he is negotiating his knowledge from the first space in order to understand the requirements of the second space, thereby creating a third space where he can negotiate and comprehend the course materials.
6.8 Conclusion

Josh’s experiences and those of the PIDO group of students, exemplify the concerns that distance education theorists and researchers have observed since distance education’s inception. Several previous studies have noted that literacy and learning programs that just rely solely on pre-packaged materials and that do not engage with the social backgrounds of the learners fail to enable students to become critical, independent thinkers (Garrison, 1993; Ratuva, 1996; Landbeck & Mugler, 2000). According to these authors students need to develop dialogue with staff and fellow students in order to become critical and independent thinkers. Wood (cited in Landbeck & Mugler 2000) argues that texts written for distance learners discourage independent learning because they are usually designed to be read alone and require no other reading. There are concerns about the impact of the context on learning and the need for interaction as a learning resource, signifying that tutors are to provide directions or generate discussions among learners. Attention is focused on the lack of critical and independent thinking among learners and also to the structure of the course materials that students use and how they employ study strategies to link to the materials. These are issues that need to be considered and addressed. Research in this area must be undertaken, to support the development of critical and independent thinkers. The research could provide models for future course development, which could assist distance and flexible learners in accessing meaningful learning in the course materials and texts they use in their studies.

These students’ backgrounds and previous face-to-face or rote-learning modes and their transition to studying through DFL led to their search for knowledge and understanding to improve and facilitate their learning in this mode. They are surrounded by a network of systems that determine how, why, when and what they do in DFL learning. From this nested system of complexities, the students’ learning practices evolved and allowed them to negotiate their learning. These practices emerged from the interactions between DFL students’ first space and second space and aided their negotiations of learning in their third space. In comparison to students on the Lautoka campus, Chapter Seven will examine how students on the Labasa campus use the resources and prior knowledge from their first and second spaces to create a similar hybrid space in which to learn in a rural learning campus.
Chapter Seven: Case Study Two — Labasa DFL Campus

7.0 Introduction

This chapter presents an account of learning at the Labasa campus. The first section provides a contextual description of USP’s Labasa campus, Fiji: a campus that serves a number of remote centres that cater for students in many rural locations. Details of the campus location, its facilities and the courses offered to students are included.

In the second section of the chapter an exploration of fifteen DFL students’ learning practices in DFL at Labasa campus are presented. The students’ experiences and views are expressed through a synthesis of the interview, questionnaire and field-note data. These data are interpreted and synthesised to develop an account of a shared story of how this group of students reconstructed learning as a third space negotiation.

In the final section of this chapter, the experiences of Jimbo, a DFL student at the Labasa campus is presented. His story elaborates a number of themes identified by the larger group and provides a detailed description of how an individual negotiates learning in context. As with all qualitative research, his story is told through interview and field-note data that have been synthesised and interpreted by the researcher (Madda, 2010).

7.1 Background of Labasa Campus — Vanua Levu Context

The Labasa campus sits on the island of Vanua Levu in the Northern Division of Fiji. Vanua Levu is the second largest island in Fiji and has a land area of about 5587.1 square kilometres. (Britannica, 2010). It has 1690 kilometres of main roads of which 188 km are sealed while the rest are rugged and often inaccessible in wet weather. Rabi Island and Taveuni are the two biggest outlying islands, east of Vanua Levu, and other small islands around Vanua Levu include Qamea and Cikobia at the north-eastern end of the island. This is shown in Map 7.1.

DFL students are located on all these islands and negotiate the constraints of time, space, transportation and communication problems.
Map 7.1: Vanua Levu – The Northern Group of Islands

Source: http://dreammachinefoundation.com/Image_Pages/image-map.htm
7.1.1 Geography

The Northern Division of Fiji comprises the main island Vanua Levu and includes the island of Taveuni to the south-east and Rabi Island to the north-east as shown on Map 7.1. In 2000, its Banaban people became citizens of Fiji (Dixelius, 2001). The island of Vanua Levu is divided by rugged mountain ranges, which form the boundaries of the three provinces namely: Macuata, Cakaudrove and Bua. Peaks of up to 1,111 to 1,030 metres run along the centre of the main island, with rivers and streams flowing down from these mountain peaks. Villages are situated along the hills, deltas, valleys and coasts of Vanua Levu. Cikobia Island, a limestone volcanic island with four villages and a population of a hundred and fifty to two hundred villagers is located at the northern tip of Vanua Levu (Valentine, 1998). Pockets of people are spread over a large geographical area in the north and vast areas cannot be reached by surface roadways or telephone landlines, due mainly to the rugged mountains and difficulties in accessing hinterland and coastal areas (USP, 2007a).

DFL students in the Northern Division face a number of physical challenges in completing their tertiary education, for example, travelling to and from Vanua Levu can be problematic: insufficient and irregular boat services on the island are challenges for DFL students who live there. The current location of Labasa campus is very strategic as it is situated in the heart of Labasa town next to the town’s main bus station, market and among the big supermarkets. This location allows students to combine town visits and use the facilities at the campus to save time.
7.1.2 History

In 1998, the Distance Education Committee and the Senate of the University of the South Pacific approved the establishment of the USP campus in Labasa; the campus officially began its operation in March 2000 after maximising its presence in the north through its vigorous community outreach program (USP, 2007a). Prior to the opening of the Labasa campus, Labasa College, a prominent high school in the Northern Division, was used as the main sub-centre for the division. Its principal was appointed as a coordinator for the sub-centre and was responsible for the general supervision of the centre’s library, examinations, tests and coordinated enrolment procedures (USP, 2004a). Today the same school is used for tutorial activities in a number of disciplines. These tutorials are held on Saturdays when secondary school students do not use the school premises. The formal establishment of the Labasa campus in March 2000 saw the appointment of the first Director of Fiji Centre Northern marking the beginning of an expansion in the north that has impacted all sectors of the workforce and greatly improved the education of the people. This community outreach program has continued to be an on-going undertaking, bringing awareness that has focused on people having better lives and better places to live. It marketed the opportunities of study that it would create in the region and the provision of educational services for remote distances, which many have taken advantage to the present day (USP, 2007a).
7.1.3 Facilities of the Campus

At the time of this study, Labasa campus occupied two levels of a three-storey building in the town. A computer laboratory occupied the second level of the building and this is where most computer classes are held for all IT (Information Technology) programs. This IT program is a self-funded project by the campus to improve and broaden the knowledge and understanding and skills required in the IT courses. The computer laboratory has also been used for community outreach programs marketing computer awareness. A tutorial room is provided to cater for all visiting lecturers and tutors and for public lectures that the campus hosts for its northern communities.

The Labasa campus library has over 3000 books at the time of this research study, as well as 3,500 volumes. This large library collection allowed DFL students in the north to have the same opportunities that on-campus students at other campuses had in terms of accessing library books. A computer laboratory was provided for DFL students undertaking law courses and postgraduate studies and students enrolled in computer courses for degree programs used the same facilities. Many computers were donated to the campus resulting in an adequate supply of technological services for DFL students in the north. Video-broadcast conferencing (VBC) equipment and facilities are also provided.

While, generally, Labasa campus has adequate facilities that are easily accessible to urban, suburban and some semi-rural DFL students, students in remote areas are not so privileged. They have access to these facilities only when they are in town on shopping leave or during the school holidays.

7.1.4 Sub-Centres and Examination Centres

In 2007, the Labasa campus established twenty-three examination centres and sub-centres in primary or secondary schools around Vanua Levu that were used for enrolments, tests, examinations and tutorials. Today there are thirty-four examination centres in total. The examination centres are spread over the three provinces that the campus serves. Map 7.2 shows these examination centres marked in provinces. Bua province is marked in yellow and has the smallest number of students enrolled at Labasa. Labasa campus is situated in Macuata province marked in blue and Cakaudrove province marked in red has the
greatest number of DFL students in the north. These centres were initially created for the teachers who taught in the schools and had difficulty in travelling to the nearest examination centre because of the distance. The rationale behind establishing the centres was that developing community schools as remote bases would save students time, money and the discomfort of trekking the rugged terrain to reach the main campus.

Students and staff at USP readily recall these kinds of difficulties. I have personal recollections of incidents such as these occurring in Labasa: one involved a female student who travelled all the way from Tawake village near the north-eastern tip of Vanua Levu island by open boat to attend examinations and tests in the only secondary school in that district. The boat anchored in a village that had become the port of call for people travelling by boat and that also had a bus depot. The bus depot was where the buses stopped for the night and resumed operations in the early hours of the morning. This particular female student arrived at the port of call in the afternoon then walked the rest of the way to the examination venue. Relatives accompanied her all the way from her village where she was teaching finally arriving at one of the teachers’ quarters in the evening. She would have travelled by the local morning bus, but these had not been operating for some time due to the bad road conditions caused by heavy rains. Before sitting her examination, this student had to brave rough seas and difficult terrain just to get to a centre that could host her for the night.

Many DFL students in remote locations experience these conditions. Labasa campus is a small campus compared with the other two campuses in Fiji. One of its biggest challenges is to meet the needs of remote students who experience difficulty with arranging study to further their education and to gain better living conditions for themselves and the community at large. In 2007, the creation of numerous examination centres in the Labasa campus was seen as vital for the success of students in remote locations and was a lifeline for their future access to study.
Map 7.2: Labasa Campus – Sub-centres and Examination Centres

Source: Adapted from USP Labasa Campus, 2004a
7.1.5 Uses of Technology

Use of technology at Labasa campus can be difficult. Similarly to Lautoka campus, internet courses are offered only to students that reside near the campus site. Teaching and learning does not often occur in student homes because of lack of technology and electrical power access, but occurs in an on-campus mode. When students come to campus to use computer facilities for internet courses they can be assured that they will have access to resources for internet teaching and learning. There are more students in Lautoka studying internet courses through DFL than Labasa mainly due to the accessibility of the campus sites.

7.1.6 Courses

In Labasa, degree and postgraduate degree courses are offered at most levels, 100 (first year), 200 (second year) and 300 (third year). There has been an increase in the number of postgraduate courses since 2007. Currently, only four 400-level courses are offered for postgraduates (USP, 2009). This is shown in Tables 7.1 and 7.2. Online and computer courses are only offered to students who live near the main town area and, again, DFL students in rural and remote areas are disadvantaged because of their remote location. Students would need to migrate nearer to the Labasa campus to be able to study postgraduate or internet courses.
**Table 7.1:** Equivalent Full-Time Students (EFTS) at Labasa Campus: Types of Attendance and Course Delivery Mode – 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LabasaCampus</th>
<th>Type of Attendance</th>
<th>Course Delivery Mode</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full-Time</td>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>Face-to-Face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>178.7</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 7.2:** Equivalent Full-Time Students (EFTS) and Level of Courses at Labasa Campus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Degree</th>
<th>Sub-Degree</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Postgraduate</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary</td>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>Diploma Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** USP Statistics, 2007b.
7.1.7 Tutorials

Not all courses have tutorials due to lack of manpower. For those courses with tutorials, they are generally organised every Saturday morning at Labasa College. Many tutors are teachers who teach in secondary schools and they conduct tutorials for the university, mainly for Foundation courses. Tutorials for students in remote locations are often held once or twice a semester and are in schools where the students are located and are working as teachers. Centre lecturers from the campus provide tutoring in remote areas and they travel to the students for tutorials. Notices are sent through the mail or by phone to students and head teachers of schools regarding the tutorial visit dates and times. Classes normally take between thirty and ninety minutes depending on how much time students need. Some courses provide tutorials by satellite or audio conference. These classes are often scheduled once a week and are broadcast from the Laucala campus in Suva. DFL students in urban and semi-urban areas take advantage of these opportunities.

7.1.8 Transport

For most students studying through the Labasa campus the main means of public transport is the public bus service. Some students live and work so remotely that DFL students have to walk many miles to catch public transport on the main roads. In this part of Fiji, buses are irregular and in poor condition, which results in unreliable dirty travel resulting in longer more tedious journeys on the rough and bumpy roads. On fine days the roads are dusty and on wet days buses can get stuck on the roads leaving passengers stranded for hours. Stranded passengers either walk to their destinations or hitch rides on passing vehicles.

In my experience, as a centre lecturer at USP, DFL students in remote areas were often delayed by such occurrences. I once encountered a situation where two DFL students left the village after school to attend a test held at an examination centre in another secondary school on the next day. This was the nearest centre to the school where they were teaching. There were no transport services in the village and there was no vehicle to borrow or hire consequently, the students trekked the hills and lowlands to reach the secondary school. The two students left the village at 4.00p.m.
and arrived at the examination venue three hours later. They stayed overnight with friends in the school compound. This kind of hospitality is a tradition that many of the students in the rural areas extend to other DFL students who come in from distant areas. The test was scheduled for the following day at 5.00p.m. During the morning of the test day, the students studied and waited for the test time. After the test, they slept at the examination venue; and at about 4.00a.m. and before dawn the next day they made their way on foot back to their school to be in time to begin teaching at 8.00a.m. that morning. These students spent two days away from their homes and workplaces to take a one-hour test.

During my time at USP, I knew of students on Qamea Island, an outer island east of Vanua Levu, this island can only be physically reached by two boat journeys: one to Taveuni (the third biggest island in Fiji) and then from Taveuni to Qamea Island. For students, transport was expensive and time consuming in the Northern Division and yet, they accommodated all these difficulties to travel to destinations to achieve their educational and social goals. Overcoming such barriers to access education, point to the personal and social significance of learning for many students located in remote areas.
7.2 Students at Labasa Campus

The following section details students’ accounts of learning at the Labasa campus and its sub-centres. There is discussion about the common themes that were present in their interviews including what influences how they negotiate their learning. A case study of a learner is then presented to elaborate on the processes of negotiation he engages with as he studies at USP.

Data reported here involved fifteen DFL students as participants. Four of these students lived in urban communities and the remaining eleven were from rural areas located in the Northern Division. Table 7.3 summarises the participant information. Students in the remote areas of the north were mainly teaching in village or parish schools and were a considerable distance from the town. The fifteen participants were unaware of the research study as they had not been informed about this research. However, the research team had been granted permission by the university, the campus director, and the Ministry of Education to visit the schools at which the DFL students were located. The research team’s first visit was to students in the Bua province as shown in Map 7.2.

Two female teachers volunteered as participants for this research study and interviews were conducted on school premises. Both teachers lived and worked in these remote schools and were enrolled in the primary BEd program. Our next visit was to the Cakaudrove province where six students, three males and three females, volunteered to participate in the interview. Four of these students lived in school premises in remote areas of Cakaudrove and the other two students lived in the Savusavu town area. In total the interviews conducted in this province were spread over a five-day period.

The research conducted in the Macuata area was spread over a week and a half and seven students participated in the interviews. The first group of interviews in this area was held in a rural school near the Doi township. Prior to the interview, a Fijian protocol of ‘sevusevu’ as explained in section 5.8.2 of Chapter Five was held. This
was a cultural practice, which would then allow me to carry out the interviews. Three teachers volunteered and interviews were conducted individually, although the others sat around listening. Two females and a male participated in the interview after school, which lasted for about three hours because the teachers had to leave for a short while to attend to the young children boarding at the school. A few days later, the team travelled to the north-western coast of Vanua Levu to interview students who had volunteered to participate. A ‘sevusevu’ was presented to the principal and the interview began with two of the school’s teachers. The male teacher was the head teacher of the school and the female teacher was his assistant head. The interviews were conducted on an individual basis as they requested. This was strictly a one-to-one interview, which lasted between fifty to sixty minutes. The last two students interviewed in Macuata were females working in Labasa town. One was a legal officer and the other a staff member at the Labasa campus with both enrolled in DFL courses at the Labasa campus. All the participants of this research study were enrolled in DFL courses at the Labasa campus.

7.3 Data Sources

All of the students in this case study completed questionnaires and formal interviews and some provided follow up interviews, depending on their availability. Field-notes and course materials were used as additional sources of information about the context for study. More women (ten) than men (five) participated; with ten Fijian students, comprising eight women and two men all of who spoke at least two languages including Fijian and English; three were Indian students, one woman and two men who also spoke two languages: Hindustani and English. A male student of Chinese origin was another participant who spoke Fijian and English and a female of European descent spoke English as her first language.

The group in different combinations studied a total of eight courses with students taking from one to three courses each. There were twelve teachers enrolled in the BEd and BA primary secondary education programs. Two participants were government employees in other departments who were furthering their education via DFL for better opportunities in the work places. There were six students with families, while the rest were either single or married, with or without children. Nine
of these students had studied for more than three years in DFL and the new students had all enrolled the previous semester. Six students had left school between 2000 and 2006 and nine had left school before the year 2000.

All the participants were approached individually and asked to participate in this research study. They volunteered to fill in the questionnaire and participate in the interview. A number of other students in the campus were informed about this research study through the campus staff, but only these fifteen participants consented to be part of the research study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Program of Study</th>
<th>Courses of Study</th>
<th>Years of Study</th>
<th>Previous Qualification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Tuli</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>BEd PRIM.</td>
<td>101EN</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teacher Cert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Fijian</td>
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<td>301BS</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>111SC</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Uday</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>BEd PRIM.</td>
<td>221TL 232PS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teacher Cert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Obee</td>
<td>Fijian</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>111SC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Form 7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
7.4 Themes in Student Interview Talks: The Focus of Negotiations in DFL

The student interviews used in this analysis were conducted using a structured interview schedule. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The questions included were related to students’ learning practices in DFL (see Chapter 5: Methodology for more detail).

Eleven sub-themes were derived from the DFL students’ interview data and field notes. These are represented in the figure below (See Chapter Five – Methodology for a detailed account of the analysis methods used to develop the themes presented). These were clustered into three major themes that are discussed in the following sections. Students discussed how they negotiated their access to learning, their difficulties with course materials, and their learning interactions in their courses of study.

DFL students’ discussion during interviews was focused on common themes related to social and cultural influences, previous learning experiences, and the pragmatics of learning in DFL. These themes or issues were described by students as significant to their success or failure in their learning journeys. The numbers in brackets shown in Figure 7.1 represent the number of participants that responded to the questionnaire.

An examination of the ways students described influences on their learning is presented in the paragraphs following Figure 7.1.
Figure 7.1: Themes Emerging from Participants Response to Questionnaire and Interview Items at the Labasa Campus
7.5 Negotiating Issues with Course Materials

Two themes emerged from the interview data in regard to course materials and textbooks. The first was related to access to materials, including their delivery to remote areas. The second issue raised was one of the appropriateness of course content or the relevance of the content material. Quality of the course materials was one other concern related to course materials.

7.5.1 Delivery of Learning Materials

Delivery of course materials was a problem for many students. Two students living in urban areas and two from the rural area discussed these difficulties. One of the participants described how she withdrew from a course she had intended to take because her course materials arrived too late to begin (Field-notes, 13/11/07). In my own experience at USP, the distribution network was not without problems. Course materials were despatched to Labasa campus from Laucala campus and sometimes deliveries were delayed for weeks. Vero mentioned an event related to this when he said:

There was a textbook they also said we were to use but the textbook wasn’t available at Labasa centre and they said it would come the following weeks and it came after five weeks.

He eventually withdrew from this course during the first half of the semester. To be fair, sometimes delays could be a result of out-of-print texts or students enrolling very late at Labasa campus. Labasa campus staff would then place an order to Laucala campus for despatch to Labasa. The course materials or textbooks were then either flown over by air route or despatched by shipping services to Savusavu and Nabouwalu and then passed through an island delivery chain before arriving with the students some weeks later. In these situations, as the students testify, those who are at most risk are the remote students. Another student Raika, said that she would only use her course materials when the textbook resources were available (Field-notes, 13/11/07). She explained that by the time her course was due to start the textbook had not arrived. She was later instructed to collect it at the Labasa campus (154 kilometres away) during the third week of the semester. For both Raika and Vero such delays were deterrents to their enthusiasm for learning. They both expressed disillusionment that is echoed in a paper written about DFL services in the Pacific:
**DFL mission statement can be misleading in its promise to offer and deliver educational opportunities suited to their needs. The atmosphere and style of delivery is unsympathetic of student circumstances and may lead to loss of trust and motivation to continue engaging in the activities of distance and flexible learning** (Napwatt, 2008, p.17).

Delivery of course materials played a major role in these students’ DFL studies. Given the DFL students’ geographical location, the demands of timely delivery impacted students’ learning in their studies.

**7.5.2 Course Materials: Relevance of Content**

Ten students expressed the need to use materials for learning that they could relate to as people of the Pacific. Many of them expressed concerns that course developers largely ignored their own educational experiences and cultural identities. In this way, they were asked to accept a very European-centred view of the world that left behind their first space resource sets and their identities as people and learners. Bena said of a course she was studying:

> If they can give ... like if ...they can give examples, put pictures! ... If they are giving a story, like what happened about Napoleon ... I don’t know what happened? At least give some illustration on that coz ... I don’t sometimes ... I can’t even know who Napoleon is! ... about us ... I don’t know!

Bena again mentioned the word ‘story’ in her interview illustrating that this is the genre that she preferred for her written course materials. Her interest in narrative forms of reading and writing is very cultural, as was mentioned earlier. Bena also indicated that she would like the course materials to be about her as she used the word ‘us’ to signify the need for something local to be used. Locality could mean Fiji, the Pacific Islands, or her village, all of which she could have related to. She saw her first space (locality) as important to her negotiating her learning in her second space, which was DFL and all that it encompassed. Tuli said:

> Some things are not understandable ... I can understand some of them but I cannot relate to them, some are not related ... It’s OK but ...

Bena, Tuli and ten other students from Labasa campus wanted the contents of the course materials to be relevant to their contexts so that they could relate to them. Their inability
to relate to the situations in the course materials caused difficulties in understanding the whole content and hence learning in DFL studies. Their first space included familiar territory and this was important to their negotiations of learning in the second spaces provided by the course materials.

7.6 Interactions for Learning.

Students also expressed concern about tutor availability for assignments and feedback, which provided learning support for DFL students.

7.6.1 Tutorial Participation

Although tutorials are not always part of courses at USP, students see them as having a significant influence on their DFL studies. Eleven out of the fifteen students interviewed all wanted regular tutorial assistance and six students stated a preference for visits by the course coordinator. Four students also wanted the campus to conduct workshops for DFL students as part of ongoing tutorial offerings. The main reason that students wanted tutorials was to understand course content better. As Buna, a female student said:

… if the lecturer himself or herself would have come and explained in a simpler way. If there was a lecturer could come down and er ... explain not often but at least once ... or at least three times in a semester would be good eh!

Two more students made positive comments about tutorial visits. Lokee said:

I think ... the things that really make us finish our ... our course or this semester was because we have our tutorial, our tutor he was coming now and then to come and help us ... talked to us ... like ... bring it closer ... I think it’s really good ... makes our course really interesting ... it really helped us.

In her description of her interaction in tutorials, she said she considered the tutorials a contributing factor to her success in her DFL studies, because the face-to-face presence of the tutor gave a personal touch that made a greater impact on her learning (Field notes, 15/11/07; 20/11/07). Tuli, her classmate, expressed the same sentiments. Both Lokee and Tuli were Fijians who identified that they enjoyed the company of other friends and associates to help them negotiate their learning in
DFL; for them, learning in DFL, had to be interactive and meaningful and the tutorials provided opportunities for both. Some tutorials were delivered through the use of technology and students who had experienced this option identified problems with access and infrastructure. Two students who had participated in virtual tutorial meetings described network problems and poor acoustics as providing problems for students. The satellite services, they said, could mar tutorial participation (Benda, 21/11/07; Obee, 22/11/02).

7.6.2 Feedback

Educational research presents a compelling case for the role of feedback in effective teaching and learning (Hattie, 2009). Galusha (2008) referred to the lack of feedback as the lack of ‘face-to-face’ contact with the tutors. This face-to-face contact via tutorial is addressed in the previous paragraph. Students may have trouble in self-evaluation as a result of this non face-to-face feedback. Keegan (cited in Galusha, 2008, p.6) perceived the link between tutor and student as important because the lack of it would not enable students to “… complete academic and social integration into institutional life”. As a result, many students will drop out of courses. Galusha and Keegan believed that feedback was important to students studying through the distance education mode. In the data collected in this research, seven students discussed the feedback they received and the benefits of this, while eight said that they did not receive any feedback during the semester. Two students received feedback and agreed with the comments made by the tutor. As one of them said:

I always agree with what they say and ... just open my eyes ... sometimes

I hope to do the course again so I can improve ...

Three of these students received feedback very late and would have preferred to have received it before their next assignment was due, as a student said:

With the assignments ... to be honest they tell us to hand it in on time so that they ah! ... send it back on time ... er ... to help with the next one ... but we always get them late. Sometimes we give in ah! on time but getting it back late and sometimes we don’t get it back ... we have to get those eva ... evaluation from them to help us with our work.

Raika described the need for students to have constructive comments on submitted work. She was puzzled when she found symbols and unexplained marks on her paper and she said:
They should explain the marks ... like when ... when you do something wrong you
do you get punished and they tell you what is wrong but here ... it’s not clear.

Essentially the markings on Raika’s assignments should have helped her improve in the
writing of the next assignment, but the markings were vague and she could not understand
or relate the feedback to what she had written. The markings for feedback included
question marks and exclamation marks and a series of dashes as were shown on her paper.
Raika was a teacher. She believed that every error students make should be identified and
corrective measures should be taken to improve the quality of their work. This was the
way she viewed feedback in her first space.

7.7 Access to Learning

The students at the Labasa campus had greater issues with access to learning than students
at the Lautoka campus and many of these issues had a considerable impact on their
studies. There were positive as well as negative effects, which influenced the way
students negotiated learning in DFL studies. These are elaborated in the following
paragraphs.

7.7.1 Negotiating Conflict in Learning and Social, Cultural, and Personal
Obligations

Many parents in Fiji have aspirations for their children to study at university since
education is often associated with higher social status. Ten ethnic Fijian students, one
part-Chinese and one Indo-Fijian student described how they were obligated to study
because of the communal and/or the nuclear family expectations; while three students of
non-Fijian descent had economic or social reasons for engaging in further education.
One student, Foiakau, introduced herself by saying:

I am doing this course to do something useful especially when
you work in remote places.

This was her first year of teaching at primary school having just graduated from a
teacher’s college and this was her first rural posting. She expressed this:

This is my first experience in a remote school and I never went to a rural school.
But ... its hard for these small children here because their parents not here. I feel
Foiakau is teaching at a remote parish primary boarding school for children whose parents are members of the parish. Children in this school walk to school every Sunday afternoon and returned to their homes on Friday afternoons after school. During the school week they would live in the school hostel where they were looked after by some church officials who were normally parents or relatives of the students and staff. Children would walk to their villages crossing rivers and mountains on their own or occasionally accompanied by an elderly person. The only transport to this school was by vans, which would take people to Doi town then to Labasa town. From Labasa town they would catch another bus or van to take them to their villages. Many of the parents could not afford the fares and it was much faster to walk than travel the long route by public transport.

Foiakau’s reason for studying demonstrated her commitment to contributing to her local community. She felt that because of the remoteness of the school where she taught and the consequential difficulties of transport and communication the teachers experienced, she could contribute to the growth of the community by being better educated and being an example to her students.
7.7.2  Reconciling Language Background and Language Difficulties

Language backgrounds for the group of students at the Labasa campus differed and this impacted the way in which they made sense of the course materials and textbooks presented to them. Eight students said that they could not understand most of the content in the course materials because the words were complicated. Three students said that they could understand some of the content, but only when they were able to use the dictionary or the internet. Two students complained about the illegible print in their course materials because the fonts were so tiny or the print quality was poor. One student, Uday, was enrolled in a mathematics’ course that was required for a teaching post as a head of department and said this:

_I think the course materials should be simple and the instruction
Be ... be given especially in the calculation part so that it becomes easier for the students, those students who are living far from the centre so that it becomes easy to understand ..._

Uday further added that some of the readings for the course were understandable:

...
the readings OK ... but calculus ... (clucking noise) that’s why I ... when some other gang ... we get together and my friends we than help ... one another.

The same course was done by Obee, a Fijian female student, who also said:

_The calculus is very difficult to understand and ... er ... it ... requires
someone who’s ... really good at it to explain! If there’s a topic like
on calculus chapter 15 and ... at least give us some notes or some samples
of how to tackle it._

The calculus topic was difficult; the students felt it was incomprehensible and that they needed particular instructions to understand clearly. Uday and Obee illustrated the difficulty of trying to understand instructions delivered in a second language for a course that was difficult, in itself, to understand. As they pointed out, the instructions were written in English, which was their second language, and they each used their mother tongue in every day speech. Uday used Hindi most of the time, and Obee spoke more Fijian than English in her daily conversations at work and at home.
The fifteen DFL students interviewed in Labasa raised issues about the language used in academic study guides, such as difficulties with unfamiliar vocabulary and phrases. Lase commented on how he found the course materials difficult to understand, he said:

*Er ... normally the explanation that they give are mainly difficult problems and they don’t define it properly or explain it properly and then we find it very hard to ... get to understand it ... I go and ask members of the same unit but mmm ... mmmm even myself don’t know it...they go to the class shares but no!*

Uday reiterated Lase’s problem. Uday and Lase study the same course and had similar difficulties. Both students were Indo-Fijians and spoke Hindi language as their first language but they could have understood the instructions if they were practical and written in simple language. This would allow them to follow the instructions and arrive at a solution that would contribute to their learning in the DFL course in which they were enrolled.

Lokee in her discussion of language use in texts, focused more on what she saw as a good example of a well-written text.

*For this English course ... it covers really a lot of er... things. It’s very resourceful and everything has been simplified like how to write the abstract and the step by step ... you just have to fill in ... the steps ... It’s OK and good.*

Lokee was happy with the course materials and made positive comments, which reflected the way she summed up the course later in the interview when she said:

*They said “Oh! 101EN everybody will fail that course because that was in the past years” but I said no! 101EN is different now I show them the book and everything I told them see! They very clear ...and I follow step by step and I share with everybody and tell them to do 101EN before doing any other degree course.*

Lokee indicated that it was important to engage students in DFL learning. Her personal experiences mirror findings by Bolabola & Wah (2001), who found that difficulties with course materials were the reason for women in the Cook Islands withdrawing from courses at USP.
What the students here allude to is the notion that first space language backgrounds influence each student’s ability to take advantage of the learning experiences offered in the second space of USP courses. Researchers Lingam & Burnett (2008, p.8) discuss this concept in terms of ‘insider understandings’ of how adult students learn in the Pacific. They were referring to teachers who were studying a course in education. Teachers knew their particular needs in their first spaces better than anyone. The challenges they faced in their second spaces were sometimes in opposition to their needs for preserving and promoting “… culturally sensitive Pacific knowledges and ways of teaching and learning” (Lingam & Burnett, 2008, p. 8). The experiences of students at Labasa indicate that this might be extended to a consideration of language and its use.

In summary, students discussed the disadvantages to learning that they faced as speakers of languages other than English. Indeed, the majority of students in Labasa spoke either Fijian or Hindi as the language of their first space. There was very little exposure to English in everyday interactions in and around Labasa. Labasa district had a large population of Indo-Fijians and the Indo-Fijians and the ethnic Fijians had created a hybrid language for conversations and interactions that people knew and understood. Neither of these languages nor the hybrid language was used by USP to connect to students’ language backgrounds.

A telling example of the use of language genres adds to this complexity in language use and language forms. One student commented on the forms of language used in the textbooks and how alien these forms of language were to her as an Island woman. She was concerned about the length and complexity of the course texts. She said:

*The course material, I think mm … its ahhh it should not be too long, the course book. It should just be er … enough pages … like in stories … simple and not … too many pages.*

Bena was a Fijian female teaching in a rural school and who came from an island in the eastern part of Fiji. Bena describes for herself the value of an oral tradition of story. Story telling had always been the Fijian way of relating events, and as a teacher and easterner, I connected with this oral tradition. It was not surprising that Bena was used to the ‘story telling’ kind of expectation she held for the texts and she expressed her
preference for more culturally appropriate texts in her interview. For her, the course book needed to be short and informal as her own ways with language were as this would help her access the texts more easily.

7.7.3 Access to Power Supply for Learning at Home

Access to sources of electricity in modern Fiji is still variable and depends on location and living arrangements. This much needed part of the infrastructure impacts students’ abilities to engage in study and to be successful in their DFL courses. The data collected expressed this succinctly: four students living in the urban areas of Labasa had a regular supply of electricity and in this respect their learning spaces were much like those in any other city or town. Eleven other students however, had irregular access to electricity and sometimes no access for months. These DFL students lived in remote areas. The lack of access to a regular power supply in their homes and schools meant that they had a range of difficulties to overcome that were as basic as access to power to provide light in the evening to allow them to study. These students were teachers in local and or village schools where power sources were shared with the villagers. Most of the villages in these sub-centres did not have regular electricity while some did not have any power source at all. Generators were available in some villages but these were regulated and available only for short periods of time — approximately three to three and a half-hours from 6.30p.m. to 10.00p.m.

One Fijian student, Dama, discussed in detail the power issues that other students referred to. She said that the school compound in which she worked had only one generator that all teachers used and it was regulated for approximately three to three and a half-hours every day. Dama related how she was obligated to take care of the young boarders who lived in the school compounds; and she was selected to undertake this task because she was a married woman with children of her own. Her priority every evening was to see that students were fed, that they had done evening prep and gone to bed for the night. The power supply was limited and lights would often be turned off for the boarders between 8.30p.m. and 8.45p.m.. As supervisor, she had only an hour and a half to meet her own domestic needs and to study. This did not give her sufficient time to complete the studies she had for that evening. She said that she would often try and complete her DFL studies when she went to her family in town at the weekends. She voiced how even
this would be difficult because when she got home, her family also needed her attention. What Dama’s interview illustrates is how a lack of access to a regular power source can affect the studies of DFL students (Field-notes 14/11/07; Field-notes, 13/11, 07). Dama’s primary responsibility and cultural obligation after work was to assume the role of a parent to the young boarders. Her first space resources and prior experiences influenced how she negotiated learning in her DFL studies. In her case we see a complex blend of first and second space influences. The lack of electrical light interacted with her cultural obligations, which blended with the DFL expectations to produce an outcome that was far from ideal in terms of time and space to study. The third space that developed for Dama was one in which there was a lot of burden and frustration.

Generators used in coastal villages were susceptible to high concentrations of salinity that damaged fuel-operated generators resulting in irreparable damage. This damage was costly and many villages could not afford instant repairs; repairing a generator could take many months or more than a year to repair. Lokee a female Fijian teacher said during interview that she enjoyed the course she was studying: 221TL, an education course. She taught in a remote school that had no power supply because the one generator in the school compound had been rusty and damaged for some time. The school was advised that it was better to buy a new generator than repair this damaged one because the cost of repairing would be more expensive than simply purchasing a new one. No progress was made for some time (Field-notes, 13/11/07). Lokee studied by lamplight; she used kerosene and benzene lamps as an alternative source of power. Similar to many people in developing countries, Lokee adapted to a way of life that many people in developed countries would not tolerate. What is important to note here is that with no power supply, no computer access was possible. Moreover, even when print resources were made available the print could be difficult to read as the quality of copying was sometimes illegible — and harder to read by benzene lamp. Lokee’s first space resources impacted on her ability to engage in the second space learning.

### 7.7.4 Transport

DFL students in remote areas had some difficulty in reaching Labasa campus mainly due to transport problems. Most students travelled on public transport, which was often time consuming and troublesome. One participant, Vero, a male Fijian teacher, described the
kinds of problems that were prevalent: he was unable to attend satellite tutorials at Labasa campus because as he said:

First of all you have to hire a carrier from here (the remote school) to Doi(a semi-rural township) and from Doi to Labasa. Then we have to spend the night in Labasa because it’ll be late...then in the morning I’ll have to make my trip to the campus...and then hire again from there to school (Vero-Interview, 13/11/07).

Vero said it was expensive for him to hire transport as well as book into a hotel or motel for the night. He did not own personal transport that could assist with this issue and additionally, he did not have a relative in town that he could stay with for the night. He would forgo the satellite tutorials because he could not afford the cost of travelling.

In another situation, a student, Moto, liked to study on the weekends. On Saturdays he would catch the local bus to Labasa at about 6.00a.m. to arrive at the campus between 9.30 and 10.00 a.m. He would then use the campus library from 10.30a.m. to 12.30p.m. at which time the campus closed. Two hours was not sufficient time for him to study and make use of the library facilities. Other students were also there and in most cases those DFL students that arrived there earlier were already using the computers. If he was lucky he was able to access a computer to use the internet. Moto spent more time travelling to the campus than using the campus premises for studying purposes (Field-notes, 14/11/07).

Vero and Moto discussed in detail issues raised by many students about the ways in which transport played a significant role in their DFL studies. These students’ first space resources influenced their ability to engage with their second space learning environment. The result was a hybrid third space of extensive frustration and limited time for study. These third spaces reflected those of many DFL students living in remote areas. Developing countries like Fiji continue to experience transport difficulties in their first spaces while trying to gain further education through DFL studies at USP (Luteru & Teasdale, 1993).

7.7.5 Communication

Disseminating information to remote students, particularly when urgent matters arise, can sometimes be problematic. Communication with DFL students in these locations is unreliable because landline phones are not available; consequently, many resort to using mobile phones. The mobile services are also unreliable in most areas of Vanua Levu.
experienced this in Savusavu Town where one end of the town had mobile services available while at the other end of the town the mobile services were inoperable. Students in remote areas can only be contacted through postal services, although this is also unreliable. Yusuf (2009) affirmed that weaknesses in the communication systems in DFL did impact the students’ learning experiences in various ways.

Only four of the fifteen students interviewed in Labasa had reliable means of communication via mobile phones because they lived in urban areas where the mobile services were functional. Six students did not have any regular means of communication, although they had mobile phones the mobile services were dysfunctional in most of the areas where they lived. Three students did not have any means of communication: Lokee, for example, did not have a mobile phone and she stated that her reason for being at Savusavu centre most weekends was because she could discuss her courses with colleagues from other schools; as well as call on her friends to meet and discuss the course contents and difficulties she was experiencing in her DFL studies. The other reason, she explained, was to use class shares on the internet to communicate with others who had completed the course and those that were currently studying it with her. This was the advantage of class shares. In essence, Lokee needed to communicate with people either by meeting with them face-to-face or via the internet. She was used to being with people in her first space and she also needed them to assist her learning provided by her second space. DFL students resembled Lokee in many ways and preferred to negotiate learning in the second space by drawing on their first space social customs of close interpersonal communication.

7.7.6 Access to Technology

In this era of technological growth, where distance education throughout the world has tended to focus on tutorial participation through technological media, much is still to be done to provide developing countries with adequate access (Lingam & Burnett, 2008; Whelan, 2008; Pradhan, Chin, Freitas, Ibrahim, Marjan, 2005). Five students in remote areas expressed interest in the internet as they considered it useful for references, but they did not have the time or the resources to use it frequently. Three urban students enjoyed the services of the internet at the Savusavu centre, and the rest of the students hardly used the internet in their studies. One rural student used the internet for research for
assignments when she was able to visit the Labasa campus, and two others from the rural area wanted to be computer literate as they had not yet had opportunities to develop the skills they needed. Kali expressed her desire for the provision of technology services as she said:

_Erm ... if erh ... USP could help us with er those er satellite er you know the dish, if they could install somewhere around our lo location here eh? So ... er ... it could help us in satellite ... and internet too!

Lingham & Burnett (2008) stated that although USP prided itself on the use of Information and Communications (ICT) to deliver its programs into all the USP member countries, the program delivery had in many cases fallen short at each urban centre. This research showed a low-use, but high-value approach to thinking about technology in DFL. DFL students in the urban areas were fortunate to have better access to technology than the rural students.

7.8 Summary of Labasa DFL Students Analysis

Overall the students at the Labasa campus were a diverse group that had a range of backgrounds, language histories, and learning strengths and needs. In the preceding section, there was an exploration of how their geographical locations in remote settings influenced their learning related to transportation, communication, technology and access to materials. Further complications for learning arose when: students had first space resources that did not match those of the second space in terms of languages spoken at home and in previous prior learning; and when the expectations about how language functions as text and learning preferences for learning interactions such as making shared or collaborative meaning.

7.9 Jimbo’s Learning Story

This section tells Jimbo’s learning story in DFL. I have used Jimbo in much the same way that I have used Josh in Chapter Six. Jimbo has been chosen as a special participant in this research study at Labasa campus because he typified DFL students’ experiences of negotiating learning in DFL. Using the learning story of Jimbo allows me to represent and discuss in more depth the complexity of issues facing Labasa students.
Jimbo is a male Fijian participant who describes how his cultural and educational resources impact the ways in which he negotiates learning in DFL. Analysis for Jimbo’s research data follows the case study research (Dyson & Genishi 2005). In this section, Jimbo’s personal learning story is presented by explicating prominent themes discussed during his interview and follow-up conversations. The interpretive analysis is achieved through a continuous and reiterative process of weaving “the webs of significance” (Gertz cited in Taylor-Leech, 2007, p. 183).

I present a theoretically driven account of learning as a third space negotiated practice. I first consider Jimbo’s immediate environments of learning in his first space entailing the physical, social and cultural environments of which he is a part; and secondly, I consider the second space he meets as represented by USP and the learning environment provided by this educational institution. Accounts of learning provided by Jimbo indicate that he draws on his first space resources as he encountered learning in the second space and through this he negotiated his learning in the hybrid or third space. Within this context, learning is neither completely personal nor completely institutional. The accounts show the active negotiation that a student engages in to create hybrid practices that help Jimbo make sense of the official learning spaces offered by the university.
7.9.1 Jimbo

Jimbo’s case is used to elaborate three examples of how views of learning may be different in first and second spaces; and how students negotiate this tension through integrating first space practices into second spaces. The resulting space for learning represents a hybrid of two families of practices that makes sense to him.

Learning histories create first space resources that learners draw on to make sense of subsequent learning environments. Jimbo’s learning history was in some ways typical of many students educated in the colonial schooling system of Fiji. He grew up in the city of Lautoka. He was educated at a Fijian school where he attended primary school for the first five and a half years. In his sixth year of education his father was posted to Labasa town where Jimbo continued primary school. He left his family in his seventh year of education to attend an all-boys’ boarding school on the eastern side of the main island: Viti levu. There, Jimbo attended secondary school for another six years before leaving to enter further education. Students in DFL courses study for a range of reasons in a range of ways.

7.9.1.1 Jimbo’s Background

Jimbo is a mature male school teacher and a student at the Labasa campus. He once taught in secondary schools and tertiary and private institutions in Fiji. According to Jimbo, he has always been a learner and actively sought out opportunities to study, moving among private education providers and finally ending up at USP in the DFL courses. He highly values learning and the acquisition of knowledge.

In 2000, he commenced DFL studies at the Laucala campus in Suva and then transferred to the Labasa campus. At the time of this research he was studying at the Savusavu centre because it was closer to home. Jimbo walks to the centre every day to work and pursue his studies. He is interested in management studies and enrolled as a part-time student in a number of DFL courses at the USP Labasa campus from 2000 to 2007. At one point, when things in his life were difficult, he said he withdrew from his DFL studies but eventually returned. Jimbo has a few more courses to complete to gain a first degree in arts, majoring in management studies with a minor in psychology.
Jimbo’s current USP DFL studies involved a range of learning opportunities. These together constituted his second space. His course included the Introduction and Assignment Book, the course book and a textbook that he could buy or borrow from the USP library. The course required two essays, a mid-semester test and an examination at the end of the semester. These were the requirements in his second space and the expectations of the university. Jimbo’s overall comment about his second space requirements were:

...at the moment it’s a lot of readings eh and just assignments and all this ... er ...
not a lot of stuff of participatory activities eh!

7.9.1.2 Jimbo’s Course Description

The 301BS course was primarily concerned with employment and industrial relations. This course provided a background and review of issues and themes and explored the role, aims, history, and goals of unions, employer organisations, and governments in the field of industrial relations. The course materials were drawn from around the world, but especially attended to issues and developments related to the South Pacific. Also included was information about industrial relations in the United Kingdom; the United States of America; Japan; some European countries including Germany; Australia; New Zealand; a few selected Asian countries including Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. The course assessment for the course included fifty per cent continuous assessment and fifty per cent examination (USP, 2006 p.337-338). The assessments were two essays and a test and a final examination at the end of the semester.

7.10 Data Source

The interviews with Jimbo were conducted mostly in formal settings either in an educational institution or premises, but the nature of the interview was mostly informal. Each interview was administered in under an hour in conversational style. This was a strategy to release some of the tension from the interviewees. As with the interviews for other students, Jimbo and I would often converse while waiting for the other interviewees to arrive. During these waiting periods I revisited themes I had explored with Jimbo and other students who I interviewed earlier. I recorded conversations and other information these students shared during these informal meetings.
Below is a summary chart of three broad categories derived from the thematic analysis of Jimbo’s interview and field-note data. The graphic represents the first spaces of Jimbo’s social contexts of learning, his individual learning strategies, and his learning history. In the second space, I detail the learning space created by the DFL courses that Jimbo was enrolled in. The third space represents how Jimbo negotiated his interactions in the second space by drawing on his own resources to create a third or hybrid space.

**Figure 7.2: Jimbo’s Space Chart**
7.10.1 Jimbo’s First Space Views of Learning: Practice Makes Perfect

During the interview, Jimbo recalled how his early experiences shaped his views of learning and his learning practices. He remembered his days of learning English in Lautoka when the class used to read a set of books which Jimbo called the South Pacific Readers (SPC) produced by the South Pacific Commission and adopted for oral reading in primary schools around the Pacific region inclusive of Fiji (Siegel, 1989). It was an oral Tate English reading book used in many Pacific islands in earlier days of colonial rule. Using the SPC Readers (as it was commonly known) in primary school, he said he knew reading as something to be done out loud and repetitively with other people. First the teacher would ask the students to read to their desk mate (in twos), then group mates (groups), then to the whole class (reading in front of the whole class) and finally to the teachers. He, and other students, would read the texts so often they would learn them word-for-word. He reported that he could read it aloud in class without looking at the book, because he was one of the smart kids. Even in his adult life he remembers some of these ‘verses’, as he called them.

Such early experiences with oral language and repetition provided Jimbo with the opportunity to develop a culturally specific view of how one ‘learns’. ‘Verses’ reminded people of rhymes, recitations, singing and rhythms that were part of the oral tradition of Pacific Islanders. As a Pacific Islander, the histories of my people came to me through oral tradition not through the medium of print. Today our songs, dances and music tell stories of our ancestors and who we were and where we came from. An oral tradition was the way many generations of Fijian’s learnt English: it was not something that was reflected in the genre of learning presented in USP DFL academic settings.

In the earlier days of schooling in Fiji, much learning was about acquiring knowledge to promote retention and transfer of meaning (Mayer & Whittrock, 1996). As a primary school student, Jimbo recalled the words from the readers and had no experiences of really being asked to apply what he had learned to a new situation. Mayer (2002) referred to this result of the learning outcome as rote learning. Jimbo reiterated this when he said:
The teachers at primary school they don’t go beyond ... no chance to develop ... our own. But we’re left on our own ... and not go beyond ... you know! They just tell us to read ... and like there is no interest ... and like everything was done ...

This rote learning was also apparent in Jimbo’s cultural and family life. In interviews, he related how at Sunday school he also had to recite Bible verses and the Lord’s Prayer and Psalm 23 (The Lord is my Shepherd). He said he was used to it and he enjoyed it in some ways. The focus was on repetition as a reason for, and a source of, learning. As we will see, even now, this way of learning was something he remembered fondly and often fell back on as he encountered new experiences.

7.10.2 Learning in the Second Space: Working Towards Understanding, Synthesis and Application

The DFL course assignments and reading tasks were tasks that required students to engage in developing understanding, synthesising sources of information and applying the new knowledge they had acquired into academic writing tasks. In Jimbo’s course, the guide book or Introduction and Assignment book (I & A), had the following marking criteria for an assignment: “good quality and error free write-up; evidence of good understanding of the topic, relevance and correctness of information; validity and support of opinion; conciseness; precision and logical presentation of information” (USP, 2007f, p. 7).

All of these required a degree of academic competency on the part of DFL students. In order for Jimbo to comply with these he needed to address some learning strategies that would enable him to do what was required. Firstly, for a good quality and error free write-up, he had to have a good command of English that would enable him to understand the contents of the course materials as was required in the criteria. He also needed to relate the question or task in the assignment to a real life context. Jimbo stated previously that sometimes he could not “... apply the term” in the given situation, which he then tried to negotiate by visualisation. He also stated: “Er...er...I go for the dictionary ...” and when he still could not understand it: “I usually check the uh internet for..uh ...”. The internet, more often than not
provided him with the information he needed. The course materials did not help him as much as the internet did. Jimbo was also required to provide valid opinions to support his arguments in the assignments, as well as write concisely and with precision so that the whole presentation of the assignment was coherent and cohesive. Jimbo said:

... disable the write-up, the assignments. You know they ... er ... erm ... err ... thee ... It’s just about two or three, two or three paragraphs. Ke (code switching meaning ‘if’) they if ... if they could elaborate more, if there ... could be a guide or something ... um ... hmm ... they don’t give an example ... a sample of one of the very best! ... more useful, more detailed on what they require.

He first states ‘disable’ the written assignment and what he meant was not to have any assignment at all because he did not know what do as there was no hint or guidelines that would help him. He code switched to ‘Ke’ and said it emphatically showing how he earnestly required some elaboration in the assignments.

7.10.3 Learning Negotiated in the Third Space

In order to negotiate the differences in orientation of how one learns, Jimbo relied on his first space resources. He reported that he often used repetition strategies to learn the content (e.g. he kept on referring to the textbooks, re-reading, reciting, and memorising). For example, when asked about what he did when he did not understand the content in the textbooks or course materials he replied:

If I don’t understand, I read the entire book, and keep on referring to the textbooks ... There’s no body in management course ... Ummm ... usually, I read the entire paragraph even if I do not understand that... kinda ... just try and visualise something similar ummm ... situations eh?

Jimbo had approached the contents of the DFL studies in his second space by reflecting about ‘similar situations’ in his first space. He created a way of negotiating meaning through reading and re-reading, and by repetitive actions similar to those he used with the SPC readers in primary school and with his religious practices.
Jimbo read everything and repeatedly referred to the texts. He had said earlier how he used to memorise verses and he now tried that strategy in this situation. The first way to think about a third space is as a bridge between the DFL students’ home environment and his learning environment provided through the distance mode. Jimbo tried to make connections between his official learning environment (DFL) and his own personal connections to the contents of the learning environment. He used repetitions and read and re-read the articles to help him understand what he was reading.

7.10.4 Learning in the First Space: Collaborative Collectives
The learning experiences that Jimbo described carried another message that was culturally specific. In his view, learning was a collaborative exercise developed in the company of others who were attempting to learn the same things in the same ways. The recitation routines of verses and psalms meant that he was always focused on learning with others and in sharing responsibility for that learning.

7.10.5 Learning in the Second Space: Individual Responsibility
Jimbo’s management course booklet outlines the approach of how the course developers expect each student to engage in the learning activities. Predominantly, learning was represented in this booklet as an individualistic enterprise, where students read on their own and respond to certain prompts and essay questions: working in groups or collaboratively is largely discouraged. For example, in the ‘Warning against Cheating’ section of the course resource ‘Introduction and Assignments’, students are advised: “If you work in a group to discuss an assignment, you must ensure that the final answer which you submit is your own. Similar answers to an assignment will be seen as plagiarism” (USP, 2007f).

When distance education was first conceived it was as a medium of learning for individual people as described in chapter two of this thesis. The introduction of distance education learning was for individual learning and today it has advanced to many modern media and new technologies such as the internet. A guiding principle for distance education practice was listed in chapter two. This principle, according to Lentell (2007), was that students in
DFL needed to acquire skills for self-directed and independent learning to be successful in their studies. DFL therefore was based on the principle of individual learning. The second space provided by USP and all its expectations in DFL studies required students to be independent learners. This was a situation where Jimbo was expected to immerse himself, regardless of whether it matched his own views or if he had skills that would support his learning as an individual.

7.10.6 Third Space Negotiations: Balancing Individual Effort with Collaboration for Support

Because Jimbo had a history of seeing learning as a collaborative and collective enterprise, he liked courses in which he could collaborate with others. The course he and I talked about in the year data was collected was not one that promoted active collaboration and he did not have a peer group close to him that he could draw on to help him develop understanding. He said of his learning in the course:

There is no one else ... only me ... like I try to do it myself. Before when I used to do other subjects ... ahh ... we used to share with others ... and it was easier then. It's always good ... ahh ... when we have others ... becoz ... then they can share with us.

While the University valued individual work, Jimbo expressed a preference for seeking out other students studying the same course so that they could work collaboratively. His earlier courses, he said, were easier because of this. Peer group members would clarify meanings and help him understand what he was learning. In this example, Jimbo is faced with a situation in which his first space beliefs are challenged and not supported in the second space. Although he feels the need to collaborate with others to develop his thinking and understanding of course materials, he cannot and, this in turn, precipitates a shift into personal learning strategies that have served him well in the past. In this way the first space practice of using repetition and re-reading gains even greater importance. With little else to draw on, Jimbo takes the route of a learning practice that sits in opposition to the vision of learning represented by the university.
Gutierrez et al (1999) stated that learning should be seen in the larger context of the individual, which influence and organise learning. Collective activities facilitate and mediate learning for the individual. These researchers defined collaboration as “… a process in which participants acquire knowledge through co-participating … within linguistically, culturally and academically heterogeneous groups ...” (p. 87).

Jimbo indicated the struggles he had experienced and how he needed support, which is why he needed the support of his 301BS colleagues, that is, the other students doing the same course. Jimbo did not like the instructions given for the assignment and wanted it ‘disabled’ meaning not to be used, but to be replaced by instructions that had clear details and had specific examples, which he would then be able to follow. He clearly wanted the best examples that would be useful to him to demonstrate the requirements of the assignments. It had to be relative to his understanding, situation, and at the same time, fulfil the requirements of the convenor or course coordinator. Jimbo was caught between two worlds: his first space and second space; consequently, he leaned more to his second space to help him negotiate learning, but he also wanted relativity from his first space to make meaningful connections with what was expected of him in this particular assessment task. Throughout Jimbo’s DFL studies, he exemplified the relationship between what was learnt in his second space and the social contexts of development in his first space.

7.11 Conclusion
Gutierrez et al (1999, p.88) described the third spaces to be hybrid learning spaces in which students’ linguistic and cultural forms, styles, artefacts, goals, or ways of relating interpenetrate and transform the official linguistic cultural forms of the school teacher or classroom. The gist of their research studies have emphasised the importance of the cultural contexts of students and how students make connections between their cultural contexts and the linguistic resources provided by the institutions of learning. What is important in this study is to be aware of what the students bring with them to DFL studies and how these are taken up during academic tasks. DFL students like Jimbo illustrated that the construction of his third space was created from the negotiations working between his first spaces (socio-
cultural, historical, economic and political contexts) and his second space represented by the institution of learning (USP) and its courses. The difficulties that Jimbo experienced in DFL studies may be due to a lack of connection between his first space and second space. I believe that there must be an arena provided that examines how knowledge can be co-constructed within the DFL environment. When course convenors or course coordinators and DFL students work together within a third space then DFL students will become engaged in learning and will learn more about how to negotiate their learning in DFL. DFL students’ constructions of themselves as learners were influenced by their socio-cultural contexts as they entered the formal education system in their second space provided by the USP. In the final chapter, I draw conclusions as to possible future research and expand learning outcomes and recommendations through the examination of how hybrid spaces such as the third space enhance negotiations of learning.
Chapter Eight: Learning Negotiated in the Third Space

8.0 Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I have described the nature of the study I undertook and elaborated on my overall research aim, which was to develop deeper understandings about the way students at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji might negotiate learning in their distance education studies. In engaging in this inquiry, I have proposed that learning in DFL is a negotiated process during which students come to resolve tensions between their first space resource sets (social and cultural roles and responsibilities, geographical location, material resources, family traditions) and the second space of the official setting of university learning (campus locations, course design, learning materials, theories of learning, campus resources).

For each campus, through the presentation of group data representing the experiences of the student group as a whole and through the use of ‘learning stories’, I have discussed DFL students’ socio-cultural, historical and environmental contexts of their first spaces compared with the USP’s official learning context representing their second space and how these affect the ways in which each DFL student negotiates learning in their studies. I have theorised this negotiation, following Gutierrez (1999, 2002, 2008), Moje et al. (2004) and Flessner (2008, 2009) as complex negotiation via the creation of a third space. In this space, I suggest, students solved problems in ways that saw them blend aspects of first and second space resource sets, recontextualising practices from each to form hybrid learning practices that are neither exclusively first space nor second space.

This final chapter summarises the conclusions drawn from the experiences of the DFL student participants in the study and discusses my recommendations for change. I also make suggestions for implementing changes to enhance effectiveness of DFL at USP. Finally, I will discuss the contribution that this thesis makes to the field of distance education in general.
and to understanding DFL in Fiji. As a teacher, I hope this work provides opportunities for me and many of my colleagues at USP to examine our own teaching practices and provides us with new ways in which to interpret DFL students’ situations and to respond to them appropriately.

8.1 Discussion

As noted in chapter four, a third space is a hybrid space that people have access to in which they draw from multiple funds of knowledge or resources to make sense of the world (Gutierrez et al, 1999). I have proposed that third space theory is a useful conceptual tool for DFL researchers who might want to explore the idea that learning takes place not through transfer, but rather is negotiated and recontextualised practice in a metaphorical space. It is in this space that students are able to explore the worlds around them, to engage with, as well as struggle with, the ideas and practices related to learning.

The third space metaphor was a fitting theoretical tool in this study because it allowed me to elaborate on the idea of learning as negotiated practice rather than transfer of knowledge. In proposing the existence of a hybrid space or “… a place where home or peer space merges with the second space discourse of academics” (Gutierrez et al, 1999), there is an acknowledgement that learning creates new spaces for learning and thinking for individuals. Third space theorists affirm its existence at the spatial location of two epistemological and empirical realities: the ‘first space’ representing the home and community contexts and the ‘second space’ depicted by the discourses and knowledge embedded in formal institutions.

Throughout this work, I have tried to understand how participants’ ideas and practices play out within, and across, the communities of practice and nested spaces of the University of the South Pacific. This has helped me explore what Gutierrez (2008, p. 152) has referred to as the:

... productive and unproductive aspects of learning cycles, to see the sites of possibility and contradiction, and to document the processes that lead to learning - that is,
processes marked by new forms of participation and activity that change both the individual and the practice, as well as their mutual relation.

Gutierrez’s work and my own are driven by a similar desire: we seek to understand people better and how people appropriate cultural concepts as they move in and across an array of social practices — paying attention to the boundary crossings that reinforce, extend and conflict with individual arrangements and the range of skills, capabilities, and knowledge that students bring with them (Gutierrez, 2008, p.152). In this way, I have been able to observe ways that lead to students learning in DFL. I observe the ways DFL students participate in new forms and activities that modify their learning practices and influence how they negotiate learning in their studies. In my own work, I suggest that this is the essence of those third spaces created by DFL students at USP.

During the fieldwork research conducted in Lautoka in 2007, I discussed with students their experiences and practices for learning in first and second spaces. These are described in chapter six. I examined one particular participant, Josh, in great depth as well as a group of ten students that formed the PIDO group. I highlighted a number of themes identified in these students’ data which influenced the ways in which the students engaged and negotiated learning between their first and second spaces and constructed new ways of doing and learning that were hybrid or negotiated. The issues related to learning are shown in Figure 6.1 of chapter six.

In chapter seven, I discuss findings from the Labasa campus. There were fifteen students who participated in this research study and many of them were from remote Northern Division villages. Their first spaces were complex and mediating influences included geographic isolation, cultural and familial obligations, access to technology, access to transport and access to a regular power supply. This group revealed some similar and some different concerns related to their studies compared with the Lautoka group. I used Jimbo’s learning story as a synthesising device. His experiences served to exemplify and explore in detail the issues raised by the group at Labasa.
In the following paragraphs I discuss what I refer to as the focus of negotiations, out of which major themes and sub-themes were derived as presented in the students’ responses.

8.1.1 Course Materials

One of the major issues that emerged from the students’ data was centred on course materials. Each of these students was expected to engage in course materials provided by the university. In the students’ attempts to engage with the course materials a number of hurdles had to be overcome before real learning could begin. One of these was in relation to the course contents, which the students had difficulty in understanding. The textbooks and the course materials was written in English, a second language for these students, a language less used by the many students enrolled in DFL studies and the language of the minority group in Fiji. Students learnt their mother tongue in their first space and used it on a daily basis at home and with each other at the university. It was the language they shared with friends and peer group members. They were only expected to use their second language to negotiate learning in their second space. They did so by seeking collaborative work with friends and colleagues or they read through their materials of learning repetitively until they understood the readings. In this latter task, students have begun to conform to a particular learning approach influenced by the teaching in the form of instructions written in the course materials.

Related to this was the level of difficulty in the text language used. DFL students in most Pacific countries have an oral background that is often personal and informal. Yet at the university the English language used in the texts is sometimes beyond the students’ ability to understand. Formal academic English was less familiar to most students whose first language was either Fijian or Hindi; therefore with two different languages, students again sought assistance from their friends and peers to negotiate the meaning of the words in the content of the materials so that they could then learn about the topics covered.

Another issue that influenced the ways students engaged with learning and made sense of the courses they encountered was what they perceived as the relevance of the course contents.
Many students voiced concerns about the use of examples to which they had no real connection. This is illustrated in chapter six where the topics that were outlined in the course book were out of date, unrealistic, and foreign. The students who had access to the internet would have had the extra help needed to deal with these topics and could negotiate this issue productively, but the DFL students who lived in remote areas would have very little chance of getting the assistance they needed to learn in such circumstances and had to rely on more local means of assistance. Josh, the key participant in chapter six, lived on the outskirts of the city and in his course of study faced the same situation as the remote students experienced. Josh negotiated learning by recontextualising his second space knowledge into his first space. He described how he approached his teachers and friends for assistance with developing the understanding he needed to demonstrate in the course. Josh, and many of his fellow students, used existing practices of community and shared learning with the assistance of others and applied it to university study.

Quality of the text was another concern derived from the students’ responses. They expressed the need for legible print in some of the photocopied notes that were inserted in their course materials. In living conditions where sources of electricity were limited or unavailable, the students only source of light was the daylight, which meant that they had to conduct all their studies at this time. A student like Dama, who was a teacher in a remote primary boarding school with a regulated power supply supplied by the school’s generator, would have difficulties attending to hostel work, house work and DFL studies as discussed in chapter seven. Juggling her time for all of the work she had to do was stressful and tiresome. She resorted to using the kerosene and benzene lamps for reading the course materials when the lights went off, but the illegible print in the course materials were too difficult to read in such conditions and so Dama waited for the weekends to go to her home in town where she would have the time and access to electricity that would then allow her to engage with the materials. This productive negotiation was Dama’s way of ensuring that she could still commit to studying even though she had teaching and pastoral care duties for the school children she supervised. Dama’s situation reflected the need for course materials to be legible and have quality print.
One final concern raised by a number of students was the delivery of course materials. Given the expectations that DFL students have the opportunity to study, the university is confronted with the many challenges of coordinating, organising and planning to serve students over great distances. One of the challenges is to maintain timely delivery of the course materials to enable the students to access learning. DFL policy states that all materials should be received within three weeks of the start of the semester. Students who do not receive their materials on time are advised to withdraw from the course (Napwatt, 2008, p.10). In relation to this, Vero, a participant discussed in chapter seven, said that the textbook he needed arrived five weeks late at the Labasa campus, which caused him such great disappointment that he eventually withdrew from the course. DFL students often experience these kinds of disappointments, especially, the students that have paid their fees in advance and those who live in remote areas. Others like Vero are disappointed because they were deprived of an opportunity for further education. Their capacity to negotiate learning in such a situation is limited.

The analysis of the students’ interview data and field-notes showed that their experiences in their DFL studies and the resources they had in their first spaces have been integrated into learning within the formal educational setting of the university, represented in their second spaces. In this integration process a third space emerged where the negotiations were occurring. Third space enabled the facilitation of the learning and understanding of the contents in the course materials. Figure 8.1 illustrates the third space created by these DFL students at the two campuses of Lautoka and Labasa.
Figure 8.1 shows the socio-cultural dimensions of the negotiations that occur between DFL students’ first space and the academic culture provided by the USP in their second space. The result of the interactions and negotiations between the two spaces is the creation of the third space — a figurative space that provides the support for learning that the students require. Students’ practices in the third space represent attempts to resolve issues.

The students’ responses at the two campuses led me to new reflections about research previously published in the area of distance education teaching and learning by researchers such as Mugler and Landbeck. They published an article in 1997 describing the learning styles of students at USP. Their findings revealed that many of the USP students’ learning styles reflected low percentages in higher order conceptions of learning and that they viewed learning as applying or making use of knowledge. The researchers reasoned that this could have been the result of the examination-oriented curriculum of secondary schools in the regional states of USP as well as the lecture-based transmission mode of teaching preferred by students (Deo & Nabobo, 2003). The use of print-based materials as delivery systems for
information shapes learning at USP in an official space of information processing and retention.

This study adds to previous research, focused on the students in the Pacific, by adding detail to the ways in which DFL students use their own cultural-learning styles and previous educational experiences to make sense of academic learning at USP and as a way of negotiating learning in their studies. In chapter six, Napsy, one of the PIDO group members, had difficulties in understanding his course materials and the only way he learnt how to deal with it was to: “… make your own points and keep making your own points that you can come up with so that you can understand it.” Napsy advised that it was important to “… keep making your own points” or writing down the main points repetitively, until understanding the contents of the course materials would eventually happen. Josh, on the other hand, responded by saying: “I read … and re-read again and keep it. I go step by step.” In both Napsy and Josh’s situations the strategies they used to negotiate learning in the course materials they used in DFL studies were typical of first space cultural-learning styles that focus on repetition and recitation. I argued that this application of the unofficial, culturally-embedded learning style into a university course, constituted the creation of a third space where students used what they could to make sense of an unfamiliar and official learning space.

Similarly, in chapter seven, Jimbo recalled the way he learnt how to read in primary school using a prescribed text that children in his class often recited as part of learning English. Repetitive reading actions as noted in his story told of the joys of reciting the SPC readers and how, years later, as an adult learner in DFL he continued to use much of that practice in his DFL studies. This practice emerged in his second space university studies to create a his third space negotiation of learning.

These DFL students’ responses in interview indicated that historical, cultural and social factors shaped the ways they perceived learning. Indeed, many of the DFL students that participated in this research reported that they drew on their first space learning practices, so
that they might try to negotiate the new university learning in meaningful ways. As Tuwa and Jimbo remind us, to be successful in DFL the appropriation of first space learning practices into the third space needs to be able to produce work in line with university expectations if students are to be successful. Students in this study indicated that they perceived that the courses provided in the official space of the university were not structured in ways that helped them connect to first space learning practices and did not really support the development of a set of hybrid skills that might help them be successful as DFL students.

In addition to the students’ concerns with course materials, there were other issues related to negotiating interactions for learning. These are summarised in the following paragraphs.

8.1.2 Interactions for Learning

The learning interactions of DFL included tutor-student interactions, student assignment comments or feedback and peer interactions around learning. Hattie & Timperly (2007, p. 81) asserted that feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, which can have positive or negative impact. As reported in Figures 6.1 and 7.1, many students at Lautoka and Labasa campuses were not satisfied with the feedback from their assignments for various reasons. The students were interested in the feedback to inform them of how they would attempt the next assignment and to allow them to be better prepared for the next assignment. In response to a lack of feedback, or feedback that was vague or late, students had little option other than to continue using the same learning practices throughout the course.
Figure 8.2: Interactions for Learning: Spaces, tensions and negotiations

Figure 8.2 shows the socio-cultural dimensions of the negotiations that occur between DFL students’ first space and the academic culture provided by the USP in their second space. The third space negotiations can be productive or non-productive, but they also represent an attempt to find a meaningful solution to tensions among first and second spaces (Gutiérrez et al, 1999).

Tutorials and tutoring were also related to learning interactions that emerged as a major theme for participants. Of the thirty DFL students who provided interview data, only eight students attended tutorials on a regular basis as shown in Figures 6.1 and 7.1 in chapters six and seven. The majority of the students attributed their tutorial non-attendance to transport difficulties, particularly from remote areas, hence their inability to attend the scheduled tutorials. Further communication breakdowns between the campus staff and the DFL students resulted in students receiving late notification of cancelled or postponed tutorials. In light of these many let-downs, many students chose to simply not attend tutorials,
believing that time that may be wasted in transit would be better spent on study. The unfortunate result of this negotiation was that the majority of students surveyed did not receive any expert university guidance from course staff. Instead they often worked with the course materials, which they frequently found dense and difficult, to learn the content through repetition and rehearsal, or they sought the advice and guidance of other DFL students from previous years to support their learning. In this way, what the university put in place to provide access to quality teaching and learning was deemed too difficult to access and was negotiated out of the students’ learning spaces.

Also pertinent to the DFL students’ situation as they reported, was the quality of the tutors employed by the university and the campuses. Students expected quality presentations and performance from tutors to ensure they had the support to enable them to negotiate learning meaningfully. Respondents reported that tutors employed at the campuses or centres were not often skilled in working with students. These tutors provided support for DFL students who do not have face-to-face interaction with their lecturers as the on-campus students do. This led to frustrations for some of the students in the PIDO group, as discussed in chapter six, as they felt that even if they did attend tutorials by overcoming the huge transport and communications issues, the quality of tutor support was often lacking. This was another factor that seemed to contribute to low levels of engagement in tutorials in centres and campuses.

To sum up the discussion in this section, the DFL students conveyed their need for more in-depth interactions around learning and additional social support in assignments and tutorials. Without these the main ways in which they negotiated their learning were to withdraw from the official space and use local, community resources or to rely on text-based resources. These were seen as a means of obtaining socially mediated learning interactions that they felt would empower them to negotiate learning in DFL studies.
8.1.3 Access to Learning

Access to learning was another dominant theme that emerged from the students’ responses to the questionnaire and in the interviews. Related to this broad theme were issues related to communication, transport, campus facilities and technology. Each of these concerns affected the students’ learning in DFL in a variety of ways.

Figure 8.3: Access to Learning: Spaces, tensions and negotiations

Figure 8.3 shows the socio-cultural dimensions of the negotiations that occur between DFL students’ first space and the academic culture provided by the USP in their second space. The third space negotiations can be productive or non-productive, but they also represent an attempt to find a meaningful solution to tensions among the first and second spaces (Gutierrez, 2005).
Major issues to be negotiated in terms of access to learning included the lack of reliable communication and transport services available to DFL students in remote areas and these were often discouraging to students, exacerbated by the very late communication and dissemination of notices and important matters. In Josh’s learning story, I discussed the difficulties he experienced with transport. The buses were infrequent and could not get him to campus in time to do any study. This resulted in Josh being an infrequent visitor to the campus and this impacted his learning in ways that saw him doing his best without much access to learning support. The remote nature of the homes of many DFL students at USP, has huge implications for the ways in which they learn, as it more often than not puts them in the position of having to use first space resources and learning practices to engage in university study. These may, as I discussed earlier, be more or less effective.

Another theme that the participants raised was related to the provision of adequate campus facilities and resources for learning. Resources, such as the libraries, were not always helpful. Gaining access to books and technology was often an issue for students who could actually travel to the campus. For those who already had transport difficulties because of the remoteness of their homes, found little satisfaction from the tutorial staff, and perceived a lack of resources contributed to their belief that they might do better on their own in their communities with their current learning practices rather than engage in the tertiary study designed by USP.

Technology was raised as an issue of resourcing that students felt influenced the ways in which they engaged in their learning. While this was readily available to students in urban and in some suburban areas, most of the students who were interviewed did not have personal computers and used the computers available at the campuses. None of the thirty students that were interviewed owned a computer.

Related to technology was the issue of communicating through class shares. Eight of the students in the PIDO group described difficulties in this area that had to be negotiated. Class shares was a space on the USP network where lecturers could make files available to their students and students could access these files and communicate with teaching staff.
These files included tutorial notes, PowerPoint tutorials, examination guidelines etc. (USP, 2009). According to students, these files were supposedly updated on a regular basis, but frequently were not. Of course, taken together with transport to campus issues and access problems to resourcing and technology for rural and remote students, such problems in communicating and distributing up-to-date learning materials, take on an added significance. Access to the class share learning tool was important to DFL students because the tool supplemented and supported the course materials. The students needed this kind of support so that they might more successfully negotiate learning in their course materials.

The issues raised by the students became sites for negotiation and for the creation of third spaces where students drew on their existing resources and practices to help them solve problems in dealing with their USP studies. Some of those negotiations were the result of multiple issues and were resolved in ways that Guitierrez (2005) might call unproductive.

The next section of this chapter discusses the implications of this study for researchers, course convenors, instructional designers, tutors, campus and centre staff and the university.

8.2 Implications for Course Designers and Course Convenors

The participants of this study raised concerns that, according to previous reports (Wah, 1997) are not new to DFL in the Pacific, but are real concerns that affect learning. Understanding these concerns can help to inform course design and delivery in distance and flexible learning at USP. Teachers, tutors, course convenors and course designers would benefit from understanding more about DFL students’ socio-cultural, historical, political, linguistic and environmental backgrounds that influence their learning in the DFL context. DFL participants in Lautoka and Labasa campuses reported frustrations with factors such as: language difficulties in the contents of their course materials; late deliveries of the learning package or textbooks; irrelevant course contents; lack of, or deficiencies in, tutorial support; lateness, or the lack, of feedback from markers; lengthy or vague assignment contents;
deficiencies, or the lack, of reliable communication and transport means; and the sometimes unreliable modern technology services that were provided to students in both campuses. Occasionally, some students expressed favourable circumstances for these factors that specifically create a positive environment for learning. In dire circumstances, as listed previously, DFL students resorted to collaboration with their peer groups to help them motivate one another, as well as to provide support mechanisms for learning in difficult situations. Confronted with the many challenges and complexities of life, DFL students studied with what they mostly used in their first space: they sought the company of others to assist them in negotiating learning. Gathering this kind of information has always been seen as a way of supporting exemplary DFL practices at USP in terms of integrating instructional design, learning materials and teaching and learning interactions.

Educational institutions are for people and the University of the South Pacific is for the people of the South Pacific. It had been the premier provider of tertiary education in the region for the last five decades and, although other tertiary institutions have emerged during this time, USP continues to be a dominant regional educational institution today. USP is a place for learning, meeting, exploring, thinking and sharing. Its campuses in the region are its arms, legs and eyes, and they reflect influences and attitudes about education. In addressing the Regional Campus Directors Forum in 2009, the USP’s vice-chancellor, reminded the directors that they were “… servants of their stakeholders” and added that they needed to show:

... that we are fired by a deep passion for the university as a regional institution ...
deeply anchored in the Pacific countries and societies .... We cannot therefore make demands of our stakeholders when the stakeholders themselves are worse off than the university (Chandra, 2009, p. 11-14).

The students, whether studying in face-to-face, on-campus or DFL mode, are the stakeholders that need to be the priority in any educational institution. It was for them that I set out to pursue this investigative process so I could understand how the students negotiated learning and how I might review my own teaching performance to suit the needs of the students I serve in distance and flexible learning.
The recommendations that appear in the following section are my responses to the issues raised by students during this research project. Three major categories of recommendations are discussed. They are recommendations relating to course materials, interactions for learning, and access to learning.

8.2.1 Implications for Course Materials

The responses and reflections of students in this study have implications for the design the course content and materials for the students. Firstly, USP might ask course designers to focus on the range of cultural-learning practices in the Pacific and incorporate activities and materials that help students learn academic practices in more supported ways. Learning instructions and assignments that support collaborative work, for example, would be of benefit because students have indicated that they can negotiate learning through collaboration with friends and peer group members. Assignments that require students to collaborate officially over a semester might better support students to utilise collaborative learning practices to develop better collective understandings of course content.

Issues with irrelevant and outdated course content can be addressed by employing course designers and subject experts who can make larger issues contextually relevant to local students. In this way, students will come to see that the larger issues dealt with in courses are also locally relevant and meaningful. For example, the course that included a focus on Napoleon might be re-contextualised to focus on a local Pacific figure and be linked to broader issues. In connecting learning in this way, course designers might help students draw on first space knowledge to make sense of the course content more readily. In addition, more attention to the production of materials, including print quality and font size would aid students in processing the ideas more readily. There needs to be an acknowledgement that not all students have access to power, light and computing facilities so that a commitment to high quality learning materials can be made.
In terms of the density of text and the difficulties students had in understanding key issues and vocabulary in the readings, the ways in which materials are presented might be reconsidered to include a focus on less formal language, clearer structures with orienting devices such as headings and subheadings and more use of visuals to elaborate main points. The use of ‘considerate text’ (Armbruster and Anderson, 1988) is recommended. Through this, students who struggle with the general and specific formal registers of English required for academic work might be gradually exposed to the language in a supportive way. Considerate texts would change the ways in which students interact with texts that present complex issues, providing more opportunity for learning and thus reducing the need to rely on recitation and rehearsal of difficult content without deep understanding. Students’ experiences have illustrated what Lynch & Szorenyi (2005, p. 14) acknowledged as an existing pattern in Fiji: “At the tertiary level, the curriculum is more aligned to meet the needs of the western students rather than the background experience and knowledge of all Fijians”. The challenge then is for the university to understand the background experiences of its students and to match them with courses that the students will deal with in their studies.

Another issue was related to the slow or failed delivery of course materials to students in remote areas, which resulted in students withdrawing from courses. In some instances students are expected to travel to the campus to collect these materials. Some students travel because they are interested in pursuing further studies, others do not go because of personal, religious, or family commitments. Some students go but are turned back because the texts are not available. In the end, students can become frustrated and either withdraw or do not pursue any course of action and when students do not withdraw they can be deemed failures for that course of study. Staff members at the campus must feel the importance of keeping to scheduled times and ensure that deliveries are issued on time to avoid negative impacts on DFL students’ learning.
8.2.2 Implications for Interactions for Learning

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that learning is a socially mediated, negotiated activity. I believe that tutors and teachers can create culturally sensitive third spaces in which DFL students can become academically engaged and successful. The major finding with regard to learning interactions in this study is that it is necessary to attend to students’ cultural knowledge and everyday resources and integrate them into their learning within the formal educational setting provided by USP. A learning community in DFL must be built to focus on learning rather than teaching, which will then provide the opportunity for third spaces to develop. Tutors might welcome and benefit from more training in understanding diverse learners and culturally specific learning styles. Flessner (2009) believes such cultural sensitivity can create opportunities for third spaces to develop. In his action research study of an elementary mathematics class in the United States of America (USA), he examined the way he (as a teacher) and his students constructed a classroom environment that enabled a social culture to develop in which the third space was fostered. The advantage of his research was that he was able to analyse the interactions that took place in the classroom and to critically examine the ways in which he constructed activities for his students and assess the results of those actions (Flessner, 2009, p. 426). Similarly for DFL, course convenors would benefit from being mindful of the students’ socio-cultural backgrounds and devise course activities co-constructed with their students. Through these activities, students will be able to think of ways to integrate their cultural knowledge and DFL knowledge to form powerful learning opportunities that encourage and engage them in higher-level thinking and deep-based learning orientation (Deo & Phan, 2006). In the light of all these issues, it is important for educators and teachers to contextualise the teaching and learning processes in DFL studies (Mugler & Landbeck, 1997; Deo & Phan, 2006).

A second area in which students raised significant concerns was in feedback on their learning. Only a few of the students reported receiving feedback from their assignments, but the majority of students did not receive feedback or received it later than they needed it.
Students who received feedback preferred constructive comments that would help them in their next assignment or test and did not approve of the short, vague and meaningless comments that were marked on their assignments. Six students did not receive any feedback and five received it later than needed. Twelve students mentioned there was no consistency when feedback was returned. All thirty students believed in the value of feedback to improve their work in DFL studies. In order to improve assignment feedback for students, course convenors, lecturers and tutors need to reflect on the need for learners to receive timely and meaningful comments. A commitment on the part of the course convenor or course lecturer to ensure that feedback is constructive, meaningful, that it is returned to students on time and before their next assignment is due will inspire and encourage students in their DFL studies. At the same time, campus staff have to be responsible for the prompt delivery of the marked assignments and feedback and treat them with a sense of urgency and dedication. Students who live in rural and remote areas cannot be expected to collect their feedback from the campus nor can the campus deliver feedback on a regular basis to the students. The most convenient and financially viable way to assist DFL students in these locations would be through the postal services. In this instance, I strongly recommend that the government and the USP management work together to provide the infrastructure and services necessary to ensure a prompt delivery system. This will enhance students’ learning in DFL and therefore provide opportunities for the students to negotiate meaningful learning drawn from and provided in their first and second spaces of learning. Feedback is a critical lever in the third space because it provides students with reflection on the extent to which they have negotiated their learning successfully.

8.2.3 Implications for Access to Learning

Lautoka campus provided tutorials through face-to-face mode, or through the internet, or through satellite or audio tutorials. Students accessing tutorials via satellite had technological and linguistic issues with their tutorials. The technological services are sometimes unreliable, which may be due to the different time zones within the twelve countries in the Pacific region. Sometimes the acoustics are poor and the reception is not clear: students complain
about such services. Some of the students mentioned how they would be scheduled for a tutorial and when they arrived it had either been deferred or rescheduled. When this happens students who used public transport would be unable to attend the rescheduled time, so they would forgo tutorials altogether. Students also commented about the language difficulties incurred when the tutor’s accents differed from theirs, and they could not understand most of what the tutor in this audio session was saying. In such a situation, understanding the accents of the tutor coupled with the poor reception would leave many students disappointed. These are issues best dealt with by campus or university staff, but they are equally important because they do affect DFL students’ learning. It is important to note that the participants of this study expressed interest in tutorial participation even though some of them had given up on it. Students’ needs reflect their social and cultural practices in their first spaces and in order to negotiate learning in their second space studies they sought face-to-face interactions from peer group members. To address this issue, I reiterate Clifford & Vakamocea’s (2006, p. 14) conclusion about lecturers and I recommend to course convenors and tutors: “… to become critically reflective ... and to question the basis of their own knowledge and practice”. In doing so, course convenors, lecturers and tutors can be encouraged to provide suitable learning experiences for DFL students’ to create their third spaces where they can negotiate learning more effectively and meaningfully.

8.3 Implications for Governing Bodies

As indicated in chapters six and seven, the long distances that the students in remote areas travel over mountainous terrain to reach the campus or centres is often physically exhausting and overwhelming. Associated with this is the unreliable public transport service, which the majority of students use to travel to the campus or centres. The challenge of technology was more striking in Lautoka than in Labasa. Participants in Lautoka experienced more frustrations with new technology and poor acoustics in its network services, while the Labasa participants did not contribute much to the topic as most of the students had no access to technology except through the campus and centre.
Despite the provision of modern technological equipment in both campuses, data collected during this research study revealed that many students wanted more face-to-face interactions in DFL. Some students in urban areas attended tutorials, but the majority did not for personal and technical reasons as highlighted in chapters six and seven of this paper. Language was another challenge as it was a barrier for more than ninety per cent of the participants who were second language speakers of English, which is the medium of communication used in the students’ second spaces of learning.

The current Government has to assure that all citizens are given adequate education to deliver on its promises for a better and a brighter future for its citizens. If it is to retain government and gain support from the people then it has to provide the infrastructure necessary for lifelong learning required by all citizens in the country. This includes: better roads, more transport, better means of communication, and adequate supplies of electricity, all these factors are important for learners to negotiate their school and tertiary studies. The establishment of proper infrastructure and a commitment to education in the country will help cultivate and contribute to a better nation. In the next section, I present some limitations of this study, which I hope will help me improve my skills in research and enhance future understanding of the third space theory so that I am better equipped with the knowledge of how this theory could be effectively used to enhance students’ negotiations of learning in DFL contexts.

8.4 Implications for Researchers

The findings from this research study suggest that researchers, public policy makers and educators must consider the multiple spaces of DFL students and provide the necessary bridges that students need to cross in order to engage in higher education programs provided by their universities. The students need to feel a sense of belonging in their second spaces of learning, so they can have meaningful participation in these programs. If they feel a personal and familial connectedness to these programs, then when learning is merged with their first spaces, their familiarity with these programs, or second spaces, will enable the creation of third spaces. Third spaces enhance educational performances, engage and negotiate learning
effectively and successfully. More educational research does need to be conducted in third spaces, which would build on and contribute to the body of literature. Further research into how third spaces are generated need to be investigated so that researchers who use this method are knowledgeable and better equipped to carry out further research.

In chapter three I looked at several theories of learning associated with distance education and the different approaches and assumptions that each theorist or researcher adopted to convey their ideas of learning. Skinner’s behaviourist approach to learning and Gagne’s approaches to instructions are theories that promote behaviourism, which can be applied to the development of objectives in instructional design, computer assisted learning, the curriculum and behavioural objectives in learning-task activities. Behaviourists focus on observable aspects of learning and they break down tasks into smaller parts, which are used to shape the behaviour of the learner. Cognitivists, on the other hand, focus on the minds of the learner to explain how they learn and what triggers their learning, while constructivists focus on the learners’ experiences and how learners make sense of their own experiences.

Ausebel’s theory has proved to be particularly influential for written instructions. As stated in chapter three, he emphasised receptive learning that require learners to be actively involved in the instructions by underlining, completing missing words, rewording sentences, summarising sentences or giving additional examples. His motto was: “The most single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly” (Holmberg, 2005, p. 59). This appealed to students and also appealed to instructors in distance education. In terms of the contents and structure of the subject matter, behaviourists insist on starting out from the smallest aspects of knowledge and move from the particular in order to come to understand the general. The ‘bottom-up’ approach was advanced by Gagne (Holmberg, 2005). On the other hand, Bruner suggested the ‘top-down’ approach, which has also influenced Ausubel’s advanced organiser. Given these three broad frameworks of learning theory, it is evident that their contribution to teaching and learning in distance education has been beneficial. They have offered a discussion of research paradigms that are applicable to distance education. Educational
research has identified with these researchers in its development. History and instructional designers have been influenced by these early theories of learning and developed learning materials based on these theories (Holmberg, 2005). Current researchers have deviated a little from this line of thinking and have advocated other ways of research that are appropriate for the students of this age. Through my own research and understandings of DFL students’ learning, students have different ways of learning and different preferences for learning, therefore guiding students through learning tasks and helping them to solve problems of increasing difficulty is an important obligation for course convenors and tutors, as well as a motivating force for them (Holmberg, 2005).

In recent decades, research in the social sciences has made significant progress and continued the development of scholarly research processes (Watkins & Schlosser, 2003). Researchers in the South Pacific, for instance, have over the past decades investigated the learning practices of DFL students studying at the University of the South Pacific (Thaman, 1994b; Mugler & Landbeck, 1997, 2000; Deo & Nabobo, 2003; Deo & Phan 2006; Tuinamuana, 2007). Most of these studies are centred on historical, linguistic, social and cultural factors that shape students’ perceptions of learning in various situations within the Pacific context. Their contribution to research studies of learning in the Pacific has been reliable and practical.

Zeichner (cited in Flessner, 2009, p. 441) stated that “… one of the indicators of quality in self-study work is addressed when we ask, ‘How does this study build upon existing work in an area … and make a contribution to our knowledge about that area’?” Based on the assumption that all educational research should build on, and contribute to the greater body of knowledge, I have conducted a research study that was influenced by, and builds upon, the work of educational researchers and the body of literature concerned with applications of third space theory. Third space negotiations in DFL that I discussed in this study were laden with challenges and complexities. As the students suggested, there could have been more meaningful and practical ways of negotiating their learning in DFL, but there were seemingly few opportunities for this.
Central to third space theory is that the fund of knowledge that students bring to their learning reflect their own social, cultural and personal understandings and skills. Moreover, the negotiated practices developed in the process of engaging in courses, utilises the existing fund of knowledge in new ways in the third space. Thus it is critically important to understand the fund of knowledge that students bring to learning as social and cultural beings and to develop learning activities that are likely to connect to those funds in ways that encourage effective hybrid practices to develop and which support success in DFL.

The students in this study were concerned that little attention had been given to their first space fund of knowledge, their identities, and skill sets. They needed learning to be facilitated in ways that were culturally relevant and more meaningful to them. Their experiences provide researchers and educators with opportunities to reflect on learning as negotiated practice and to instigate changes that might allow students to share their cultural knowledge and practices and to create opportunities for third spaces to develop (Flessner, 2009).

The writings of Gutierrez et al (1995, 1999), Gutierrez, 2008), Moje et al (2004), and Flessner (2008, 2009), in the field of third space inquiry have contributed much to our understanding of learning as negotiated practice. Gutierrez in particular, has shown in her research studies of immigrant children that third space allows her to probe into the fund of knowledge that students bring into their learning situations. She observed how students negotiated learning in classroom situations by using their cultural knowledge and experiences to construct meaning in class activities. Students are able to engage in learning only when they are able to relate their own home cultures in their first spaces to the classroom culture. Gutierrez and others like her have had years of experience in writing about this field of inquiry and all of these researchers have encouraged new researchers like me to strive for improvements and changes in teaching and learning. I genuinely believe that as partners in DFL we need to continually examine and reform our practices and identify our weaknesses and strengths and modify them so that we can model those practices that will “... more aptly
attend to issues of equity, diversity and social justice as they apply to the education of our students” (Flessner, 2008, p. 187).

8.5 Limitations of this Study

The sample size in this study was small (n=30) considering the overall numbers for DFL students at the two campuses of USP (n=741). This small sample size may introduce bias into the results in that those surveyed and interviewed were those willing to disclose personal information about learning. While on the one hand, as a researcher, I acknowledge the problems inherent in small sample sizes, on the other hand, as an educator familiar with the politically sensitive context of modern Fiji, I am grateful to those people who agreed to be part of the study.

There are several other limitations to this study. Firstly, an in-depth research focus on one of the campuses could have enabled a broader study of students in a wider range of courses and departments than was addressed by studying students at two campuses. There were advantages of course, to undertaking the study in two different locations, but it is also just as possible that with a larger single site sample I may have been able to describe students’ different negotiating practices.

As I reflect methodologically, I can see that more in-depth data might have been gathered by following students over time, perhaps at one campus. This would have given a more detailed account of the learning stories I present in chapters six and seven and allowed me to track ways in which student negotiations may change or evolve over time. This is an area that future research could address. A longitudinal approach to data collection could influence the ways in which we are able to describe third spaces in DFL as they take shape. Attempting to collect data in remote areas in a limited amount of time made me realise that a much longer time span could have been pragmatic and would have gained better research outcomes.
The timing of the data collection for this study also influenced student participation and response rates. Conducting the research at the beginning of the USP semester rather than towards the second half of the semester would have been a more appropriate time to gather data. By the time data collection began, students were fully occupied with tests and assignments and they were preparing for the end of semester examinations: this made it difficult for them to find time to meet with me and so interviews were often rescheduled.

Another factor related to the timing of this research study was the availability of participants for interview during the day. The most convenient time for interviewing students in rural areas was after school or in the evening when the participants, most of whom were teachers, were available, but there were difficulties in hiring vehicles at night to travel to remote areas. Many drivers were not willing to risk travelling on unsealed roads at night. As a result all interviews were conducted during the day and on one occasion only was the interview conducted in the late afternoon and through to eight p.m. Extended interviews were constrained by working arrangements and time.

Cultural constraints and expectations had to be dealt with tactfully as there are differences in culture that researchers need to be aware of to avoid antagonising or offending their hosts. Many Pacific islanders adhere very strongly to their customs and traditions and it was important that these were respected. There were protocols to be observed in a rural Fijian environment that involved the presentation of kava, a long and time consuming ceremony, which often cut into our interview times. Courtesy, however, had to prevail. Sometimes this meant travelling long distances at night to reach the next school premises to interview the participants on the following day. We were not insured and the tedious travels through rugged terrain had a physical effect as we had to almost circumnavigate the island of Vanua Levu in the north to reach the participants. While this research gave students living in remote areas opportunities to have their voices heard, the research had personal costs that were high.
8.6 Unique contributions of this study

This study makes a number of contributions to DFL research. Firstly, for course convenors, it contributes to a better understanding of the University of the South Pacific’s DFL students and how they negotiate learning in their studies. The negotiations of multiple knowledge and practices they bring into their learning are at the heart of the ‘third space’. Metaphorical spaces are created during the process of negotiating learning in their first and second spaces. Within these third and metaphorical student spaces lie benefits which enhance our (tutor/lecturer/course convenor) understanding of students’ perspectives and needs. As designers and course convenors, it also critically examines our assumptions of students and improves our communication with the students who access the learning we provide.

In terms of research, this study offers one way of conducting research that delves into the DFL students varied contexts and cultural experiences and helps researchers understand how to provide teaching strategies that meet the needs of DFL students. Secondly, it will equip teachers in DFL to deal with DFL students with greater understanding that will then create a learning environment that DFL students feel they are a part of. Collaboration between tutors, teachers and students need to be engaging so that learning in DFL becomes an enjoyable and not a stressful experience.

8.7 Future Directions for Research

Naturally, as we pursue understandings of particular phenomena, new questions or areas of interest emerge along the way. One obvious direction for future research is to explore the implications of students’ negotiations in relation to outcomes. What are the consequences for DFL students’ experiences and learning as they deploy different types of negotiating practices to make sense of the courses they encounter? A better understanding of this relationship could add to our thinking in terms of how we might best design DFL courses. It might also allow us to elaborate on the relationship between instructional design and student needs.
Another area of interest that the DFL community might benefit from is developing knowledge of the types or features of a diverse range of negotiating practices deployed by different cultural groups. The learning stories I presented seemed to indicate that there were some culturally specific and educationally rooted ways that students had of resolving tensions in learning. It would be worth investigating more fully whether these differences are simply at the level of the individual or whether there may be similarities that might help course designers draw on widely available funds of knowledge to enhance learning for particular groups.

8.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has propelled me into the field of educational research focused on teaching and learning in DFL contexts. In the course of undertaking this study I have come to new understanding for myself and I hope contributed some new understanding — theoretical, methodological and pragmatic — for the field of DFL research itself.

Throughout my engagement in this research process, I have had to think, rethink and evaluate my work as a researcher and as a teacher and I have deepened my interest in attending to, and utilising, the first space resources that DFL students bring to learning. Instructional design therefore is not about just creating environments that support learning generally, but rather about the learning support specifically for groups of students who bring valuable cultural resources to bear on the work they are presented with in the official second spaces of university coursework. My purpose in this study was to understand more fully how first and second space resources are negotiated as participants form new hybrid practices that assist them in making meaning in second space contexts.

The findings from this research study are in no way critical of the systems in place at the USP’s DFL school, but rather a DFL student’s lens into the practices they bring to their DFL studies.
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### APPENDIX 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Nov.</th>
<th>Labasa Campus</th>
<th>Benda Obee LLB</th>
<th>A young civil servant working in the Legal Department of the Ministry of Justice. Has had a few years of work experience and a first year DFL student. She successfully completed a course in semester 1 and this was her second semester doing one course. She finds DFL study interesting and challenging and she's hoping to get a degree in Law. A very confident student and speaks very good English. She has taken up the study to occupy herself and at the same time upgrade her professional status. She feels that life in Labasa is boring because there is no night life and there are very few places of interest to go to. It’s a dead town which she has had to acclimatize to because her husband was transferred to Labasa during the year as a doctor for the government hospital here in Labasa. Seems to be geared to becoming a professional in her job as she expresses her desire to eventually go to attend the University of the South Pacific’s Law School in Port Vila, Vanuatu.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Nov.</td>
<td>Labasa GCED</td>
<td>Benda GCED</td>
<td>Is a Bachelor of Agriculture graduate and wants to become a teacher and so he is doing the teaching courses offered in the BED program. He is already teaching but he wants to upgrade his qualification to become a HOD (Head of Department) in Vocational Studies offered in some of our secondary schools. He prefers to stay in Labasa and study because he has to take care of an elderly grandmother who looked after him since his parents died. He is the sole breadwinner in the family. Feroz began studying in 2001 as a full time student at the main Laucala Campus in Suva but because of financial problems had to return to Labasa to study. While at Suva he had to live with relatives who were not always kind and he contributed in cash from a meagre inheritance left by his parents. He was struggling and so his grandmother had him recalled back to Labasa because they couldn’t keep up to the payments for his board and full time student fee. He enrolled in Labasa in 2004 and has since graduated in early 2007. He is very ambitious and wishes to go beyond what his parents achieved and has set higher goals for himself in future but he says that he is slowly pursuing his goals. He is no rush to achieve this because his first priority is his grandmother’s welfare. Feroz is also known as a pest in the office. Once the campus owed him an amount of money which was a couple of cents and he kept pursuing this amount until he eventually got it and when he did, he bought a bag of peas for the staff at campus which cost him more than what he was owed. An enthusiastic student and very vocal and is always willing to help in campus social functions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The USP Labasa Campus is the most recently established Campus in the region and is currently located within the Labasa Central Business District. In 1998 the Distance Education Committee and the Senate approved the establishment of the Labasa Campus in Labasa, Vanua Levu. The Campus officially began its operation on March 2000 after the appointment of the Director Fiji Centre (Northern). With the establishment of Labasa Campus, USP is in a position to serve the North better, as there has always been a pressing need for more higher education in the North. The Centre's area of operation covers the whole of Vanua Levu, Taveuni, Rabi and other outlying islands (USP, 2009) [http://www.usp.ac.fj/index.php?id=6842](http://www.usp.ac.fj/index.php?id=6842) It currently has 23 staff members headed by the Director Dr. Bogitini. The campus is centrally located opposite the main bus stations and is surrounded by many food and retail shops and within walking distance to all government departments and NGO's. The population of Labasa is about 27,949 with a growing young population (Fiji Census Report, 2008). This campus serves the population of all of the northern islands which number 135,961 (Fiji census report, 2008). The ethnic Fijians have now dominated this region which had previously been dominated by the Indian community. The decrease in the Indian community is largely due to the occurrences of military coup in the country. The campus's main administration surroundings include, three offices for staff members holding key positions, a working area for 5 established staff, a tutorial room, and 3 computer labs, a library, a librarian and centre lecturer’s rooms, a video-broadcasting room with all its equipments and facilities, a satellite room that includes a row of tables and chairs and equipments for satellite tutorials, a tea room and conveniences. All students have access to internet and all other services offered to full time face to face students at the University of the South Pacific Having worked here for a few years, noise pollution is the biggest problem here and this continues to be the problem.
which staff and pupils have got used to. Numbers of students at this campus had decreased due to a number of factors one of which is the effect of the current military coup which has affected financial situations of students, parents and families. Labasa campus has an advantage in that people have more freedom of expressing themselves particularly in the interviews that I conducted with participants.
Appendix 2: Interview transcript:

Interview 6- SavuSavu Urban - Tuli

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Utterance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Uh thank you Tuli thank you forrrr being aaah participant for this uh interview. Aaah the first question I’d like to ask you is uh on the term literacy. Have you ever heard or come across the word errh literacy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yes uh no aah ……….I’ve…umm…in the school I’ve learnt about literacy aah in my school and also in ……doing wh… my DFL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Aaah in school, aah what did you understand by the term literacy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Literacy…uhmmm………….uhhmmm is thereerrrr students aah student learn, errr way they speak and uh aahhm n…tsk aah with their knowledge inmmm………getting over it, the education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Mmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Mmm….that’s all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Right. Aaaai thank you aah (clears throat). Have you aah ever come across the term aah academic literacy or do you think you understand what academic literacy is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Mm, not really.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>You can guess orrrr i…if you vaguely understand a little orrrr maybe you, you think you can just make a suggestion as to what you think it could be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Academic literacy wer…i think is ummmm ……..umm knowledge in a …………in students to go to school…….?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Okay. Now erm just aah looking at your course eh, what course are you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Okay. Aarhm what is this course about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Aaah its urrm ….thos…….arr learning English in preparing you…ourselves into degree level?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Aahm do youuuuu understand the whole purpose of the course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yes…aah help us in our betterment of our English in school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Okay aaaa with the course materials that you use, aah what do yours…..i mean how do you use the course material? Do you use it on a daily basis everyday or only when you need assignments or when you want uhhh yeah something in the preparations of tests maybe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>I use myg….i read my course book when I’m doing my assignment, helping me, guiding me in myyy writing my assignment and also in …….during my test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>And uh do you find uh you understand whats in the course material?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yes, it helps a lot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>How does it help you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Errhm you kn………..with …… and what I learnt in high school like how to write formal essays and ………….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Is it any different from uhhh the kinds of writing you did in secondary school or is it the same?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Its more in detail. So I its …………..in university…….(mumbles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Which one did you understand better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>The one I’m doing now in university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Okay. What is it in this uhrr uh English that you’ve learnt that is not in secondary school English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>In secondary school English when we write essay we don’t do impact…….thats what new in urrm in university but umm the others are the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>So in the processes of the stages of writing essays are they the same?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Uh, no!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>They different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yes ma’am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>How are they different?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 34 | LO | Err in high school youuuu writing from your own knowledge you don’t have
to link from a book if you have to write in err giving err exams but inn…university wee have tooo we aah ….writing from other point of view and their own knowledge too. |
| 35 | LW | : Now umm the course materials uhhh can you aahh make meaning, can you
get the meaning out of the course materials that you doing? Do you
understand what's there and you are able to aah aahh make meaning out of it? |
| 36 | LO | I can. |
| 37 | LW | Are you able to use it too? |
| 38 | LO | Yes, with the help of the local tutors, yes. |
| 39 | LW | Oh okay so the tutors help. Now if you were to read it on your own, would
you think you’d be able to use it? |
| 40 | LO | Yes. |
| 41 | LW | Mm? Now umm have you ever come across a situation where you find you
can’t understand some of the things in the course material? |
| 42 | LO | Yes ma’am. |
| 43 | LW | What do you do? |
| 44 | LO | I email my local tutors asking them a question or wait until they come for
local tutorial in here. |
| 45 | LW | And…and do you get help? |
| 46 | LO | Yes ma’am. |
| 47 | LW | Now uhhm if you were to uhmm if you were to suggest where
……improving eh, the course material or what’s in it, the content, what sorts
of things would you suggest could be included or taken out of the current uh
course material in English? |
| 48 | LO | Mmm........errr…….t….more diagram on errrr…….(inhales) okay
I’mmmmm…..put it in diagramagicl form…. |
| 49 | LW | Mmm mmm….yeah diagrammatic form. |
| 50 | LO | ….and uh yes…..and uh also…..in point form coz most of the things are
written in paragraph. |
| 51 | LW | And you find the reading the paragraphs difficult? |
| 52 | LO | Yeah, I found it…… |
| 53 | LW | What is difficult in the paragraph? |
| 54 | LO | Its too big. |
| 55 | LW | Too big? |
| 56 | LO | Uh huh. |
| 57 | LW | Okay, so ther wh…what is it the words…? |
| 58 | LO | The words……….. |
| 59 | LW | …..the words that they use? |
| 60 | LO | They have, they both made the right…..so that you could …… |
| 61 | LW | Errr okay, and umm …..any other thing that you’d like to suggest……with er
that could improve er the course? You think it would improve aah……….. |
| 62 | LO | No |
| 63 | LW | Are you happy with the course? |
| 64 | LO | Yes ma’am. |
| 65 | LW | You okay with it? |
| 66 | LO | I’m okay with ……. |
| 67 | LW | No complaints to make? |
| 68 | LO | Nnn….no! |
| 69 | LW | With the assignments that you write, do the course materials help you? |
| 70 | LO | Uhh uhhhh mostly the assignments you need to do research from er thee
internet and in the library. |
<p>| 71 | LW | Mm hmm. |
| 72 | LO | Only the course book we have got for…for diagrams. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Okay, sooo what you saying is you still need more references sooo you’ll need to get that from internet and thats that’s what you get here in Savusavu?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Mm mm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Okay. And ummm yeah okay ahhhhmmm….when you arrr get your assignments back do you get a feedback like they tell you that you know this is what is wrong, you should have said this or you should have said that or you shouldn’t leave this out. Do they actually comment…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>…..like that? Mm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>And are you satisfied with the comment? You happy with it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Mmm Yees s ma’am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>MM doesn’t sound good! Okay. Aarrr do you think that you should aaaaah be able to make recommendations to the courses or do you think that’s what is ..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>In the course? Yeah!...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>What about the otherrrr……the other students that do English do you actually talk with them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Do you discuss your issues on this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>What are some of the things that you discuss?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Uhhhhmmm……errr ……..the questions that they ask me for our assignments we discuss it together and we write our own essays. Mmmm….yeah that it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Do you do a presentation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yes ma’am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>And uhhm you have no problems with it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Okay and umm then what happens to the presentation? Do youuuu send a copy of it orr……?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>No it was arh I did a presentation which was marked locally….mark local.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Ah okay. You have a local tutor. And the local tutors are helpful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Mm mm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>You understand uhh uhhhm their….their teaching, their tutoring? Is it helpful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yees MM…mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Do you find it more helpful or do you find that you yourself provide a lot of that help?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>I found it more helpful to….in er writing assignments we have to send him a draft so that he could mark it and then we prepare the final copy that’s ther…..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Okay, is there any other comment you’d like to make, regarding ah the course? Any comment at all. Anything that you’d like the uni maybe to do or to provide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Mm..mm..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Uhm……..the course itself ……..helped me in my English err better our English and uh….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>So you think that by doing English it will help you with the other courses that you’ll do later on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yes ma’am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Mm hmm okay. Errh I guess uh that’s it unless you want to tell me something of…..do you think there should be some improvement done? In the course material?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Nnnoooo. Eerrrrmmmm conduct it er a little sweetly and er conduct feedbacks ommm……notes and nn….coz we usually make our own notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>And you don’t know whether its right or wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>How often are the tutorials?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Fortnightly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Is this OK?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>No… weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>But you want a weekly? And you want thaar the local tutor or you want some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Aah local tutor we have but better for some other tutors from…..therr main campus to come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>LW</td>
<td>Aah what about the coordinator? Do you want the coordinator who is the one who runs the course, who’s done the course, who writes the course, do you think uh he should come?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115</td>
<td>LO</td>
<td>Yeah!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

Information Sheet for Participants

Research Project

*Academic Literacy Practices in Distance Education: Focussing on Print Based Materials for Learning*

**Chief Investigator:** Dr. Elizabeth Hirst (Chief Supervisor)

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**Student Researcher:** Leda Waqailiti – PhD student
**Assistant Researcher:** Benidito Waqailiti – PhD student

This research project is a PhD study from the Griffith University Gold Coast Campus.

**Research Aim**

The primary purpose of this research project is to examine literacy practices in distance education focussing particularly at the reading and writing practices. This research explores the literacy practices used in distance education courses and how students in distance education perceive literacy in their learning process and how they engage in these literacy practices. This research hopes to open up discussions on academic literacy practices for example, whether academic literacy practices are taken into account by course convenors or coordinators in the designing of course contents. It raises issues on literacy in tertiary institutions and how students and staff within a faculty describe academic literacy practices in the reading and writing tasks given in the courses offered at university. Equally important is to understand how students act upon these descriptions in reading and writing practices and how they describe these literacy practices taking into account social relationships and the physical and social environment. This enhances our understanding of the nature of academic literacy practices in third world country universities specifically in the context of the South Pacific Island States. The outcome of this will enable us to review literacy practices in our higher educational institutions and allow us to reconstruct literacy practices conducive to our learner’s situation and environment.

**Research Background**

- *The University of the South Pacific*

The University of the South Pacific (USP) is a Pacific regional educational institution serving 12 member countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Western Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The
main campus is in Laucala, Suva, capital of Fiji. The School of Agriculture is in Samoa and the School of Law in Vanuatu. Each region has a university campus but Fiji has two other campuses apart from the main campus, Labasa serving the north and Lautoka serving the western division. USP provides all programs offered to students ranging from certificate levels to diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Being a multi-modal university, it offers courses both face-to-face and by distance learning. 20,000 students are currently enrolled at USP, more than half study by distance education (USP 2006 Calendar,17), the majority being from Fiji.

- **The Campuses in Fiji**
  The majority of DFL students at USP are from Fiji. Data will be gathered from the three campuses in Fiji namely, Laucala, Lautoka and Labasa. Majority of DFL students in the Lautoka and Labasa campuses are teachers teaching in urban and rural areas in Fiji while Laucala campus has more face-to-face students than DFL students.

**Research Project Description**
Potential participants will take part in an interview that will be conducted by the student researchers, in the school premises or at any University of the South Pacific’s campuses. Participants may choose any one of these venues for the interview to be conducted. Prior to the interview, participants will be provided with a written version of the questions for the interview and will be briefed on the nature of the interview, its aims and the questions that will be asked. The interview will be conducted on a one to one basis in approximately one hour. The interviews will be recorded then transcribed and data collected from this will be used by the researcher for a thesis submission. The research students will collect all written versions of the interview questions issued to participants prior to the interview and these will be destroyed.

**Participation**
Participants in this research will be teachers enrolled in Distance & Flexible Learning courses offered by the University of the South Pacific. These teachers have trained in primary and secondary teacher institutions or are graduates with no teaching qualification and are required to do education courses to be able to teach in Fiji schools. Potential participants are selected from the urban and the rural areas based on their proximity to the USP campus. Participants in the rural areas will be selected on the basis of inaccessibility to most forms of regular communication with the university campus while urban participants will refer to those who have various forms of communication with the university campus readily available to them.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time without providing an explanation and without comment or penalty. Participants can contact the researchers if they wish to participate in this research project and/or they need further clarifications in relation to the research. All information will be confidential and your participation in this research will be not be revealed in any document published as a result of this research.

**Data Storage**
Data collected will be kept in a secure location accessible only to the investigator and the student researchers. The interview data will be transcribed and all tape recordings will be destroyed after transcription is complete. The data will be coded and de-identified and stored separately.
Feedback
All Participants will be sent a summary of the outcome of this research. The Minister of Education, the Director of the DFL Units at Laucala, Lautoka and Labasa campuses and the Director of the Fiji Research & Development Unit will also be sent a summary of this research outcome.

Ethical Conduct of this Research
Participants may discuss their participation in this research with the investigators and can direct any concerns to them. Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of this research project you should contact the Research Ethics Manager at the following addresses:

1) The Research Ethics Manager
   Office of Research
   Bray Centre, Griffith University,
   Kessels Road, Nathan. Qld. 4111

2) E-mail: research-ethics@griffith.edu.au

If for economical and/or social reasons participants are unable to contact the Research Ethics Manager at Griffith University, you may contact the Director of USP Lautoka Campus, Mr. Joe Veramu for any ethical concerns regarding this research. Mr. Veramu has guaranteed that he will refer all ethical concerns from participants to the Research Ethics Manager at Griffith University. Mr Veramu may be contacted at the following addresses:

   The Director
   USP Lautoka Campus
   Private Mail Bag, Lautoka, Fiji.
   Tel.: (679)666 6800
   Fax: (679)666 7133   Email: veramu_j@usp.ac.fj

Privacy Statement
The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity as a participant will be safeguarded at all times. For further information consult the University of Griffith’s Privacy Plan at www.griffith.edu.au/ua/aa/vc/pp_or telephone (07) 3875 5585.

Thank you for your assistance with this research.

Ledua Waqailiti
Appendix 4

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

27th June 2007

Research Project

Academic Literacy Practices in Distance Education:
Focusing on the print-based materials for learning

Chief Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth Hirst (Chief Supervisor)

School of Education & Professional Studies
Gold Coast Campus, Griffith University
PMB 50 Gold Coast Mail Centre
Queensland 9126, Australia.
Phone No. (07) 555 28629
Email: e.hirst@griffith.edu.au

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that I will be involved in the research study of academic literacy practices in DFL conducted by the researchers
- I understand that the data collected will include responses to an audio-taped interview between myself, other teachers and the researchers
- I also understand that the data collected will include responses to an interview designed for the researchers purpose in this task
- I understand that literacy practices in DFL studies will be discussed by the researcher and myself and that my participation will contribute to future researches in academic literacy
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I may withdraw at my time without comment and without penalty
I understand that I can contact the research team at any time for any additional question that I may have.

I understand that I can contact the Manager Research Ethics at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on (07) 5585 3875 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research.

I understand that I can also contact the Director of USP Lautoka Campus at Private Mail Bag, Lautoka, Fiji or on (679)666 6800 or vseramu.j@usp.ac.fj for any ethical concerns or complaints regarding this research project should I find it difficult to contact the Manager Research Ethics at Griffith University.

I agree to take part in this research.

Thank you for your assistance with this research.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Ledua Wqaqiliti
Research student
Dear Mrs Waqailiti

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the provisional approval granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project "Academic Literacy Practices in Distance Education Focusing on print-based materials for learning" (GU Ref No: EPS/27/07/HREC).

The additional information was considered by Office for Research. This is to confirm that this response has addressed the comments and concerns of the HREC.

Please note that we will shortly be updating the Griffith University Research Ethics Manual to reflect the changes to University phone numbers? eg the contact number for the Manager, Research Ethics should now be listed as 3735 5585.

Consequently, you are authorised to immediately commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this protocol continue to apply.

Regards

Gary Allen
Manager, Research Ethics
Office for Research
Bray Centre, Nathan Campus
Griffith University
ph: 3875 5585
fax: 3875 7994
e-mail: g.allen@griffith.edu.au
web:

Cc:
Appendix 5

Data Collection Research Questions

Section A: Student Information

Part 1: Personal Information

1. Name(s) .................................................................

2. Age (Please tick the appropriate box):
   - 18-27 yrs □
   - 28-37 yrs □
   - 38-42 yrs □
   - 33-47 yrs □
   - 48+ yrs □

3. Gender (Please tick the appropriate box):
   - Male □
   - Female □

4. Exam Campus (Please tick the appropriate box):
   - Labasa □
   - Lautoka □
   - Suva □

5. Exam Centre (Please write down the name of your exam centre).

6. Program of Study (Please tick the appropriate box):
   - B.Ed. □
   - BA.GCE. □
   - B.Sc. GCE. □
   - Other (Please specify): ...........................................

7. What year did you leave school? (Please tick the appropriate box):
   - 2000 - 2007 □
   - 1995 – 1999 □
   - 1990 – 1994 □
   - 1985 – 1989 □
   - 1980 – 1984 □
   - before 1980 □

8. What was the last formal examination you sat? (Please write the name of the exam).

9. Where did you sit this exam? (Name the place):

Part 2: Students Physical Environment

(Please tick the appropriate boxes for each question):

10. Where do you live
    - School compound □
    - Village □
    - Settlement □
    - Government Station □
    - Town/City □
    - Other (Please specify)

......................................................................................
11. Do you have a regular supply of electricity?  Yes ☐  No ☐

12. If your answer to question 11 is “No” then what is your regular source of power?
   Kerosene lamp ☐  Benzene lamp ☐  Solar ☐  None ☐
   Other (Please specify the type of power you use)……………………………………

13. What form of communication is available in your home?
   Easy Tel ☐  ISDN ☐  RT ☐  Vodafone ☐  None ☐

14. What mode of transport do you use to get to the main campus?
   Bus ☐  Boat ☐  Private Vehicle ☐  Taxi ☐  Walking ☐

15. How do you get to the exam centres?
   Bus ☐  Boat ☐  Private Vehicle ☐  Taxi ☐  Walking ☐

16. How far is your home from campus?
   Less than 10km ☐  Between 10-20km ☐  Between 20-30km ☐
   Between 30-40km ☐  Between 40-50 km ☐  Between 50 -70km ☐
   Between 70 – 100km ☐  More than 100km away ☐

17. How far is your home from the exam centre?
   Less than 10km ☐  Between 10-20km ☐  Between 20-30km ☐
   Between 30-40km ☐  Between 40-50 km ☐  Between 50 -70km ☐
   Between 70 – 100km ☐  More than 100km away ☐

18. How much do you spend on a return trip from campus or exam centre?
   Less than $20.00 ☐  $20- $40 ☐  $40- $60 ☐  $60 – $80 ☐
   $80 - $100 ☐  $100 - $150 ☐  $150 - $200 ☐  Above $200 ☐

Part 3:  Students Course Information

19. How long have you been studying through distance education?
   1-5 yrs ☐  5-10 yrs ☐  10-15 yrs ☐  15-20 yrs ☐  More than 20yrs ☐

20. When did you begin studying via DFL?

21. How many courses have you enrolled in and passed?
22. How many courses have you enrolled in and failed?

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23. What would be some of the reasons for failing?

- Poor course work
- Poor exam result
- Poor course work & exam result
- Didn’t withdraw from the course
- Other

(Specify) ………………………………………………………………………………………………………
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24. Which of these would be responsible for the poor result? (Please tick all appropriate boxes)

- I didn’t spend much time on doing my course work
- I was too tired after work to do my studies
- The assignments were too difficult to understand
- There were no resources to help me
- The assignments were too long
- I just didn’t have the time to do my studies
- I was too involved in school work
- I had too much community work to do
- Any other explanation (Please explain below):

……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

25. What delivery mode did you use for the DFL course you enrolled in?
26. Which mode do you find effective? (You may tick more than once)

Printed course material ☐ Video-broadcast ☐
WebCT ☐ Internet ☐
Face to face ☐

27. What were some of the problems you faced in these modes?

Poor acoustics ☐ Accent difficulties ☐
Illegible prints ☐ Network problems ☐
Inconvenient time ☐ ESL problem ☐
Campus management problem ☐
Other (Please explain):

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28. What improvements would you suggest for this mode of delivery?

Materials to be on time ☐ Legible material ☐
Simplified English ☐ More relevant reading material ☐
Simple assignment tasks ☐ Relevant assignment tasks ☐
More practical tasks ☐ Less volume in course materials ☐
Regular tutorial assistance ☐ Regular updates from coordinator ☐

Visitation by coordinators ☐ Workshops to be conducted ☐
Mobile Library service ☐ Availability of computers ☐
Other (Please specify): …………………………………………………………………………………
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Section B : Research Questions

Part 1: Students Prior Knowledge of Literacy

1. In your schooling days did you ever come across the word ‘literacy’?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ I can’t remember ☐

2. If you said yes, can you relate how this happened? (Please relate it)
   …………………………………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………………………………
   ………………………

3. When did you first know or hear about this term?
   At teachers college ☐ At university ☐ In the work place ☐
   In the news ☐ In the dailies ☐ By friends ☐
   Other ☐ (Please explain)…………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………………………………
   ………………………

4. How did this term come up?
   Fellow teachers ☐ Head teacher/Principal ☐ Students ☐
   Education officers ☐ Ministry of Education ☐ Tertiary Institution ☐

5. Do you understand what ‘literacy’ meant in traditional education?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t know ☐ Vaguely ☐

6. Do you understand what ‘literacy’ means in modern day education?
   Yes ☐ No ☐ Don’t know ☐ Vaguely ☐

7. How would you classify yourself?
   Literate ☐ Semi-literate ☐ Illiterate ☐

8. Why do you rate yourself as this? (Give reasons)
   …………………………………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………………………………
   …………………………………………………………………………………………………
   ………………………

9. How would you define literacy? (Please explain)

Part 2: Students Current Experiences
10. What course(s) are you doing through DFL? (Please name the course)
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

11. What resources do you have for this course? (Tick the appropriate boxes)

Course materials by USP ☐  Readers ☐  I&A ☐
Textbooks ☐  Audio tapes ☐  Video/CD ☐

12. What is the name of the text book(s) you’re using? (Please List them).
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

13. Are these accessible to you?   Yes ☐  No ☐

14. Can you get them easily?       Yes ☐  No ☐

15. If you ticked ‘No’, please state your reason(s)…………………………………………………………………………………..
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

16. Do you use all the resources sent to you for this course?   Yes ☐  No ☐

17. Are all the resources useful?   Yes ☐  No ☐  Partially ☐

18. Which of these resources do you find most helpful in your study? (Rank them in order of priority from 1 which is the most useful to 5 the least helpful)

Course materials by USP ......  Readers ......  I&A ......
Textbooks ......  Audio tapes ......  Video/CD ......

19. Do these materials stimulate your interest & thinking?
Yes ☐  No ☐  Sometimes ☐

20. How do they stimulate your interest & thinking? (Please explain).
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

21. Do you find your course materials useful?   Yes ☐  No ☐  Sometimes ☐

22. Give reasons for your answer to question 20.
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

23. Have you any suggestions about how the text selection could be made?
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

24. How does the textbook help the course materials? (Please explain)
Part 3: Students Knowledge of Academic Literacy

25. What do you understand or know about academic literacy?
26. How would you describe academic literacy in your studies?
27. What are some aspects of academic literacy that you can think of?
28. How should literacy be done?
29. Is there any difference between everyday language and academic language used in your studies?
30. What would be the difference(s)?
31. What would you then describe academic literacy to be?
32. Do you aspire to produce good academic literacy?
33. Why?
34. How would you then achieve this?
35. How would you benefit from academic literacy?

Part 4: Students Use of Texts

36. What are the stages you follow when you begin reading your course material?
37. How do you make meaning out of texts?
38. What strategies help you understand the text?
39. What do you do when you find the readings difficult to understand?
40. What available help do you use to assist you to combat these difficulties?
41. What strategy or strategies do you use to cope with the problems you face in reading?
42. How long does it take you to read a text and be able to understand its contents?
43. Would you like to suggest ways these could be done?
44. How do you make sense of
   - Assignments
   - Tests
   - Texts?
45. How do you use the contents of your readings in your writings?
46. Do you find it easy or difficult?
47. What makes it easy or difficult?
48. Can you suggest ways in which you could be assisted in this?