An Investigation of Practitioners' Conceptualisations of Quality Academic Work in Higher Education Offshore Programs

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Abstract

A manifestation of the globalisation and internationalisation of higher education has been the growth of offshore programs conducted by Australian universities, especially in the Asian region. A concern with quality assurance and quality improvement has accompanied this trend. There have been relatively few studies about offshore programs from the viewpoint of academics. The prime purpose of this study, therefore, was to gain insights into the nature of quality academic work in offshore programs as conceptualised by academics. Through a deeper understanding of their perspectives, the researcher sought to determine the factors that participants identified as having crucial influences on the quality of their offshore work.
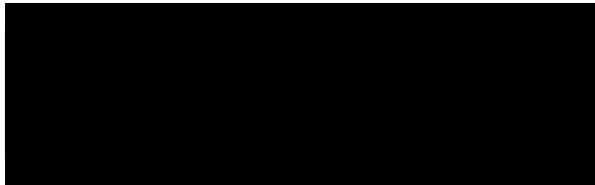
A constructivist methodological perspective, with its underpinning ontological and epistemological position that reality is formed within a social construct and concepts are constructed by the researcher and participants, was chosen as the most appropriate match to both address the central research question, and to align with the stance of the researcher. A qualitative interview-based design was employed, the main objective of which was to gather and analyse detailed accounts from a purposeful sample of 16 lecturer level academics from Australian higher education institutions, who had taught in offshore programs in Hong Kong. The main data collection method was individual in-depth semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis was utilised to unearth the themes in the data.

The guiding conceptual frame for the research was informed by: concepts of academic work, internationalisation of higher education, and of quality, along with Schwab's (1973) four commonplaces of education, and learning and cultural lenses. The findings and conclusions were supported by theoretical insights and verbatim interview extracts which highlighted the voices of participants. Three sets of factors were revealed: the contextual environment factors of contemporary academic work and notions of quality; the extrinsic factors of curriculum, student and institution; and the factors intrinsic to the academic. The confluence of these factors, interlinked through notions of learning, represented the conceptualisations of quality offshore academic work found in this study.

Student Declaration

"I, Bernadette Hosking, declare that the EdD thesis entitled An Investigation of Practitioners' Conceptualisations of Quality Academic Work in Higher Education Offshore Programs is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that had been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis was my own work".

Signature…

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Date…………13/03/2018……………………………………………………

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Chapter One
Introduction to the Study

"Traditional approaches to academic work are being battered by new approaches to funding, new epistemologies and ontologies, increasing competitiveness and internationalisation, policies seeking to measure research performance, institution-specific funding compacts, reshaped tertiary architectures, stronger forms of quality control, and broader technological advances and changes in the nature of professional work" *(Coates & Goedegebuure 2010 p. 6).*

Coates and Goedegebuure's (2010) observation that increasing competitiveness and internationalisation, and stronger forms of control of quality, are challenging factors for academic work in contemporary higher education are particularly pertinent to this qualitative study, as it is an investigation of the nature of quality academic work from the perspectives of Australian academics teaching within offshore programs. While there are various forms of offshore education, such as academics leading study groups abroad, and project based programs, the specific focus of this study is on academics from Australian universities, who, as short-term visiting lecturers, have taught Hong Kong students undertaking subject-based business degree programs provided by Australian universities. Similarly to Chapman and Pyvis (2013), a central aim is to better understand academics' conceptualisations of quality in Australian offshore higher education through their own voices.

This chapter sets the scene for the study by reviewing major trends in the two broad fields of knowledge that informed this current research; they were, respectively, internationalisation and quality in higher education. This then leads into the specific focus of the research problem and the ways it was addressed. Major bodies of theory specific to this study are identified, and resulting research issues that contributed to the focusing of data collection and analysis are presented. The constructivist approach, which was

devised to meet the intention of contributing to the body of knowledge about quality offshore academic work, by furthering the depth of understanding of how individual academics conceptualised their work, is introduced. This chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

Globalisation, Internationalisation and Quality in Higher Education

The exploration and examination of globalisation, internationalisation and quality, individually and jointly, and from a range of global, regional, national, institutional and individual stakeholders, have noticeably intensified since the 1990s. This study is situated within these important intertwined agendas in Australian higher education. The following consideration of their key trends aims to establish the overall fields of knowledge, review previous research, and indicate the research gap to be addressed in the study. It also provides a foundation of contextual literature, which is expanded upon in greater detail in Chapter Two, where developments in international higher education, the nature of the offshore context, and the anchoring theme of learning are reviewed.

There is much debate as to the nature of globalisation. Global trends in recent decades have included more open economies, as well as the rapid development and utilisation of technology, which have resulted in an increasingly integrated global economy. Scott (2000) noted that, although the terms globalisation and internationalisation are often used interchangeably, globalisation is a more turbulent phenomenon that is one aspect of a larger societal shift from modernity to postmodernity and the knowledge society. Thus, it needs to be taken into account in order to understand the challenges in higher education in the 21st Century. For Marginson (2000), globalisation referred to the growing role of world systems situated outside and beyond nation states, while internationalisation was the change in relations between nations and their cultures. Altbach and Knight's (2007) distinction is that globalisation is the context of economic and academic trends, and internationalisation includes the coping responses of policies and practices undertaken by academic systems, institutions and individuals.

Beerkins (2003) attributed the difficulty in conceptualising the term globalisation as partly due to the wide range of disciplines that have addressed the process. He offered four different conceptualisations of globalisation related to different reference points: as a geographical concept rather than a local one; within the context of power and authority, thereby distinguishing it from territorial sovereignty and the nation state; as a cultural concept involving the mixing of cultures; and as a more holistic institutional concept involving some form of cosmopolitan solidarity, rather than social cohesiveness embedded in national institutions. A postmodern approach (Dixon 2006), however, viewed globalisation and notions of time, space, subjectivity, and agency as being socially constructed by the actors involved, through their shifting and contested positionings, which were multiple, complex and uncertain in nature. Universities have various faces: benefactors, providers for the public good, and marketers. The positioning of the university shifts between these faces, although the marketing face is clearly linked to globalisation, and shares connotations of economic imperatives and Western dominance.

This globalisation process has necessitated significant changes in all areas of life, including higher education (Findlay & Tierney 2010). Indeed, perspectives on the variety of economic, social, political, moral, ethical, racial and cultural definitions offered for globalisation demonstrate its complexity (Held & McGrew 2005; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton 2000; Lechner & Boli 2015; van Damme 2000), and illustrate the magnitude of the task facing both individual universities and the higher education system in general. Global learning, for instance, was defined by Green (2019) as the critical analysis of, and an engagement with, complex, interdependent, natural, physical, social, cultural, economic, and political global systems and legacies, and their implications for people and sustainability.

Altbach and Teichler (2001) emphasised that universities have an unprecedented importance and centrality in the global knowledge-based environment of the 21st century, as they provide research for innovation, and training for knowledge- and service-based industries. However, universities and their staff perceive globalisation on a continuum from opportunity to threat, and their reactions range from enthusiastically embracing new

initiatives, through reluctant acknowledgment, to a determined resistance to change (Scott 2004). There is general agreement, however, that globalisation and internationalisation are closely intertwined and that, as a response to globalisation (Knight 2010; Knight & deWit 1997), internationalisation is changing the face of higher education.

Fundamental concerns of universities have been the advancement of human understanding and the universality of knowledge, yet the challenge of the market is central in the current era of globalisation and internationalisation (Yang 2002). Scott (2006) cautioned that despite internationalisation's undeniable economic and scientific contributions, the pursuit of universalism may come at the cost of losing distinctive cultural heritages. There are powerful market and government forces that have significantly affected the management ideas, structure and operation of universities. Universities have moved from a service profile to a market profile, and into the global marketplace in ways that are reshaping their purposes and the knowledge they produce and deliver (Dixon 2006). Such forces introduce an imbalanced economic focus to planning, educational objectives and learning outcomes (Schapper & Mayson 2005), institutional and academic autonomy (Marginson 2000), and curriculum reform (Rizvi 2007).

Higher education stakeholders, such as institutions, departments, academics, administrators, and students are likely to experience competing academic, sociocultural, political and economic rationales and objectives for internationalisation (Knight & de Wit 1995), and have contested positionings (Dixon 2006). Stella (2006), for example, identified that financial diversification by institutions, broadening of curricula and experiences for students, networking for collective learning and development, and resource sharing by academics caused significant concerns and dilemmas for these diverse stakeholders, although there were also the potential benefits of intellectual enrichment and enhanced mutual cultural understanding.

Connell, Collyer, Maia and Morrell (2017), in their discussion of changing social perspectives on knowledge, from the old sociology of knowledge to current post-colonial debates, proposed that knowledge, rather than being an abstract construction, is the

product of specific forms of social labour and practice. Under neoliberal globalisation, there has been a re-structuring of education towards a market focus, the growing commodification of knowledge, and the management and control of intellectual work. Connell (2014) noted that the autonomy of a workforce is weakened by the privatisation of higher education, the standardisation of curricula and pedagogy and increased competition Globally, neoliberal pedagogy is entangled in the logic of market individualism and efficiency, adding value to particular forms of labour power capacity (Chang and McLaren 2018). They found that the accumulation of cultural, social and mobility capital, one indicator of which was a higher quality of English proficiency, was greater for 'mobile' transnational students, whose experience was undertaken overseas, rather than for those 'immobile' students who studied *in situ* in Hong Kong. Waters and Leung (2013) speculated this was an also indicator of class reproduction, and the increase of spatial and social differentiation increasingly characteristic of international higher education.

Education, therefore, is not apolitical, value-neutral and objective, rather it promotes particulars ways of thinking, forms of knowledge and value systems, at the expensive of others (Asgharzadeh 2008). European and North American materials have been the prevailing focus of institutionalised and transmitted knowledge forms, sustained in the post-colonial world by differences of wealth and institutional support, and reinforced through definitions of best practice, scientificity, or modernity, as well as Northern biases in study, research and work choices demonstrated by knowledge workers.

However, vigorous knowledge debates are emerging in the colonised and post-colonial world in diverse fields, including education, with the application of Southern theory and post-colonial perspectives to several concerns, including claims of local autonomy made by groups such as, indigenous peoples, cultural minorities, gender groups, first peoples, religious movements, and political associations (Breitz & Peters 2010). The critique of Western knowledge systems has been accompanied by more globally inclusive views. Yet, the post-colonial world is not uniform, as depicted by differences in Brazil, South Africa and Australia Connell *et al*. (2017). Thus, knowledge formation occurs in specific time, space and social contexts. An important dynamic of such trends is the creation of

new knowledge arenas that may challenge existing discipline boundaries within organised knowledge, the institutional boundaries of knowledge institutions, and the power of the Northern-centred economy of knowledge.

Despite numerous investigations of the nature of internationalisation of higher education, it remains a highly complex and contested concept with little consensus as to a universal definition; indeed, perspectives have varied from all-encompassing approaches to specific activities. For example, van Damme's (2000) standpoint was that of the expanding global reach of universities over national boundaries, often supported or framed by multilateral agreements or programs. Others, including van der Wende (1997), saw it as ranging from any broad, systematic, sustained effort responsive to the requirements and challenges of the globalisation of societies, economy and labour markets, to more narrow foci, such as academic mobility of individual staff and students, joint research across locations, multicultural education, student exchange, and programs tailored for overseas students.

Internationalisation has also been considered, variously, as a process that integrates an international, intercultural or global outlook into any educational perspective, activity or program, including scholarship, teaching, research and institutional management (Hamilton 1998; Knight & de Wit 1997; Manning 1998), while Asgharzadeh (2008) contended that it was largely about intercultural communications and associated issues of power, privilege, exclusion, marginalisation, voice, and silence. Irrespective of specific viewpoints, Crossman and Burdett (2012) contended that the holistic nature of internationalisation impacts on curriculum development, teaching, learning and research, as well as administrative activities, and domestic and offshore partnerships. The pervasive impact of internationalisation in recent decades has been reflected in the research identified in project reports, such as those by Caruana and Spurling (2007) and Caruana and Ploner (2012). Many of the aspects of internationalisation of higher education considered in these types of reporsts are investigated within the context of this study.

Attempts to reform global higher education, such as the Bologna Process (started in 1999), which included easier international cooperation and related activities amongst its intended consequences, took the stance of overarching and comprehensive approaches to

assist in the integration of the numerous perspectives on internationalisation (Deardorff, de Wit, Heyl & Adams 2012). However, the effectiveness and consistency of the global transference and impacts of such large-scale attempts at reform of the internationalisation activities of universities has been challenged by recent investigations. Zmas (2015), for example, found that a consequence of the socio-economic, political, historical and cultural context of each region resulted in local particularities in cross-border transparency of qualifications, transnational improvement of quality assurance, and interregional mobility of students or scholars. The continuing growth of the offshore higher education sector (the contextual setting of this study), whereby students are located in a country different from the awarding institutions (McBurnie & Ziguras 2007) adds further complexity to the impacts of localisation of international perspectives.

The following overview of Australia's involvement in international education provides a broader contextual focus for this research into offshore programs delivered by Australian higher education institutions. International education has a long history in the Australian education system. The Colombo Plan in the 1950s supported international students to study in Australia under full or partial scholarships from the Australian Government. In the late 1980s, a second wave of international education began with educational institutions accepting full fee-paying international students.

There was a further shift in the context of the higher education sector in the 1990s, from generous, government-funded, and planned higher-education expansion and democratisation policies (DeAngelis 1998), towards rationalisation, corporatisation and marketisation (Kenway & Langmead 1998). The trends and rhetoric in many higher education reviews and policies (Baird 2010; Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales 2008; Dawkins 1988; Karpin 1995; Nelson 2002; West 1998) were at once catalysts and, at the same time, reflections of these changes. One profound response was Australia becoming an early adopter in the provision of education to international students in Australia and in offshore locations, especially in Asia (Castle & Kelly 2004). This was enabled by Australia's regional proximity, English-language based education system (Manning 1998), historical links with Asia (Beaumont 2000), and the strong ties between many Australian and Asian higher education institutions (Milner & Morris-Suzuki 1998).

Marginson (2007) identified key factors: the growing demand for cross-border education in the Asia-Pacific; Australia's proximity and competitive fees compared to United States and United Kingdom; deregulation and business conditions for growth; and reductions in government funding.

There is little doubt that Australia has achieved significant economic success in the international education arena, and that the reality of delivery of education in many Australian universities has not only been through onshore programs. Dixon (2006) and Davis and Mackintosh (2011) demonstrated that other forms of education such as distance learning, blended learning, face-to-face offshore programs, and overseas campuses have all featured in their international activities. As the Baird Review (2010) reported, the move towards greater internationalisation of Australian education resulted in a growing number of international students over the past two decades, with great economic benefits to Australia in terms of export income, in the order of $17 billion and 126,000 jobs.

In 2014, 16% of Australian higher education revenue was generated from international students. This rose to 17% in 2016 and 19% in 2017, when international education was Australia's largest service export. In 2017, there were 431,438 international students studying Australian higher education courses, with approximately 28% of them studying offshore. Of these, 39,262 students were enrolled in offshore programs provided at offshore Australian university campuses, 72,697 were enrolled in programs delivered through partnerships between Australian and foreign institutions, and 7,392 were enrolled in distance education (TEQSA 2018; Universities Australia 2017).

The top nations for offshore higher education provision were Singapore, China, Malaysia, Vietnam, India, United Arab Emirates and Hong Kong (Australian Government, Department of Education and Training 2018). The Australian Financial Review (2017) reported that Universities Australia argued against planned government savings in the higher education sector, as Australia's excellent reputation for high-quality university education, along with its proximity to Asia and a lower Australian dollar, fuelled education export earnings to a record $21.8 billion in 2016. Such statistics lend weight to this study's purpose of exploring quality academic work in offshore programs offered by

Australian universities. This rapid growth of offshore education had major impacts on tertiary teaching and learning including the challenges of cross border quality assurance, and changes in: modes of delivery, patterns of mobility for students and educators, student cohorts, curriculum cultural contexts, and roles and relationships between and across academics and students (Chapman & Pyvis 2013; Dunn & Wallace 2008).

Despite the economic benefits, this changing international landscape of higher education, which some argue is driven largely by an economic rationale, has produced uncertainty in the everyday practices of systems, institutions, academics and learners (Ninnes & Hellsten 2005). Once primarily focused on teaching and learning issues and on research activities, traditional academic work has been impacted upon by market forces, which have increased administrative demands, international travel, and marketing, recruitment, entrepreneurial and consulting activities (Schapper & Mayson 2005). These roles have often been compounded by greater workload demands and a growing emphasis on monitoring performance standards and accountability (Coaldrake & Stedman 1999; 2016) through quality assurance processes. Indeed, paralleling internationalisation, quality issues have emerged, in recent decades, as an active area of attention for several stakeholders including global entities, governments, universities, external quality agencies, employers, students and academics.

The interwoven and, arguably, interdependent nature of the two themes of internationalisation and quality, has been a consistent theme in both global and local higher education literature. Van der Wende (1999) claimed that, as internalisation seemed strongly linked to improving the quality of higher education, then it should not be seen as an end in itself but as a means for enhancing quality. Anderson, Johnson and Milligan (2000) and van der Wende (2007) identified that the process of internationalisation put pressure on existing systems of quality assurance, particularly as the latter were typically based on domestic policy approaches. The ongoing interest in this nexus between quality and internationalisation was recently demonstrated, for example, by Hazelkorn (2015), who described quality as a key stimulus for, as well as an impactful factor on, the increasingly competitive national and global contemporary higher education international framework.

While acknowledging the interconnectivity between internationalisation and quality, the intricacies of the relationship can be better understood through a consideration of key trends which have emerged in the quality debate since the late 1990s. Similar to the debates about definitions of internationalisation, there has been dispute amongst stakeholders as to the definition of what quality is, how it can be measured, and what are appropriate approaches and purposes of quality assurance (Woodhouse 1996; Yin & Wai 1997). Indeed, for some: "Quality has become a universalising metanarrative" (Morley 2003 p.vii), which has been viewed from multiple global, national, institutional and individual levels. An early global perspective, for example, has been articulated as a demonstration to society of the upholding of expected standards (UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, Autonomy, Social responsibility and Academic Freedom 1998), which relied, primarily, on the delivering institution establishing, maintaining and measuring the quality of courses, standards of delivery, and assessment of all functions and activities.

The emerging quality challenges in the offshore sector were addressed in Sharing Quality Higher Education Across Borders (UNESCO 2004), Quality and Recognition in Higher Education, and The Cross-border Challenge (OECD 2004). Clayton and Ziguras (2011) claimed that in the Australian context, offshore activities were routinely subjected to rigorous scrutiny at their inception, and programs were repeatedly examined through ongoing quality assurance regimes from both Australia and host countries, activities which were indicative of global influences on local procedures and practices.

At a national level in Australia, attention on quality saw the formal establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in March 2000 by the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). Watty (2002) attributed the impetus for the formation of this entity to the on-going progression and formalisation of external quality assurance monitoring instigated by Australian governments since the late 1980s. AUQA's ultimate purpose was to promote, audit, and report on quality assurance in Australian higher education.

The publication of several reports on aspects of quality in the early 2000s was a further demonstration of the focus on quality, but also on the diverse and, potentially, competing perspectives on quality. Striving for Quality (DEST 2002), for instance, discussed the changing contexts of teaching and learning, including internationalisation and subsequent impacts on quality issues; Quality through Diversity (Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee 2002) addressed quality issues in relation to teaching knowledge and skills, and measuring student learning; and Higher Education at the Crossroads (Nelson 2002) emphasised a productivity of learning stance, which borrowed from total quality management approaches. A National Quality Strategy for Australian Transnational Education and Training (DEST 2005) sought to develop a consistent, robust and comprehensible quality strategy by drawing together the many existing offshore quality assurance arrangements.

In 2008, the Bradley Review recommended the establishment of the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) as an independent statutory authority, located within the Australian Government education portfolio, whose mission was to further enhance quality and support accreditation through the regulation and assurance of the quality of Australia's large, diverse and complex higher education sector, including offshore programs. The operations of AUQA were transferred to TEQSA in January 2012. The establishment of such quality agencies, along with the number and variety of formal reports on quality, were indicative of the spotlight on quality in higher education and, therefore, were in alignment with Coates and Goedegebuure's (2010) proposition that academic work was being impacted upon by stronger quality controls.

Quality in higher education has its underpinnings in traditional approaches to quality in manufacturing systems and organisations, such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Quality Assurance (QA); yet, education is generally regarded as a service industry. The influence of these approaches was evident in the higher education quality literature since the 1990s (Taylor & Hill 1993), but became particularly prevalent during the 2000s. These approaches appeared to be driven, primarily, by economic and productivity rationales in response to the increasingly competitive higher education environment. The applicability of TQM, for example, as an approach to transformative change in education

was a source of debate in the quality discourse; some advocated its potential to contribute to the development of models of educational excellence (Sakthivel & Raju 2006), or to the improvement of university administrative and service functions (Srikantha & Dalrymple 2005), while others were critical of its relevance, fitness for purpose or transferability to a service sector, the centrality of which was believed to be, primarily, about learning (Houston 2007; Koch 2003).

The prevalence of QA as a theme in the quality literature over recent decades, indicated that its policies and procedures have become increasingly standardised across national boundaries, and that its strongest advocates tended to be governments and senior management. Indeed, Cheung (2006) argued that international cooperation between quality assurance agencies to develop common guidelines and rules would solve problems of uneven standards and procedures. However, QA has also been met with less enthusiasm and, indeed, in some instances, by resistance, from proponents of professional autonomy and academic freedom. Indicative examples of criticisms of QA in higher education included: weak conceptual and theoretical foundations (Blackmur 2008; D'Andrea 2007); over-focus on accreditation rather than on improving the quality of teaching and learning (Amaral & Rosa 2010; Faber & Huisman 2003); and bureaucratisation of audits which caused tension with the professional values of academics (Cheng 2009), especially in regard to external rather than internal quality audit processes (Cheng 2011).

The often competing standpoints on, and evaluations of, the contribution of specific aspects of QA underscored the diversity of activities and perspectives on quality in higher education. Examples of these different views included: standards and benchmarking of courses (Booth 2013; Jackson 2002; Laugharne 2002; Yorke 2002), perceptions of quality standards (Lomas & Tomlinson 2000; Louw, Bosch & Venter 2001), quality awards for staff performance (Lawrence & Dangerfield 2001), assessment of student learning (Bramming 2007; Knight 2002), student experiences of offshore education (Pyvis & Chapman 2004), and the purpose and value of formalised student feedback (Bean 2005; Harvey 2003; Kane, Williams & Cappuccini-Ansfield 2008). Indeed, Houston (2007), Knight and Trowler (2000) and Newton (2010) argued that an imbalance exists between

quality assurance and quality enhancement with a resultant emphasis on the achievement of standards over continuous improvement.

Less attention has been given to the individual perspectives of academics in the quality literature, although they are frequently impacted upon by quality initiatives imposed on universities as a consequence of reports and reviews. McElwee and Scott (2000) argued that academics should have greater involvement in the quality debate, particularly as they may hold values and conceptions of quality that are different to other stakeholders. Indeed, Harvey and Green (1993) found that quality has been defined as exception, as perfection, as fitness for purpose, as value for money, and as transformative. Similarly, Newton (2002) described quality as contested, as there were competing voices and discourses, and academics and managers viewed quality differently. Front-line academics' perceptions of quality, for example, included a lack of mutual trust, suspicion of management motives, impression management, tokenism and ritualism, and confusing demands. Chalmers (2010) reported that the reward and recognition of quality teaching, through systematic implementation of indicators and metrics, were also suggestive of possible misalignments between conceptions and expectations of quality drawn from disparate discourses, and stakeholder perspectives.

Drawing upon interviews with over fifty academics from fourteen United Kingdom universities, Worthington and Hodgson (2005) identified that quality assurance was frequently perceived as a stressful, thankless and time consuming activity, with the involvement of academics being limited to providing teaching and learning documentation. Quality assurance in the global education market involved power, control and surveillance over the academic labour process, and, therefore, was a form of Taylorism. Accountability, surveillance and regulation of the academic labour process was also emphasised by Morley (2003), who linked these characteristics to private-sector market values concerned with productivity and performance output.

For Watty (2003), the consequence of a lack of consensus amongst academics and other stakeholders was conflict between managerial expectations and academics' views of their own responsibilities. Anderson (2006), for example, found Australian academics were

committed to the notion of quality as excellence in scholarship, however they were sceptical of the 'instrumental, minimalist and mediocre' forms of quality assurance favoured by educational policy makers, which they perceived were mainly concerned with minimum standards. According to Watty (2006), academics favoured a definition of quality as a transformational process negotiated between the teacher and the student. Furthermore, Newton (2010) contended that, as academics implemented quality based on their perceptions, then it could only be properly understood relative to their constructions. The experiences, perceptions and constructed conceptualisations of the quality of their offshore work was the essence of the investigation of academics in this current study.

The desirability of quality improvement in higher education through the lens of a quality culture, characterised by transparency and commitment from all stakeholders, was aptly expressed by Harvey and Williams (2010):

> *"Quality, for it to become part of the lived experience of all stakeholders in higher education, needs to become a fundamental part of what is done in the sector. A genuine culture of quality is necessary. However, there is always a tension between quality as ritual and quality as it is owned by its stakeholders". (Harvey, L & Williams, J, Fifteen Years of Quality in Higher Education, Quality in Higher Education, Vol. 16, No. 1, April 2010, p.4).*

The above review of major trends in internationalisation and quality revealed that, despite the extensive conceptual and empirical research associated with the global and local implementation of quality policies, there was no clear agreement as to their definitions and purposes, nor was there any certainty as to the extent of their contribution to improving higher education in general. The tensions resulting from competing perspectives on quality are likely to be exacerbated by the additional complexities arising in offshore programs.

It is within these multifaceted, dynamic and tension-filled conditions that contemporary academics carry out their work. Traditionally, the roles of academics were characterised by long-established values and practices that were embedded within a culture of academic

individualism and autonomy, but changing policies and tasks shift local control and individual autonomy to a more collective and institutional focus, along with a blurring of distinctions between categories of staff (Coaldrake & Stedman 1999). As Kogan and Teichler (2007) contended, academics perceive a substantial change of their job roles in an internationalised higher education environment: less professional autonomy, pressure from external societal expectations, increased monitoring and control of their performance in both teaching and research, and a decline of possibility to influence their organisations. Moreover, while full-time academics have reduced levels of influence over institutional decision-making, Mok and Nelson (2013) found that their part time counterparts, the numbers of whom are rapidly escalating, have even less. Indeed, Andrews, Bare, Bentley, Geodegeburre, Pugsley and Rance (2016) argued that the casualisation of the Australian academic workforce necessitated the gathering of more information about impacts on the quality of educational outcomes, and the support required for individual career development.

Similarly, Worthington and Hodgson (2005) saw global education work practices, such as quality assurance and quality auditing, as displacing the traditional self-regulation of professional accountability, resulting in a shift from trust relationships in universities to a culture of institutionalised distrust. Slade's (2011) perception was that such changes reflect an industrialisation of higher education, where the role of an academic is compartmentalised into teaching, research, administration and community work; yet, Jones (2011) argued that the complexity of academic work meant that effective academic development depended on taking a holistic approach, which integrated the components of academic work from a range of perspectives. Crawford (2010), however, highlighted that despite being the recipients, the voices of academics were largely missing from the dominant discourses of academic development.

The key themes discussed in the preceding review of trends in internationalisation and quality in higher education provided insights that assisted in scoping the central research question. By establishing dominant themes in the literature, those areas and perspectives that have had relatively less attention were also pinpointed, in particular, the offshore component of international education, specific cultural contexts, and the perspectives of

individual academics. In light of these gaps, and with the intent of contributing to relevant discourses and academic praxes, this study sought to unearth the essence of conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work through the voices of academics, as they recounted their perceptions of, and experiences in, Hong Kong programs.

The Purpose of the Study and the Research Question

The preceding discussion suggests that the shift in focus towards internationalisation and quality assurance in contemporary higher education meant that academics teaching in offshore programs continue to be subjected to numerous and changing influences and expectations, yet their voices on these matters have been given relatively scant attention to date. The purpose of this research, then, is to investigate the experiences of such academics in order to better understand how they conceptualise the quality of their offshore work, in particular, to more clearly identify and explore both the facilitating and impeding factors that have shaped their notions of the quality of this work. In addition to insights from the reviews of globalisation, internationalisation and quality, a consideration of Schwab's (1973) four commonplaces of curriculum subject content, learner, teacher and milieu contributed to the formulation of an organising framework for the further review of relevant literature in Chapter Two, and in subsequent findings and discussions. Cultural and learning lenses furthered conceptual and contextual elucidation.

Specifically, this study focuses on academics who are at lecturer level in their institutions, and whose offshore work mainly involves classroom teaching. Of particular concern to this investigation is the identification and exploration of the factors which shaped their conceptualisations of quality offshore academic work and, to distil from these findings, implications for contemporary academic work. In order to do so, the key research question addressed in this study is:

How is quality academic work conceptualised by academic practitioners in higher education offshore programs?

In order to answer the research question, information was gathered about four issues. These issues were developed from concepts and themes pertaining to quality academic work identified in the preceding discussion, and in the comprehensive literature review in Chapter Two, namely, themes in globalisation, internationalisation and quality in higher education, Schwab's (1973) four education commonplaces, learning perspectives, and specific aspects of the cultural context of the study.

The four research issues expressed as sub-questions are:

- *What are academics' conceptualisations of their academic work?*
- *What are academics' conceptualisations of quality in higher education?*
- *How do extrinsic factors contribute to academics' conceptualisations of quality academic work in the offshore context?*
- *How do intrinsic factors contribute to academics' conceptualisations of quality academic work in the offshore context?*

Rationale, Significance and Anticipated Outcomes of the Study

In the current Australian economic and political environment, internationalisation, including offshore activities, is a key focus for many higher education institutions in their pursuit of a larger revenue base through greater global reach and market share. As demonstrated by the vast array of policy documentation produced both within institutions and external agencies, this strategic direction has been accompanied by greater formal attention to quality assurance of international activities, a major intention of which is, arguably, to contribute to commercial competitive advantage. Yet in addition to economic goals, higher education institutions serve numerous educational and societal purposes. Scott (2006) asserted that universities had a multiplicity of dynamic, fluid, multilayered, and often coexisting and interrelated, missions united by an interconnecting theme of service, which have evolved from Medieval to the postmodern era. Six broad missions were identified. The two core missions of teaching and research emerged in pre-nation-

state circumstances. The nationalisation, democratisation and public service missions developed to serve the needs of nation states.

The internationalisation mission arose with globalisation. In recent decades, the emphasis has been on international or multicultural curricula with a global education focus, increasing foreign student populations, international exchange of students and academics, and research collaborations between institutions in different nations. Higher education institutions expect their academics to engage in a variety of roles and practices, including research, teaching, administrative tasks, community engagement, consultation with business, and representational activities, all of which are overlaid with an international dimension. Thus, contemporary higher education is characterised by competing and diverse paradigms and agendas which, inevitably, are manifested in both opportunities and tensions in the work of academics.

A key focus in contemporary global higher education and international activities has been on quality as a business success factor, particularly at national and institutional policy levels. Yet, as Cooper (2003) argued, universities are one of the custodians of heretical and transformative ideas in society, therefore, they will need to continue to have multiple, contradictory, and ambiguous purposes in order to maintain this role. Quality approaches, then, must be re-conceptualised to acknowledge differences between education and business, so that higher education institutions are able to serve social and transformative purposes, rather than to act as quasi-commercial organisations.

The concepts and practices of individual Australian academics working in offshore contexts have been relatively neglected, although they are crucial aspects of the complex mosaic of quality international higher education, especially as the approaches and practices of academics are pivotal to the interpretation and enactment of institutional quality policies and procedures. Therefore, this empirically-based study aimed to crystallise conceptualisations of quality academic work in offshore contexts from the perspectives of practising academics. Accordingly, the significance of the study is to provide both practical and conceptual perspectives as a basis for the further understanding of contemporary academic work in offshore contexts, which may assist academic staff

and, potentially, other stakeholders, to be better equipped to undertake their roles in that sector of the dynamically evolving Australian higher education environment.

The study brought together concepts from various fields of knowledge with the intention of utilising, building upon, and informing previous research about internationalisation and quality in higher education in general and, in particular, through its findings and conclusions, to broaden and deepen understanding of the experiences and conceptualisations of academic practitioners in offshore programs. By elucidating the ways in which academic staff positioned themselves in terms of quality academic work, and the factors that influenced their conceptualisations, it was anticipated there would be theoretical and practical value for a range of stakeholders, and that this study, through its focus on the voices of academics, would make a specific and worthwhile contribution to the existing higher education discourse.

Overview of the Research Approach

In order to investigate what constitutes the nature and processes of how higher education academic practitioners understand and construct meaning as to the quality of their work in an offshore context, a qualitative approach was judged to be appropriate for this study. Qualitative research is, fundamentally, a process of inquiry into the understanding of social or human issues (Creswell 2012), and a characteristic of this type of research is sense making and understanding about perspectives, processes and phenomena under examination (Merriam 2002). An underpinning assumption was that higher education academic practitioners were best positioned to hold insights into the factors that influenced their own work.

Chapter Three presents the methodological perspective in detail. In brief, the study was designed to capture descriptions of the reality of offshore academic work as experienced and constructed by the participants (Hatch 2002; Sarantakos 1998; van Manen 1990). A qualitative interview study (Weiss 1995), embedded within a constructivist paradigm (Hatch 2002), reflected this intention. Empirical data was gathered through a

complementary data collection method of individual semi-structured interviews (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008).

In the data analysis and interpretation phase of the study, both induction and deduction were utilised to draw insights from empirical evidence and theoretical concepts. However, as Hatch (2002) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), amongst others, recommended, the emphasis was on inductive techniques to assist in identifying and constructing patterns from the details in the data. Verbatim extracts from the participants' in-depth responses served to both illustrate the themes, and as the evidence to ground the interpretations reported in the research findings and conclusions (Thorne 2008). These extracts feature prominently in the reporting of findings in Chapters Four and Five. This approach to empirical grounding of findings was mindful of Corbin and Strauss' (1990) seven criteria for theoretical findings, which focused on conceptual generation, systematic relationships and linkages, development, and density, along with variation, broader conditions, and process that impact of phenomenon, and, the significance and extent of theoretical findings.

In addition to addressing a specific research problem, the potential importance of the descriptive knowledge gained from this type of approach has been demonstrated in several ways. For example, it can establish a basis for the development of typologies, frameworks, categories and classifications (Neuman 1997), which, in turn, can lead to more abstract interpretations of data and generation of theory (Corbin & Strauss 2008). For Miles and Huberman (1994), the practical and theoretical issues identified through such research processes can provide a platform for further critical examination and explanation of the phenomenon under scrutiny. In this study, in keeping with the constructivist approach of contributing to the building of theory, a data-based and theory-informed provisional framework for offshore quality academic work was developed, incrementally, throughout the journey of the research. Its patterns, details and contributions to the existing body of knowledge about academic work in offshore contexts are merged in Chapter Six, and implications and suggestions for the practices of educational stakeholders are offered in Chapter Seven.

The Researcher's Perspective and Assumptions

My career path has been involved with secondary, technical and higher education roles as an academic practitioner in onshore and offshore contexts, and as a trainer and consultant in a range of business sectors. A uniting thread of motivation and interest in these roles has been seeking and sharing a greater understanding of what contributes to effective academic praxis, which is contextually applicable and transferable, and is characterised by ongoing learning. This study represents a further realisation of this enthusiasm, as it is focused on the ways in which academics make sense of their work in specific contexts, and on the implications for further learning and development for academics and a range of interested parties. It was inevitable, however, that my personal perceptions about the nature of academic work were brought to the study. It is contended, though, that rather than detracting from the trustworthiness of the research process, these insider insights added richness to the process, particularly as they were in combination with a rigorous, systematic approach to data gathering and analysis.

In support of the above contention, and in the light of Lichtman's (2010) reminder that a researcher's experience, knowledge, skills, and background can have considerable influence on the outcomes of a study, my approach to clarifying the issues related to insider insights was guided by, in particular, Crotty (1998) and Hatch (2002). Crotty (1998) argued that a researcher brings a set of formed assumptions about human knowledge and inquiry which shape their questions, the choice of methodology and, in the end, the significance of the findings and conclusions, while Hatch (2002) recommended that for theoretical integrity and logical consistency, researchers should examine complex paradigm issues and explore assumptions and implications of different ontological and epistemological perspectives early in a research process.

Chapter Three discusses the ontological and epistemological assumptions in extensive detail in order to not only provide the basis of a sound methodological perspective for the research process as a whole, but also to make explicit my own paradigmatic viewpoint to the study's questions and approach. In brief, the qualitative approach chosen for this study

was underpinned by assumptions that included: there are unique multiple realities rather than any one absolute reality; the knowledge of interest is composed of individual constructions of reality; and the most appropriate method of investigating these constructions is through specific, local, experientially-grounded, individual perspectives. These assumptions were not only fundamental to the constructivist nature of the research, but were also reflective of my researcher stance.

Finally, as a consequence of insights from my own experiences of academic work in offshore contexts, there were two main contributions to the study: the development of an effective rapport with participants in interviews that assisted in unearthing in-depth information; and the provision of insights into the understanding and interpretation of their perspectives, as well as to the subsequent construction of patterns and concepts.

Scope of the Research and Limitations

In order to better illuminate experiences and perceptions of participants, the study was intentionally scoped within specific boundaries which enabled a deeper and narrower examination of the research questions (Creswell 2012). While this was a strength of the research approach, the nature of these boundaries also imposed limitations on the study outcomes (Punch 2000). Although detailed in Chapters Three and Seven, it is timely to foreshadow the ways in which the scope and limitations may restrict the generalisability and transferability of findings and implications (Creswell 2012; Wolcott 2009).

There were five key parameters which contained the research: a single academic classification level; purposeful sampling and sample size; individual academic perspective; general business discipline sector; and one offshore location. The findings of the study, therefore, neither claim to be generalisable to academics at lower or higher levels, to all academics within the lecturer level, or to be representative of other non-academic stakeholder perspectives, nor do they claim to be directly transferable to other discipline areas or other cultural settings. With due consideration of the restrictions on generalisability and transferability of conclusions beyond the specified parameters of this

study, potential insights and implications for other contexts and stakeholders are offered in Chapter Seven.

Overview of the Thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters. This chapter introduced the central concern of the study, which is the nature of offshore quality academic work as conceptualised by Australian higher education academics. In order to situate the study and identify its anticipated significance, the key contextual themes of globalisation, internationalisation and quality, and their impacts on contemporary academic work, were reviewed. Drawing upon this contextual overview, and further shaped by Schwab's four commonplaces of education, the central research problem was articulated, as was the methodological approach chosen to most effectively address the purpose of the study. As the personal sets of perspectives and assumptions of researchers can influence all aspects of their activities, these factors were also highlighted. Finally, the scope and limitations of the study were established, as were likely contributions to an in-depth exploration of quality offshore academic work, as well as restrictions upon the generalisability and transferability of the findings of this study to other settings.

Relevant theories, concepts, and knowledge, which provided a context for understanding and interpreting the experiences of the participants, are reviewed in depth in Chapter Two. The approach to constructing the literature review was, firstly, to interrogate the existing literature pertaining to the field of higher education, and to the specific context of the study, in order to guide the initial theoretical direction of the research process, and, later, to inform the interpretations of findings. As was consistent with the theory-building nature of this qualitative constructivist study, pertinent themes that were unearthed during the cyclic collection and analysis of the data, in particular aspects linked with approaches to learning, were also incorporated.

To meet the central intention of this study, which was to gather data from the perspectives of individual academics, it was necessary to select and implement a research approach

best suited to elicit their responses. The choice of a qualitative constructivist interview study, its complementary methods of qualitative data collection and analysis, and the researcher stance are elaborated upon in Chapter Three.

The findings are presented in Chapters Four and Five in a format designed to preserve the voices of the participants, while, simultaneously, emphasising the key patterns and themes in the data. Thus, these chapters portray both the detail and the themes in the data. It was revealed that the academics' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work were determined by a combination of contextual environment, extrinsic, and intrinsic factors.

Chapter Six extends the analysis of key findings from the data to form conclusions within the context of the relevant literature, and it presents a provisional framework for the conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work, which was constructed throughout the research process. Chapter Seven brings this study to closure with an overview of the research process, and a consideration of implications, recommendations, and suggested future research directions.

This chapter established the basis for the thesis and the foundation for the research undertaken during this study, the details of which are elaborated upon in the following chapters.

Chapter Two
Literature Review

Introduction

Chapter One demonstrated an emphasis in the higher education quality literature on quality assurance issues in policy, governance and regulation, as compared to a relative lack of research exploring quality enhancement in curricula, and learning and teaching, especially in different cultural contexts (Caruana & Montgomery 2015). This study aimed to contribute to bridging this gap in the discourse by investigating conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work, as held by academics teaching in offshore programs in the traditionally Confucian educational and cultural context of Hong Kong. The strategically designed literature review that follows assisted in: establishing a sound theoretical basis for the research, conceptually framing the research questions, selecting and implementing an appropriate methodological approach and methods, and informing the analysis, construction and interpretation of findings. This is consistent with the constructivist nature of this study, where theoretical concepts formed a broad organising framework, and were also utilised to investigate themes which emerged during the research process.

The literature review sequence began in Chapter One with an introduction to the macro contextual environment issues of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education, quality viewpoints, and the nature of contemporary academic work. This chapter extends and deepens these foci. Firstly, it identifies the trends and themes in internationalisation of higher education; secondly, it draws conceptual insights from Schwab's (1973; 1984) commonplaces of education, adapted in this study as curriculum, student, academic and institution; thirdly, it examines characteristics and implications of learning perspectives, which are extensively embedded within participants' comments; and, finally, issues specific to the offshore context of this study are presented.

Trends in Internationalisation of Higher Education

This thesis is situated within the field of transnational education, therefore, the underlying trends, issues and debates associated with international education are likely to inform stakeholder views about what constitutes offshore quality academic work. This first section of the literature review identifies key themes which characterise international higher education, and the fourth section focuses specifically on the offshore context.

According to Bedenlier, Kondakci and Zawacki-Richter (2018), it is only in recent decades that internationalisation of higher education has evolved as a discrete field of practice and research. Their meta-analysis of studies in international higher education revealed that research had focused on four major developmental trends since the mid-1990s. These broad groupings were: delineation of the field, institutionalisation and management, emerging forms of international education accompanied by changing student needs and support structures, and a shift from the institutional to the transnational context. The following review of internationalisation in higher education is organised chronologically around these four broad trends, and each is illustrated with indicative examples of debates which mark the path of internationalisation in contemporary higher education. This includes aspects of offshore or transnational education, which is the focus of the current study, and is developed in greater depth in the final section of this chapter.

The delineation stage included internationalisation's impact on national and institutional contexts, policy, curriculum, the student experience, as well as identification of the importance of globalisation. Scott (2000), for example, highlighted the necessity of considering the effects of the shifts in society associated with globalisation; Altbach and Teichler (2001) identified that the international mobility and exchange of staff and students, especially in industrialised countries, had become a usual aspect of academic life, and was evident in policies and administration; and Leask (2001) defined a successfully internationalised curriculum as one that provided a relevant, supportive and inclusive educational experience for all students, including the development of international and cross-cultural understanding and empathy, with a focus on both content and process.

The second wave recognised increased economic globalisation and forces of the market on higher education, along with greater emphasis on institutionalisation and management of internationalisation, and concerns with intercultural aspects of learning and teaching. Knight (2004), for example, contended that traditional rationales behind internationalisation have been grouped as social/cultural, political, academic and economic, and higher education institutions have typically competed through the achievement of academic standards. However, a consequence of increasing global competition was a greater interest in branding or developing a strong international reputation in order to successfully compete for market share in activities including: recruiting international, fee-paying students, offering for-profit education and training programs, and providing language testing and accreditation services. Institutions, themselves, sought national and international quality assurance. Further, Knight (2004) argued that the international dimension was influenced by both top-down, national/sector level factors, such as policy, funding, programs, and regulatory frameworks, and bottom-up, institutional factors including mission, student population, faculty profile, location, resources, and orientation to local, national, and international interests. Given the complexities and interplay of these factors, an effective dynamic interaction between all actors depended on clear articulation of their rationales and assumptions.

The intercultural dimension of internationalisation, which incorporated the roles of institutions, teachers and students, was also a key focus of research during the early 2000s. Otten's (2003) suggestions for enhancing intercultural learning included a systematic approach to: intercultural orientation programmes for international and domestic students and academics; intercultural enrichment within course curriculum; culturally sensitive styles of learning and teaching which overtly utilised diversity as a classroom resource; and intercultural training to promote intercultural competence, which entailed the knowledge, attitudes and skills to interact positively and effectively with members of other cultures.

From an institutional perspective, openness, curiosity and trust are fostered when international and intercultural implications in teaching are not treated as secondary to

academic universalism and institutional functionalism. From the teaching perspective, tolerance to otherness and different styles can be negatively impacted upon when more time, energy, and patience are required, or when academic standards are threatened in diverse classrooms. Teekens (2003) proposed that staff development was required to form the characteristics of what was described as the ideal teacher for the international classroom. These characteristics involved intercultural issues related to: language, cultural differences, teaching and learning styles, use of media and technology, the academic discipline, foreign education systems, the international labour market, and personal qualities, such as vision and leadership. Thus, the intercultural aspect of internationalisation and the roles of some of the key actors were prominent in this period.

The third trend encompassed the consequences of the growing complexity and problematic issues in international higher education, with an especial emphasis on student social and support needs and structures, and concerns and strategies for staff in different cultural settings, including conflict between staff. Altbach and Knight (2007) described the landscape of international higher education as being at a crossroads. A range of motivations, consequences, issues and challenges for internationalisation were identified. They argued that emerging programs and practices needed to not only be profit centres, but must also be of public benefit. Traditional approaches to internationalisation, for instance, were characterised by campus-based initiatives such as study-abroad experiences, curriculum enrichment, strengthened foreign-language instruction, and sponsorship of visiting foreign students. These types of activities were more likely to improve research and knowledge capacity and to increase cultural understanding, as well as promoting competitiveness, prestige, and strategic alliances.

Internationalisation has different manifestations for different stakeholders (Altbach & Knight 2007). Economic and political integration was a pursuit of European Union authorities; developing countries sought foreign students to enhance the quality and cultural composition of the student body, for greater prestige, and to generate income; self-funded individual students became a large source of funds for international education; and in countries where the domestic capacity could not absorb demand, access provision grew through branch campuses, franchised foreign programs, or independent

institutions based on foreign academic models. Addressing this competitive international educational environment, Wilkins and Huisman (2011), for example, took the perspective of student recruitment to international branch campuses, and recommended that universities focus on strategies that addressed student motives and pull factors for student choice of international study, in particular, institutional reputation, quality of programmes, and rankings (O'Connell & Saunders 2012).

Altbach and Knight (2007) highlighted that in the Asia Pacific region the number of active partnerships between local and foreign institutions had expanded. In addition, universities faced competition from new types of providers, including: commercial IT and media companies, corporate universities, professional associations, and international conglomerates, and acquisitions or mergers with local higher education institutions. Issues of registration, regulation, recognition, accreditation and appropriate quality assurance accompanied these changes, as did concerns with academic entry requirements, assessment procedures and standards, academic workload, modes of program delivery, curricular adaptation, and academic and sociocultural support for, and interactions between, students. Meanwhile, Gift, Leo-Rhynie & Moniquette (2006) recognised the necessity to create effective regional systems to monitor the quality of transnational education offered by increasing numbers of providers, so that host countries maintained high standards in higher education offerings. Quality assurance of this nature also laid a foundation for importers of transnational education, to eventually also become exporters.

The notion of mobility and circulation of international higher education stakeholders, however, can mask a net movement from smaller developing countries to more economically advanced countries. This imbalance may be somewhat redressed through the recent concept of the education hub, which usually involves one of three forms, namely, students, skilled workforces or knowledge/innovations. Typically located where the emphasis is on knowledge and service industries, such as Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong, Knight (2011) described an education hub as more than an individual entity such as a branch campus, but rather as a part of a nation's plan to position itself as a well-reputed regional and, potentially, global higher education and research centre. Jon, Lee and Byun (2014) identified South Korea as an example of a middle-income, non-Western,

non-English speaking country attracting international and regional students in response to the demand for international education. These are examples of internationalisation being experienced in non-Western settings, and are in contrast to the largely Anglo-Saxon and Western European dominance in location, content and understanding in higher education (Bedenlier, Kondakci & Zawacki-Richter 2015).

Moving from this managerial and organisational level, research on internationalisation took a more comprehensive social viewpoint. In terms of student engagement, Montgomery and McDowell (2009) found that when networks of international students shared academic, social and emotional support, this contributed to the success of their international experiences. However, Leask (2009) proposed that support for both international and domestic students, through the formal and the informal curriculum, was necessary for meaningful interaction aimed at developing international and intercultural perspectives and skills. The formal curriculum includes the sequence of teaching and learning activities and experiences related to content, resources and assessments, while the informal curriculum encompasses various on-campus extracurricular, optional activities. Improved interactions depended on encouragement and reward of intercultural engagement amongst students. When interactive and collaborative learning processes are carefully structured and designed within a supportive campus culture, internationalisation of the curriculum effectively links cultural diversity and intercultural learning.

While a supportive campus culture is desirable for effective student engagement, Leask (2009) described its development as likely to be a long term process, however, incremental, small, local decisions, such as the inclusion of specific intercultural objectives, can have significant impacts, as can regarding cross-cultural interaction as a two-way process needing adjustments by international and local students. Successful interaction, for example, in group work, must be managed carefully, and guided by academic staff, who themselves must be highly effective intercultural learners. Implementation of strategies also requires support from service and administrative staff.

From the perspectives of academic staff, Sawir (2013) investigated how the internationalisation of the curriculum and their own teaching practices were influenced

by the increase in international students studying in Australia. If well-engaged, the different perspectives and experiences brought by these students were valuable cultural and educational resources, which facilitated the implementation of an internationalised curriculum, and enhanced teaching quality. A second contribution was to widen domestic students' overall learning and experience, including respect, understanding and tolerance of other cultures through relationships between international and domestic students, while also reducing international students' cultural and social loneliness.

Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland and Ramia (2008) suggested that local students required openness, curiosity and an interest in learning about others' lives, values and cultures, such as collectivist relationships, to assist effective bonding, understanding and practice in interactions with international students. Institutions could assist by providing more successful educational interactions between students, in shared and mutually respectful learning settings. Despite effective internationalisation of higher education being dependent on cultural awareness and appreciation, and active engagement by all students, academics reported that it was a challenge to get domestic students to appreciate and utilise these cultural resources, and developing interactions between international and domestic students could be complicated and difficult (Sawir 2013).

In the last decade, interest in international education continued, particularly in relation to new forms, concepts and contexts. Soria and Troisi's (2014) study of United States undergraduate students revealed that, although formal study abroad was traditionally perceived to be the principal means by which students developed global, international and intercultural competencies, internationalisation at home activities were also effective. Purposefully designed curricular and co-curricular activities, including global and international coursework, and attending themed lectures and other academic events, in conjunction with engagement and friendship with international students, may be more accessible and successful ways to enhance students' competency development.

For Trinh and Conner (2019), home initiatives can involve and benefit all students. As students are prospective resources to offer multiple insights and cultivate diversity to enhance the internationalisation of the curriculum, partnerships between students,

lecturers and institutional bodies, in both the formal and informal curriculum, along with sustained engagement opportunities, have the potential to enrich student experiences and outcomes through sharing diverse interests, life experiences, languages, and cultures. Possibilities include co-creation of curriculum design and pedagogy, and associated learning, teaching, and assessment activities. Benefits of partnership approaches to student engagement could offer students helpful academic and social outcomes, such as learner agency development, and augmented professional, social and cultural responsibilities, in addition to better meeting their learning and support needs and challenges.

Green (2019) concurred that students and staff, in partnership, needed to be engaged deeply in, and by, an internationalised curriculum which addresses the interrelated curricular domains of knowing, doing, and being, if global learning is to occur. Related learning objectives would be designed to develop informed, open-minded, responsible people, who seek to understand how their activities impact on local and global communities, and to collaboratively and equitably address significant world issues. In order to learn to live and work effectively and ethically in an interconnected and interdependent world, such global learning requires critical transformative engagement. However, as Phan, Tran and Blackmore (2019) argued, an embedded structural characteristic of Anglo-Saxon host universities often entails a deficit frame viewpoint of international students that sees them as lacking in skills, such as critical thinking. Such a mind-set can work against utilising students' diverse cultural resources and transnational knowledge in the development of inclusive curriculum and teaching approaches.

The nature of engagement between academics and other stakeholders in internationalisation of the curriculum, and learning and teaching activities, was investigated in this study, and the impacts on conceptualisations of these aspects of offshore quality academic work are considered in more detail in Chapter Six.

Participants in this study conducted their academic work, including offshore work, against the backdrop of internationalised higher education. While their offshore activities were primarily associated with learning and teaching, their work was, inevitably,

embedded in what Schwab (1973) referred to as the four commonplaces of education. These commonplaces formed the central component of the conceptual framework for this study, and are introduced in the following section.

Schwab's Commonplaces of Education

Schwab (1973; 1984) argued that there were four commonplaces of education which needed to be in an equal relationship characterised by coordination, rather than subordination or superordination by any one component.

> *"Defensible educational thought must take account of four commonplaces of equal rank: the learner, the teacher, the milieu, the subject matter. None of these can be omitted without omitting a vital factor in educational thought and practice. No one of them may be allowed to dominate the deliberation unless that domination is conscious and capable of defense in terms of the circumstances"* (Schwab 1973 pp. 508-509).

He was concerned that education was too driven by statistical studies and metrics that copied social sciences, which were, in turn, based on natural science assumptions, whereas a more realistic representation of education would be a deliberative problem solving activity that targeted specific situations with the intention of forming defensible, though not replicable, decisions from which there could be future learning (Roby 2008). Furthermore, as educational problems were practical problems, then practical knowledge was vital to success in teaching (Reid 1978), and, to be effective, solutions must be put into action in ways appropriate to the circumstances of a context (Ross, Cornett & McCutcheon 1992).

Furthermore, as representatives of each commonplace could only contribute partial knowledge to solving educational problems, substantial collaboration and adaptive communication were required in order to provide the broadest opportunity to bring their expertise together and to share the concerns of each party. Such a deliberation-centred

approach was likely to extend discussion beyond measurable objectives, related to explicit curriculum, to other non-measurable objectives and implicit curriculum. This process of collaborative discovery, in combination with the coalescence of what was discovered and the utilisation of combined issues, could form the basis for generating new educational materials and purposes (Schwab 1973). However, as Reid (1999) identified, collaborative deliberation involved extensive time, expertise and commitment, a lack of which may hinder its application in practice. These constraints on collaboration remain relevant in the contemporary higher education environment, as was identified in this study.

The four commonplaces form a useful conceptual framework for thinking about higher education's multidimensional systems. Salmons (2010) proposed that including a change in any of the four elements would flow through to the others and, consequently, impact on a system in its entirety. For example, at the classroom level, changes in the role or style of the teacher, subject content and materials, characteristics of students, and the type of classroom environment would, inevitably, influence the nature and meaning of the learning experience. At the institutional level, program changes impact on contextual settings required for courses, the staff required, and the type of student attracted to the program. In addition, the contribution of teachers as curriculum makers, who use their personal practical knowledge to interpret and convert curriculum materials into learning experiences, was examined by Craig and Ross (2008) and Deng (2013), while others (Remillard 2005; Sherin & Drake 2009) identified how teachers' individual knowledge, beliefs, values and experiences, as well as their personal narratives (Connelly 2015), influenced the ways they construed and actioned subject content in their classrooms.

This current study utilised the four commonplaces, in conjunction with the contextual environment factors reviewed in Chapter One, particularly, the nature of contemporary academic work, and notions of quality in internationalised higher education, as a guiding conceptual framework for the study. This framework was further developed through the following components of specific literature, which are shaped, firstly, by a learning lens, which reflects the pervasive theme of learning found in the data, and, secondly, by a contextual lens, which focuses on the offshore context of the study.

Learning Perspectives

Preliminary analysis of interview data early in the research process identified a consistent emergent theme, which was that participants viewed quality academic work as deeply intertwined with learning. In broad terms, the analysis indicated that offshore quality academic work entailed: contextualised curricula that assisted learning; student characteristics that impacted on their learning; institutional activities that supported learning; and characteristics and behaviours of academics that encouraged learning in themselves and others. Cunningham, Gannon, Kavanagh, Greene, Reddy and Whitson (2007) argued that a key challenge for academics is how to most effectively articulate their own positionalities in regard to the different ways learning theories or models might inform a coherent approach to educational products and processes. Thus, the discussion of learning perspectives and their relationships to components of offshore academic work that follows, provided valuable conceptual insights for interpreting participants' conceptualisations of the contributions of learning to the quality of their work.

Education is a complex process that has generated numerous theories and interpretations of how it is effectively accomplished, but learning is fundamental to approaches to education. In this study, learning emerged as the superordinate theme which united the range of attributes that were found to contribute to conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. Neumann (2014) contended that learning in higher education involved, firstly, encountering an idea that resonated with or contradicted existing conscious or unconscious knowledge, followed by the acknowledgement, surfacing, and examination of overlaps and tensions between existing and new ideas. Learning theories have been influenced by a range of discipline areas, including psychology, philosophy, education, cybernetics, organisation, linguistics, social anthropology and design, along with their associated learning paradigms, key concepts, and learning approaches (Millwood 2013). Such theories assist in explaining the different ways in which both students and teachers learn, what motivates learners, and the manner in which information is presented and processed. Indeed, the incorporation of elements of learning theories into the most

relevant and appropriate instructional actions has been the subject of on-going debate in education (Ertmer & Newby 2013). The nature of curriculum content and processes, as well as the activities of higher education institutions, themselves, are informed by learning theories, which are manifested in favoured forms of knowledge and behaviours.

Krause (2012) advocated the value of applying educational theories to the quality debate, as quality was an ill-defined or 'wicked' problem due to its social complexity, multiple dimensions, and lack of fit with traditional problem solving methods, all within a rapidly changing academic work environment. For example, D'Andrea (2007) and D'Andrea and Gosling (2005) argued that the explicit application of learning theories to quality review processes had the potential to enhance quality through improvements in learning and teaching. Discerning standpoints on learning, then, was integral to this study, as it assisted in fostering insights and making more overt, the often tacit assumptions, values, beliefs, preferences, perceptions and evaluations that influence notions of quality academic work.

Although the body of literature on learning theories is extensive and intertwined, theories are loosely gathered around five orientations, namely, cognitivist, humanistic, behavioural, social learning and constructivist perspectives (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner 2007). While there is, inevitably, overlap between these broad viewpoints, a consideration of each provides the basis for comparison between their different emphases and contributions to educational concepts, processes, and outcomes.

In order to explore notions of quality academic work through this study's pervasive and uniting theme of learning, the fundamental tenets, influences of early and contemporary theorists, and manifestations in learning, teaching, curriculum and institutional practices of the five learning perspectives were reviewed. This process, in turn, helped to frame the consideration of the offshore context of the study examined in the final part of this literature review. Taking this wider view of theories from different learning perspectives surfaced additional sensitising concepts that acted as a lens through which to investigate, analyse and build theory about offshore quality academic work.

Cognitivist Learning Perspective

Cognitive theories, called information processing theories by some (Grippin & Peters 1984), take the position that the individual learner has intrinsic motivation and control over their learning activities through their mental processes, which they use in specific ways to interpret and give meaning to experiences. Piaget (1972), for example, argued that cognitive development continues through life and involves processes of assimilation and accommodation, whereby new experiences and changes are incorporated into existing mental schema. Others developed the work of Piaget. For Bruner (1961), learning was about discovery through inquiry and building of constructs from materials provided, not in a final form, but requiring organisation and meaning making by the learner. The role of the student was as an active problem solver with the teacher as facilitator. This pragmatic approach was enabled through the concept of the spiral curriculum (Bruner 1960) which involved information being structured so that simplified levels of complex ideas could be taught first, and developed further at later stages. However, such problem based learning approaches have disadvantages including being overly time consuming, resulting in misconceptions and errors without appropriate guidance from facilitators, and being less suitable for addressing abstract, theoretical concepts than for more straightforward concrete problems.

Similarly, Ausubel's (1967) concept of meaningful learning described acquiring new knowledge by relating it to previous knowledge, though he argued that the entire content of what was to be learned should be initially presented to the learner in order to reduce the time consuming nature of discovery learning. In particular, both Bruner and Ausubel rejected the notion of rote learning and agreed that learning meant processing new information in depth, and applying it to wider contexts. In essence, this entailed individuals 'learning how to learn'. The ability of individuals to differentiate between rote learning and learning how to learn was directly related to cognitive learning theory by Gagné and Briggs (1979). Akin to these descriptors are the terms 'surface learning' and 'deep learning' (Marton, Dall'Alba & Lai 1993; Marton, Alba & Tse 1996), which distinguish between a superficial focus on curriculum material itself as opposed to

seeking underlying meaning. Assessment tasks that encouraged deep approaches to learning were linked to learning effectiveness or quality (Bloxham & Boyd 2008).

Debate continues, however, as to whether this dichotomous image of learning approaches is applicable across cultures. For instance, in Confucian cultures, reproduction and memorisation, typically attributed to rote learning, were closely intertwined with deeper learning as they formed a foundation for understanding more complex concepts and, ultimately, supported successful educational performance outcomes (Kennedy 2002; Sit 2013; Watkins & Biggs 1996; 2001). Likewise, Tan (2011) suggested that Chinese international students used rote and deep learning approaches concurrently, to the puzzlement of many Western educators and researchers (Rao & Chan 2010). Biggs (2003), Biggs and Tang (2011) and Mathias, Bruce and Newton (2013) advised that cultural stereotyping of students as homogenous rote learners failed to comprehend students' experiences of changing and unfamiliar educational conditions, and lecturers, therefore, should adopt more contextually-sensitive teaching approaches.

Vygotsky (1978) questioned whether learning theories based on individual self-discovery and interpretation took sufficient account of the cultural and social learning environment, including the value of learning from 'more knowledgeable others', especially teachers and fellow students, through communication and collaborative classroom activities, and role modelling by teachers of correct strategies and use of questions to simplify problems. A further important contribution from Vygotsky was the 'zone of proximal development', which defined the difference between what students could achieve in problem solving by themselves as compared with teacher or peer assistance. When this type of learning featured staged support from others to reach learning goals, it was termed 'scaffolding' by Bruner (1985) and, as with physical scaffolding, supportive strategies were incrementally removed when no longer required, and more responsibility gradually shifted towards students (Krause, Bochner & Duchesne 2003; Daniels 2001; Hammond 2002; Verenikina 2008). As Lipscomb, Swanson and West (2004) noted, there were several challenges for the educator. These included: the time-consuming nature of the process, judging the zone of proximal development, modelling desired behaviours, strategies or activities, and giving up control as students grew in competence.

From a cognitive learning perspective, then, quality educational approaches perceive learning as predominantly a process of inquiry and understanding which relied on learners' intrinsic motivations, with developmental opportunities guided and supported by others. However, notions of rote and deep learning, in particular, prompt questions in this study about the types of learning that are valued and applied in different cultural contexts.

Behaviourist Learning Perspective

The learning paradigm of behaviourist theories, by contrast to cognitive theories, views external factors as controllers of learning, rather than mental processes. Thus, learning depends upon responses to extrinsic motivations or stimuli. Watson (1878 - 1958) and Skinner (1904 - 1990) were two originators of behaviourist approaches to learning. Classical conditioning and operant conditioning, which focus on behaviours and not on cognitive thought processes, underpinned their viewpoints. Watson's classical conditioning believed behaviour resulted from specific stimuli that elicited certain responses, while Skinner's more comprehensive development of this notion, called operant conditioning, involved rewarding particular behaviour. A key element to this learning theory was the rewarded response where desired responses were positively reinforced, and unwanted ones were discouraged (Parkay & Hass 2000).

The central premise of the behaviourist approach is that conclusions regarding human development were derived from observable behaviour rather than assumptions about subconscious motives or processes (Shaffer 2000). From this primarily scientific view, evidence of learning is demonstrated by behavioural changes that can be observed, measured and reinforced. The pervasiveness of learning objectives, incremental learning strategies, feedback systems, outcome-based assessment approaches, and performance evaluation measures in numerous educational practices and learning activities, and in quality assurance approaches, manifested this perspective (Tovey & Lawlor 2008).

Influences of early behaviourists are evident in the work of others. Robert Gagné devised a 'Conditions of Learning' theory entailing a task-focused, objective model with required learning evaluated through observation and outcome measurement. Underlying assumptions included that when different types of learning existed, intellectual skills could be organised in a hierarchy of complexity, and completion of prerequisites at each level enabled subsequent learning levels. A matching sequence of nine instructional events facilitated the stages of learning (Gagné, Briggs & Wager 1991). Although often considered in terms of cognitive learning theories with higher levels of cognition dependent on first achieving lower levels, Bloom's (1956) mastery learning paradigm, and taxonomy of learning objectives and outcomes, are also described in clearly observable terms and instrumental teaching approaches, where educators help students to sequentially master behaviours through learning levels.

A pervasive indication of the behaviourial perspective is seen in the standardised, packaged and, for some (Hayes & Wynward 2002; Margolis 2004; Najafi 2015; Ritzer 1996), the 'McDonaldized' nature of higher education curriculum materials and processes. Ritzer's (1996) term, 'McDonaldization', emerged from the efficiency, standardisation, control, measurability, and predictability characteristics of the modern fast-food industry. When applied to higher education, it is apparent in standardised and outcome-based curriculum and assessment, formularised managerial procedures and processes, large class sizes, utilisation of technology-based learning (Najafi 2015), and growth in satellite and branch campuses (Altbach 2012). For some (Donn & Al Manthri 2010; Naidoo 2007), largely generic course content and delivery methods represented a drive for cost reduction over ensuring relevance and appropriateness to characteristics and contexts of learners, along with uncertainty as to genuine educational, social or economic value and benefits to stakeholders. Indeed, Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011) dubbed routinised, standardised and pre-packaged approaches as a form of 'digital Taylorism'. These concerns are of direct relevance to this study, as many offshore program designs and quality evaluations are based on standardisation and measurability.

Behavioural learning approaches, in general, focus on extrinsic motivations or stimuli to elicit and reinforce desired responses from learners. As learning is essentially evidenced

in observable and measureable behaviour change, the quality focus is typically quantitative. Knowledge acquisition and reproduction through prescribed goals, and standardised curriculum materials, delivery techniques and assessment, using teacher-centred methods are emphasised. Whilst being cost effective, it is possible that behavioural influences on program design may override tailoring learning to recipients' specific learning needs. The relevance and effectiveness of standardised materials and learning and teaching approaches for offshore contexts were considerations in this study.

Social Learning Perspective

Rotter's (1954) theories shifted the learning emphasis from the primarily stimulus-response and reinforcement focus of behaviourist theories to incorporate the impacts of the social environment and individual personality, for example, the notion of external and internal locus of control (Rotter 1971; 1990). From the social perspective, both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations affected learning. Building on this position, Bandura and Walters (1963) argued that learning was not purely behavioural with individuals learning by reinforcement, but rather, it was also a cognition process in a social context which relied on observation, modelling and imitation of others. Social Learning Theory (Bandura 1977), later renamed Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura 1986), drew on these underlying assumptions about learning responses. This learning perspective, therefore, is typically characterised by cognitive elements of attention, memory and motivation incorporated in staged and structured learning tasks, alongside operant conditioning or learning of desired behaviours in social contexts.

From this perspective, teachers' classroom roles influenced students' learning by demonstrating expected behaviours, providing detailed verbal instructions, and utilising exemplars, such as web based interactions (Polin 2010). Uptake of desired behaviours, though, depended on individual self-efficacy. A central concept of Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura 1988; 2001), self-efficacy is based on both individual self-perception and external experiences. Maddux (1995) and Zimmerman (2000) defined it as personal mastery, belief and competence to effectively perform tasks,

and cope with, and exert some control over, events within one's environment. In academic work, for example, self-efficacy was connected to lecturers' confidence levels in research, teaching, and service tasks (Hemmings, Kay, Sharp & Taylor 2012), and to research dispositions and publication outputs (Hemmings & Kay 2016).

A powerful, shared premise of social learning theories is the accomplishment of learning in authentic practical settings through engagement with more knowledgeable others in practice communities. For Buch, Andersen and Klemsdal (2015), practices referred to the ways things are done, and learning processes were best understood as transformations of and within practices. In this way, practitioners participated in enacting and changing their particular practices, which enabled them to know what and how to carry out their work, and to learn about themselves. Allen's (2016) study of teachers, for example, revealed that participation in ongoing, relevant, and collaborative professional learning was a key factor for teacher and student success, as it increased teachers' sense of self-efficacy, and comfort and contentment in meeting students' classroom needs, as well as improving their professional practice.

The combination of impacts of interactions with others, along with the effects of social and cultural contexts, linked social learning systems and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; 2011), especially for adult learning and workplace learning where members of the same professional community with differing expertise mutually engaged in real work practices with common goals (Blackmore 2010). As Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa (2007) highlighted, in higher education communities of practice, critical consideration of teaching and learning issues amongst staff encouraged improvements in their job performance. In addition, the quality of student learning experiences increased, and advanced professional practice itself was facilitated, through input from new members, approaches, technologies and experiences (Wenger 1998).

Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas (2006) defined communities of practice or professional learning communities, as groups of people who shared, and critically examined, their practice, through on-going reflection and inclusive collaboration with the

intention of promoting individual and collective learning. When such collaboration was extended to reciprocal practice of teaching and learning (Hartman 1997; Naude & Bezuidenhout 2015), academics became learners with their colleagues and students. Consequently, mutual learning occurred as more experienced individuals developed themselves further through their efforts to assist novice academics and students, who, in turn, benefited from the greater experience of others. Such reciprocal teaching and learning can be thought of as a contemporary application of Vygotsky's cognitive theories within a situated social context (McLeod 2014).

For Polin (2010), the community of practice model described how socio-cultural structures of a community mediated the development of beginners to become more fully participating members. Gobbi (2010) identified the importance of teams in fostering three types of learning in the nursing education context: relational learning between individuals, which generated and transmitted cultural, tribal and informal knowledge; espoused learning, which included formal professional codes, ethics and practices; and articulated or embodied learning, which comprised the repository of collective formal and informal knowledge. Similarly, St Clair's (2004) description of an academic community of practice entailed development activities, orientation to significant concepts and practices, and immersion in the values of the academy.

The underlying rationale for such collaborative team learning was that participants, who were engaged in similar projects, would encounter common obstacles and processes, and, therefore, were well-positioned to support others (Raelin 1999). Despite the advantages of communities of practice, Polin (2010) identified that their successful formation and sustainability in the education context were hindered when practicing teachers, administrators, or managers were isolated from colleagues by incompatible schedules and locations, which, inevitably, reduced opportunities for vital, active and engaged involvement in professional communities. This is common in offshore programs where contact between visiting and local staff is usually brief and episodic.

In the offshore context, Keay, May and O'Mahony (2014) emphasised the significance and benefits to the quality of learning outcomes when offshore stakeholders were

included in global communities of practice. They recommended that all involved parties work towards three characteristics of effective practice communities: firstly, a joint enterprise perspective that recognises home and offshore partners can connect across contexts around common goals or purposes, and can acknowledge commitment and competence of all staff; secondly, mutual responsibility for learning and support by management, teaching and administrative staff, and students; and, finally, an investment of time and energy into collaborative teaching and learning approaches to create contextually appropriate, shared repertoires of knowledge and practices (Wenger 2011). Achievements of such aims were progressed when teachers perceived themselves as co-learners with local and offshore colleagues and students (Stoll *et al.* 2006). The openness and critical reflection generated by these mechanisms can assist in unravelling cultural complexity and revealing blind spots and embedded traditions which retard development of effective practice (Blackmore 2010).

However, criticisms have also been levelled at communities of practice in that they do not sufficiently recognise the power relations that sanction knowledge and practices, and, therefore, inadequately account for the complexities of both practice and community. For example, induction and learning tends to occur from outside-in, which ignores innovation and internal resistance; practice is understood within single, localised and bounded communities; and the orientation is more towards social aspects rather than tools and activities, and changes of knowledge over time (Fenwick, Nerland & Jensen 2012).

The social learning perspective, therefore, could be considered as the interplay and outcomes of mutual influences between cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors. Learners are not regarded as passive receptacles of knowledge, but, rather, are shaped by their self-perceptions in combination with external experiences. Co-learning is enhanced by interpersonal interactions, team relationships, and communities of practice within and across social and cultural contexts. An intention of this study is to explore the contributions of collaborative learning to offshore quality academic work.

Humanist Learning Perspective

The humanistic perspective of learning is based on the work of psychologists such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Maslow (1954) believed that theories based on conditioning did not adequately address the complexity of human behaviour. He represented human actions as directed toward goal attainment through a hierarchy of needs, the highest level of which was self-actualisation or achieving maximum potential. Pursuit of personal growth was equated to learning. For Rogers, learning was personal involvement, self-initiation, pervasiveness, and self-evaluation, with experiential learning an integral aspect of the learning process (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner 2007). Others articulated the importance of the learning environment. For DeCarvalho (1991) this perspective meant developing self-actualised, autonomous individuals by addressing both affective and cognitive needs in cooperative, supportive environments. Indeed, Trigwell, Ellis and Han (2011) linked the adoption of a deeper approach to learning and higher achievement scores with students who more strongly experienced positive emotions. Knowles (1975) included informal individual support, in conjunction with group environments comprised of learning helpers, such as enthusiastic and accepting teachers, tutors, mentors, resource people and peers, as a means to enrich learning. Cross (1981) believed encouraging and nurturing environments sustained the natural human tendency for life-long learning.

As this study is set within the higher education sector, a consideration of andragogy or approaches to adult learning (Caffarella & Merriam 2000; Knowles 1991), which are characterised by learner independence and personal choice to fulfil individual potential, a key tenet of the humanist perspective, is especially relevant. Major assumptions about adult learners involve self-direction, internal motivation, and readiness to learn (Fisher & King 2010; Guglielmino 1978; 1997; Slater & Cusick 2017), as well as experiential, problem-centred and immediacy of application learning preferences (Kennedy 2002).

Self-direction (Boyatzis 1994), at times called self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King 2004; Kegan 1994), self-determination (Ryan & Deci 2017) or self-efficacy (Bandura 2001) has a long association with adult learning. A particularly prominent example is

Knowles' (1975) self-directed learning process where individual initiative is used in diagnosing learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. Of specific relevance to this current study, though, is that the capacity for self-direction may not ensure high quality student performance in all contextual circumstances. As Bui, Kam, Kwek and Rynne (2017) identified, the capacity for self-direction was evident in high performance Western domestic students and was predictive of academic achievement, but a similar positive relationship was not found among international students.

Similarly, experiential learning is pivotal to adult learning. Kolb (1976; 1984), a well-known proponent of experiential learning, whose influence is prominent across learner-centred perspectives, proposed a cycle of four learning stages and styles based on experience, reflection, conceptualisation and experimentation, where individual learning style preferences were influenced by cognitive structure, educational experiences and social environment. Effective learning was contingent on progression through the entire cycle. Keeton, Sheckley and Griggs (2002) and Kolb and Kolb (2005) argued that the ability to learn was greatly enhanced when students had opportunities to explore their favoured and less-preferred learning styles, and to have control and responsibility for self-learning. Others elaborated on centrality of the self in learning cycles. Zimmerman (2002) detailed three phases of self-regulation: forethought, which involved task analysis and self-motivation and beliefs; performance, which was based on self-control and self-observation; and self-reflection, which entailed self-judgement and self-reaction. For Burleson (2005), self-learning was a synergistic cycle of creativity, self-awareness, intrinsic motivation and self-actualisation.

Notwithstanding the popularity of self-direction and experiential learning as components of student-centred adult learning, their origins in Western assumptions and views of selfhood make transference to Confucian educational settings problematic. In particular, challenges to Western modes of investigation of external experiences are posed by a Confucian definition of learning, which Wang and King (2006) described as the cultivation of inner experience so learners deepen their knowledge about being human,

and transform their lives into meaningful existences, especially through silent reflection. In addition, it can be inferred from the preceding synopses of self-directed learning and experiential learning cycles, that sufficient time and supportive resources for each learner would be a condition of quality adult learning. However, the availability of these learning prerequisites are, necessarily, restricted by the intensive delivery mode of many offshore programs.

Early humanistic concepts are at the heart of numerous aspects of learning and teaching. Therefore, the representative examples that follow were purposefully chosen for their direct relevance and potential to pinpoint anticipated differences in perceptions between Western and Confucian educational cultures.

The interconnectedness of social, academic and workplace transferable goals was established by Henning and Manalo (2015), who proposed that student learning motivation was driven by multiple complex goals, with intrinsically based needs such as autonomous, independent decision making, achievement of competence, and strong career aspirations being more impactful than external societal pressures and expectations from family. Kimmel, Gaylor and Hayes (2014) advised appreciating that many adult learners are overwhelmed by competing demands stemming from workplaces, families, professional networks, and other personal and societal commitments. Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich and Linkins' (2009) positive education approach included the aim of happiness or well-being, based on intrinsic motivators of learning and innovation, in duality with traditional curriculum content and skills and extrinsic rewards, such as grades.

Friere's (2000; 2007) transformative learning approach to social empowerment and emancipation focused on learners' life contexts and prior knowledge with the intention of raising consciousness and overcoming obstacles for social change. In the same vein, Huitt (2009) argued that people acted with intentionality and values based on human freedom, potential and dignity. Tangney (2014) also identified consciousness raising, empowerment and personal growth in a survey of university academics' conceptions of student-centred learning. The outcome of transformative learning, according to Cranton

and Taylor (2012), was essentially a deep shift in perspective, resulting in more open, more permeable, and better-justified meaning perspectives, which may involve individual, organisational, social and global change. For Hamza (2010), such learning contributed to professional development when higher education staff encountered unfamiliar international classroom environments and diverse student learning styles, which resulted in changes in their personal and professional attitudes, and broadened their global perspectives. The reflection on the development of attitudes such as patience, flexibility, and calmness was identified as central to transformative learning. When new knowledge and skills were transferred to the home country, transformation and learning were strengthened.

Oades, Robinson, Green and Spence (2013) added the importance of tertiary learning environments composed of systemic interactions with management, administration and external community stakeholders, rather than only transactional interactions between teachers and students. Indeed, co-operative activities, such as learning and teaching circles for students and staff, which enabled recognition and space for individual and collective learning needs and development, were typical practical applications of the humanistic approach (Massey University 2016). Co-operative learning with individual and collective responsibility by teachers and students was central to Hattie's (2012; 2015) visible learning approach. Learning became visible when teachers were also learners, who evaluated their teaching attitudes and practices, and assisted students to become their own teachers. Group effort was facilitated by taking perspectives of teachers and students into account using metacognitive strategies, feedback, and reciprocal teaching techniques, including questioning, clarifying and summarising. The above compilation of learning and teaching aspects all enriched the background against which quality academic work in a non-Western cultural context was analysed in this study.

As well as the nature of students and learning environments, the characteristics and practices of teachers have been examined. Rogers' (1980) psychological research identified the three key traits of most effective teachers or learning facilitators as genuineness and authenticity, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding. Along with subject competence, such teachers created important trust levels in classrooms

and exerted positive effects on student outcomes including self-concept, interpersonal functioning, attendance, and assessment grades (Cranton 2001; Rogers, Lyon Jr & Tausch 2014). The interpersonal concept of relatedness, defined as teachers showing genuine caring and valuing of students, enhanced students' motivation and productive engagement in classrooms (Martin 2007; Ryan & Deci 2000). Indeed, extensive research indicated efficacy and quality of learner-centred approaches were dependent upon student engagement which, in turn, was directly linked to teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching (Cowan 2006; Kember 1997; Prosser, Trigwell & Taylor 1994; Ramsden, Prosser, Trigwell & Martin 2007; Trigwell & Prosser 2014; Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse 1999).

AUSSE (2015) defined student engagement as involvement in educationally purposeful activities and conditions aimed at high quality learning. While students were primarily responsible for constructing their own knowledge, learning outcomes were also contingent on academics and institutions generating environments that stimulated participation. Alotaibi (2016) concurred that the educator role, essentially, created supportive learning environments with clear goals and standards, appropriate workload and assessment, and encouragement of independent and collective student engagement. Greener (2015) argued, though, that teaching for quality engagement hinged on shifting mainly formal learning activities to conditions receptive to student self-perception and self-efficacy, prior learning experiences, and active and interactive learning experiences whereby learners were given, and expected to take, a high degree of influence over shaping learning content and process to meet their needs, capacities and interests (Schweisfurth 2013).

Such humanistic attitudes and practices accorded with Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) assertion that effective teaching regarded learning as a meaningful, experiential and holistic process rather than a product. The degree of personal development and engagement sought in humanist learning approaches, therefore, is unlikely to be adequately addressed or supported by the expert model of teaching embedded in traditional education contexts, and is, therefore, a probable source of conflict between

stakeholders. The ways in which academics applied their preferred teaching styles in the offshore setting of Hong Kong were examined in this study.

Finally, criticisms and limitations of this perspective included Brookfield's (1985; 2003) contention that some adult learners preferred teacher-directed courses, and that self-directed learning, with students in non-threatening relationships with teachers as facilitators, overlooked racial and cultural contexts where the teacher was the valued, expert source of knowledge and direction. Further, the concept of 'self' was embedded and formed by cultural contexts and social networks. Therefore, instincts, values, needs and beliefs reflected the constraints and contradictions, as well as learning and change opportunities in specific cultures (Brookfield 1994). O'Neill and McMahon (2005) questioned the effectiveness, appropriateness, relevance, feasibility, and underlying cultural politics that accompanied the necessary power shift in teacher-student relationships. These issues were magnified when institutional policy-makers and external experts equated learner-centredness and teacher facilitation with modern, progressive, and globalised education, while discounting existing teaching practices which functioned effectively in local cultural contexts (Phan 2014).

In summary, this pluralist perspective spawned several person-centred education approaches, including self-directed, experiential adult learning with students as active process participants rather than passive recipients. In comparison to the concentration of behaviourism on observable behaviours, the specific focus of cognitivism on cognitive and mental processes that cannot be observed, and social learning's emphasis on extrinsic activity and interaction, quality learning and teaching from the humanist perspective can be viewed as a function of the whole person, which involves personal cognitive and affective aspects within cultural, social and political contexts.

Constructivist Learning Perspective

Constructivists define learning as a process of meaning-making by discovering complex information which is converted into internal constructions of reality (Naude, van den

Bergh & Kruger 2014). This perspective is influenced by a wide range of discipline areas and their associated theorists including Piaget, Dewey, Vygotsky, von Glasersfeld and Montessori (Phillips 1995). The construction of knowledge, led by students rather than teachers or facilitators, is a principal premise of constructivism. In contrast to the single objective reality position of cognitivists and behaviourists, constructivists recognise and build multiple subjective realities, where knowledge is contextualised, and the meaning of experiences is internally constructed and interpreted by individuals (Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy & Perry 1991; Jonassen 1991) with contributions from environmental factors (Ertmer & Newby 2013). From both personal and social constructivist perspectives, new understandings are constructed based on an array of prior experiences, knowledge, values and beliefs (Jones, Carter & Rua 1999; Kumar 2006). Constructivist assumptions underpin transformative learning theory, which itself has roots in humanism and critical social theory.

Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) argued that, to be meaningful and lasting, constructivist learning required the three relevant elements of concepts or knowledge, activity or practice, and culture or context. Jones and Brader-Araje (2002) extended contextual relevance to the concept of viability, whereby constructed meanings were consistent with individual schemes of the world and the broader social perspectives of others. For Carter and Jones (1994), such learning included: engagement in real world tasks, consciously thinking about and analysing actions for continuous improvement of practice, and active, social engagement among peers in small group work and whole classroom interactions, and Carnell (2007) recommended co-learning communities of student peers and teachers. The essence of the above viewpoints was aptly captured in Semple's (2000) depiction of a constructivist learner as the central entity, who actively engaged in seeking and constructing meaning through the integration of authentic, reflective and collaborative learning experiences.

Student-centred learning environments, which are curricula and instructional settings focused on learning activities of students, have been closely and frequently associated with constructivism (Elan, Clarebout, Léonard & Lowyck 2007). Such environments have been described, variously, as: inducing relevant learning through the use of authentic

tasks (Grabinger 1996); supporting in depth rather than surface approaches to learning compared to more traditional teacher-centred settings (Entwistle 2003; Gow & Kember 1993); and as a mediating variable between learning readiness and academic performance outcomes (Alotaibi 2016). Furthermore, for student-centred instruction to be genuinely effective, Elan *et al.* (2007) concluded that the classroom environment must be crafted and facilitated based on a balanced incorporation of knowledge-, learner-, community-, and assessment-centred learning sub-environments. However, Allendoerfer, Wilson, Kim and Burpee (2014) found that beliefs about teaching practice, at least for science and mathematics higher education academics' in the USA, were embedded within a knowledge-centred learning framework. This is suggestive of the influence of different discipline areas on teaching practices.

Teachers with a constructivist view displayed characteristics that supported learning by: sharing authority with learners, encouraging positive exchanges, formulating stimulating questions rather than providing answers, and assisting learners to develop effective ways of generating and validating knowledge (Maclellan 2015). According to Waddock and Lozano (2013), the successful constructivist educators created ways for learners, students, colleagues and themselves to work on self- and systems-awareness, and to engage in authentic, meaningful interactions with others undergoing similar experiences. Teachers reinforced constructivist classroom learning through overtly valuing students' ideas, recognising cognitive preferences (Gardner 2011), and promoting critical thinking. Themes of meaning making, connection to oneself, others and the environment, consciousness raising, and reflective practices permeate this learning approach. In addition, the emotional dimensions of experiences, evident in constructive and holistic approaches, challenge the traditional dominance of reason and scientific ways of knowing. This integration of experiential, whole person, and embodied learning, including attending to feelings in teaching and learning, can be transformative in nature (Dirkx 2008).

Bråten, Britt, Strømsø and Rouet (2011) described such activities as a 'subtle' teaching approach which involved presenting stimulating activities and challenges, highlighting and framing meaningful goals and tasks, and expecting critical thinking and problem

solving in students. Rather than decreeing an interpretation, teaching practice is one of facilitation and negotiation of meaning (Driscoll 2005), through provision of constructive feedback, and encouragement of reflection. In particular, formative feedback on performance, designed to empower students as self-regulated learners, was recommended to improve and accelerate learning (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick 2006; O'Neill 2015; Sadler 2010; 2013), while Schön (1983; 1987) identified the criticality of reflective practice or reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action to learning, and to growth and maturity of professional judgement. Learning models such as Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, Argyris and Schön's (1974) double-loop learning, which seeks to expose differences between espoused theory and theory-in-action, and Senge's (1990) concept of learning organisations are relevant exemplars of the role of feedback and reflection in constructing knowledge and improving quality practice.

This constructivist perspective, then, repositions students as active agents who collaboratively construct their learning and understanding, and whose voices and insights are valued and actionable (Bovill, Cook-Sather & Felten 2011; Davis & Sumara 2002). In such a 'powerful' learning environment, students assume greater responsibility for the construction of their knowledge with targeted assistance (Alotaibi 2016). This has potential to develop into co-creation of quality learning between students and academics (HEA 2014). Pappalepore and Farrell (2017), for example, suggested the incorporation of co-creation activities by students and teachers in the quality control processes of higher education institutions to increase flexibility, adaptability and timeliness to curriculum and assessment changes. As effective teaching practices are, indisputably, critical to quality academic work, and are likely to be impacted upon to some extent by different educational settings, these are explored in detail in this study.

Based upon the preceding discussion, it is reasonable to contend that, in general, a transition from teacher-centred to student-centred learning environments would be desirable for effective learning (Prosser, Trigwell & Taylor 1994; Prosser & Trigwell 1999). However, the suitability for different cultural settings has been questioned. While Wang (2008) supported the concept that teachers and students become partners in intercultural construction of meaning in offshore programs, constructivist educational

approaches were likely to be unfamiliar to students in Confucian cultures, so typical onshore teaching styles would not evoke the anticipated positive responses in different contexts. Therefore, as Lowyck, Elen and Clarebout (2004) cautioned, a smooth transition would depend on mutual understanding, agreement and adjustment of students and teachers, and, ideally, of all relevant parties. An additional concern is teachers' own beliefs in their self-efficacy when faced with classroom management conditions such as large class sizes, inadequate physical resources and curriculum materials, and insufficient time for planning (Ektem 2016), all done while they are working in unfamiliar cultural settings with reduced institutional support. Such conditions were encountered by academics in this study.

Drawing on a social constructivist learning perspective, an appreciative inquiry approach that builds on strengths rather than weaknesses, and collaboration amongst diverse stakeholders, has been suggested to facilitate this type of transition process towards student-centred learning (Bushe 1998; Lewis, Passmore & Cantore 2011; Watkins, Mohr & Kelly 2011; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom 2010). For example, appreciative inquiry provided a foundation for shared understandings through structured peer professional dialogue in appraisals of development of educational understanding and practice (Ludema, Cooperrider & Barrett 2001), and Jean Francois (2015) proposed it as a framework for collecting information about the perspectives of all internal and external stakeholders for global higher education programs with the purpose of highlighting positive abilities, accomplishments, and assets of individuals and entities. In these ways, the approach is unifying rather than polarising in nature. As the above descriptions implied, collaborative, inclusive and supportive principles and activities, such as those in appreciative inquiry, are a sound basis for a greater understanding of different perspectives on identifying and improving quality learning and teaching in offshore contexts.

As demonstrated above, whilst the constructivist learning perspective shares features with the other perspectives, it is, however, particularised by the combination of: assumption of multiple subjective realities; knowledge contextualised by lived experiences and personal characteristics; and constructions and interpretation of new understandings either by

individuals or co-constructed in groups. Quality learning and teaching activities and environments were learner-centred for both students and academics, with opportunities for collaborative and mutual engagement supported by feedback and reflective practices. Valuing and appreciating differences and diversity, recognising contextual influences, and stakeholder involvement in quality enhancement are inherent in this approach.

Concluding Comments on Learning Perspectives

As learning and teaching are at the core of academic work, and are especially pertinent to offshore programs where classroom activities comprise much of the work of academics, the preceding examination of the five perspectives of learning was designed to establish a sound theoretical basis for the identification and interpretation of academics' conceptualisations of quality work in Hong Kong programs. The key elements of each perspective that provided particularly relevant insights in this study are summarised below.

A cognitive learning perspective assumes that students are largely intrinsically motivated and in control of their own learning. Learning how to learn underpins this approach. Curricula focus on inquiry and problem solving, and are scaffolded from simpler to more complex or abstract tasks. The role of the academic is guidance and support. Quality issues relevant to this study included the identification of student motivations and preferences, notions of rote and deep learning, the time requirement for student development opportunities, the teaching preferences and skills of academics, and the approaches to learning and teaching that are valued and practised in specific cultural contexts.

Behavioural learning approaches favour extrinsic motivations to achieve responses wanted from learners. Quality is viewed as acquiring knowledge and reaching specified goals, which are measured quantitatively. This teacher-centred perspective utilises standardised curriculum materials and delivery methods which may not meet the learning needs of individual students or accord with the preferred values and practices of

individual academics. While cost effective for institutions, educational concerns included large class sizes, incorporation of technology, and generic content and delivery. In terms of quality in the offshore context, the relevance and effectiveness of standardised curricula, and of learning and teaching methods, as well as the emphasis on quantitative feedback in this perspective, were investigated in this study.

From the social learning perspective, cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors jointly impact on learning. Thus, learning has both internal and external influences. The importance of authentic practical settings, and opportunities of learning through demonstration and modelling by knowledgeable others are recognised. Prominence is given to co-learning between individuals, and in groups, such as teams and communities of practice. This study explored the nature of collegiate interaction within Australian offshore teaching teams and cross-institution teaching teams, and also gathered participants' perceptions and experiences of using group activities with their offshore student teams.

The central underlying assumptions of the humanistic approach include: individuals have diverse intrinsic motivations to meet their own growth and development needs; individuals are largely responsible for their own learning; and specific traits and practices of facilitators support and enhance quality learning. It is characterised by student-centred approaches, and recognises cognitive and affective needs, and the importance of cooperative and supportive learning environments. It has been associated with adult learning, experiential learning cycles, co-operative learning, transformative learning and lifelong learning. Fundamentally, a humanist teaching approach views learning as an authentic, meaningful and holistic process. This study questioned academics about their perceptions about the cultural fit of these elements of learning and teaching within the offshore context, for example, the degree of alignment of their own teaching preferences with those of their offshore students and colleagues. The availability of resources to support learning development is also a consideration in offshore programs.

Constructivist learning exhibits characteristics of student-led learning, but, rather than a single objective reality position, multiple subjective and contextualised realities are

recognised. Quality learning entails knowledge, practice and context through interlinked authentic, reflective and collaborative learning experiences. In this study, the extent to which academics are able to influence their classroom environments is of interest, given the limitations of brief contact visits and the Confucian cultural context. Detail was also sought from academics about mutual engagement in student- centred practices, including types and challenges of giving and receiving feedback with students, colleagues and other institutional stakeholders, as well as the role of reflection in teaching practices, and in student learning activities.

This systematic review of learning literature assisted the study in three specific ways: firstly, it identified the foundations of well-established learning perspectives, and their key manifestations in practice, which supported the exploration of this study's central emergent theme of learning; secondly, it provided a conceptual basis for devising and refining research and interview questions in Chapter Three; and, lastly, it informed constructions and interpretations of findings about learning and teaching in later chapters.

The final section of the literature review that follows, draws upon key concepts and insights identified in the sections above, namely: trends in internationalisation, Schwab's (1973) education commonplaces, and aspects of learning perspectives, in order to inform the specific focus on the offshore context of this study.

The Offshore Cultural Context

As identified in Chapter One, and the first section of this chapter, many studies of international higher education in recent decades have concentrated on trends such as international academic and student mobility, quality assurance, massification of education, technology advances, and, of particular interest to this study, transnational or offshore education. Developments in these areas have triggered significant global changes in university management practices; the purposes, conditions and structures of academic professionalisation; and the impacts on teaching and learning across cultures (Lee, Cheslock, Maldonado-Maldonado & Rhoades 2005; Pucciarelli & Kaplan 2016;

Schneijderberg & Merkator 2013). One consistent tendency has been for traditionally laissez-faire countries, such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia, to impose more government controls in university governance, while more state-centric countries like China moved towards more market-based state-university governance approaches (Austin & Jones 2016).

Oleksiyenko (2017) highlighted that Hong Kong, the contextual setting for this current study, was not immune from these global effects as the government plays a major role in the quality assurance and improvement of teaching and learning in higher education, particularly in publicly funded universities, although there was, as yet, no recognised way to benchmark and evaluate teaching in Hong Kong (Chan 2017). During 2012 to 2015, in particular, an overt political goal of the Hong Kong government was to grow a knowledge-intensive society by educating innovative university students; therefore, more innovative academics were needed to develop new products, content and approaches. Consequently, attention was given to more student-focused teaching approaches including problem-based learning, small size classes, and open classroom discussions (Leišytė & Wilkesmann 2016). Oleksiyenko (2017), for example, reported on the potential positive contributions of a critical inquiry learning orientation to the development of students, academics, administrators and other professionals in a graduate education program in Hong Kong University. This inquiry-based, boundary-spanning approach to involve academics, students and administrators was designed to foster creative and constructive mutual learning outcomes.

It is against the backdrop of such changes in higher education that participants in this study experienced their offshore academic work in Hong Kong. The interrogation of the broader literature on internationalisation, concepts of quality, the nature of academic work, and the anchoring theme of approaches to learning, along with the specific contextual literature that follows, formed the conceptual foundation for both identifying and refining the research problem, issues and questions, as well as assisting in determining the research design, and the analysis and interpretation of the empirical data. This component of the literature review was constructed to both further sharpen the focus on specific contextual cultural factors flagged in the preceding elements of the literature

review, and to be also cognisant of recurrent themes that emerged during the research process. This two-pronged engagement with relevant literature was consistent with the qualitative, constructivist methodological perspective of this study.

With reference to Schwab's (1973) four educational commonplaces, which were used to frame this investigation, there are five specific factors that have contributed to participants' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work in Hong Kong. These are: the nature of learners with Confucian cultural and educational heritage; the characteristics of, and challenges for, offshore academics; approaches to intercultural learning and competence; learning through reflective practice and collaboration; and the nature and effectiveness of institutional support. Elucidation of each follows.

The Confucian Learner

In this study, the predominant cultural and educational profile of students and local staff encountered by participants was that of a Confucian cultural heritage. Hence, it is relevant to consider the debates surrounding the characteristics of the so-called Chinese learner which have ensued alongside the proliferation of offshore programs in the Asian region since the mid-1990s.

Chinese learners have frequently been stereotyped as members of a fixed, static homogenous group typified by a low level of critical thinking ability, little engagement in spontaneous oral participation, and high avoidance for challenging the authority or expertise of teachers. They have been described, variously, as: preferring classrooms where clear and prescriptive rules and roles are emphasised; adopting a concrete-sequential cognitive learning style; precisely following directions of the teacher; having low tolerance levels for ambiguity and uncertainty; being trusting and respectful of teachers; using learning strategies such as memorization and repetition; and having a collective orientation displayed, for example, through preferences for small group work (Li 2012; Nelson 1995; Oxford & Burry-Stock 1995).

Small group work, for example, has been advocated as an inherent aspect of a culture-sensitive, learning-centred approach, as it exploits the Confucian concepts of co-operation, self-effacement and saving face (Flowerdew 1998), although concerns have also been raised as to suitable design and behaviours in groups. Tang (1996) advocated the examination of certain cultural-social dynamics, such as obvious hierarchies and informal configurations in groups, because they influenced the level of individual engagement in group work. Lin (2010) addressed the cultural appropriateness of common Western practices when working in groups, for instance, questioning ideas, opinions, conclusions and behaviours, and overt management of conflictual issues. Modification of Western team techniques and careful introduction of them to students from Confucian cultures were advised by Nguyen, Terlouwb and Pilota (2006) and Neuman and Bekerman (2000), while Simpson (2017) argued for thorough preparation for attaining the requisite academic and socio-cultural skills to take part in collaborative group work.

In particular, silence, reticence and seeming non-participation in the classroom have been described by some (Ballard & Clancy 1997; Hu 2002) in terms of learning deficits when compared to prevailing Western educational viewpoints. Expatriate lecturers in Hong Kong, for example, were frustrated by what they perceived as reluctance by their students to express opinions in class (Flowerdew & Miller 1995). Others (Grimshaw 2007; Watkins & Biggs 2001), however, saw these characteristics as beneficial to learning. Gudykunst and Mody (2002), for instance, described silence as a fundamental prerequisite for linguistic and cultural competence, and those who listened, observed, and restricted their verbal communication were considered wise and trustworthy in Chinese culture. Kennedy (2002) and Watkins and Biggs (1996), amongst others, also found evidence to suggest that adult Hong Kong Chinese learners, when given sufficient time to adjust, were receptive to adopting new learning styles in response to changes in learning contexts, teaching styles and modes of assessment.

Phan and Li's (2014) qualitative exploration of silence in the classroom of 'Me Generation' (post-1980s-born) Chinese students, who had studied in both Chinese and Australian classrooms, was a pertinent example of changing characteristics and behaviours. Despite the common portrayal of being passive recipients and quiet learners,

who appeared to be reluctant to adopt active roles in classroom discussion, their silence was found to have multiple connotations, including choice, right, and resistance, which those students actively utilised in their learning. Indeed, Cheng (2000) argued that causes of student behaviours were situation specific rather than being culturally predetermined, while Kubota and Lehner (2004) suggested that a more expansive range of issues beyond cultural difference would surface if researchers focused on individuals in context rather than only as part of a generalised cultural group.

Jin and Cortazzi (2011), Phan and Li (2014) and Ryan (2010) all contended, though, that a deficit-surplus depiction neither recognised wider environmental impacts such as internationalisation of higher education, the growing emphasis on quality assurance or trends in China's educational reforms. Furthermore, as Chan (2010) identified, there was an increasing individual diversity and mobility exhibited by Chinese students, and Yang (2009) emphasised that their values were becoming more varied, less traditional, and more internationally orientated. Therefore, a broader range of insights can be gained from other approaches to foster greater understanding of the phenomenon of the Chinese learner such as appreciating and nurturing the social-cultural identity of learners both within and outside the classroom, and taking a more nuanced focus on the nature of power in the teacher-student relationship and its impacts on behaviours (Phan 2009; Singh 2009; Zhou, Knoke & Sakamoto 2005). Bao's (2014) advice was to acknowledge these characteristics associated with Chinese learning styles not as a barrier, but as a valid foundation on which to build learning and facilitate teaching in internationalised classrooms. Thus, as Biggs (1996), Kember (1999) and Robinson (1988) had previously argued, the explanation for commonly accepted Chinese learning characteristics was clearly complex and could not be reduced to simplistic cultural stereotypes.

The above consideration of some of the common assumptions, perceptions and stereotypes about learners with a Confucian cultural heritage contributed to this study by establishing a basis to investigate participants' preconceptions of offshore students' characteristics and behaviours compared with their actual experiences in the classroom. Moreover, the review provided prompts to assist in eliciting interpretations of what

factors participants believed contributed to the nature of their Chinese students, and to the subsequent impacts on the quality of offshore learning and teaching practices.

The Offshore Academic

Australian academic staff who take part in work in Hong Kong represent an important aspect of the internationalisation and quality agendas of higher education, that is, offshore or transnational programs. Overt and hidden cultural differences, and unsettling challenges to underlying beliefs about teaching and learning issues, which visiting university teachers faced when teaching in Hong Kong, were explored in Bodycott and Walker's (2000) constructivist study. As most prior research had taken the perspective of international students studying in Australia, their findings provided extensive valuable insights into the growing field of offshore higher education. A key conclusion was that the development of inter-cultural understandings and related teaching practices started with the teacher's attitude, and the scaffolds created to support student learning. Other conclusions were that inter-cultural understandings needed to both permeate the curricula and be a shared responsibility of both teachers and students. However, the achievement of such goals was made complex by the conditions encountered by academics in contemporary offshore work. Leask's (2004) interviews with Australian staff teaching in Hong Kong indicated they were confronted with both intellectual and emotional demands, including feelings of frustration confusion and disorientation from contextual differences and similarities; challenges to their stereotypes and prejudices; and facing local staff and students' perceptions of them. Thus, their experience was one of 'strangers in a strange land' or cultural outsiders, a parallel position to international students studying away from their home countries.

Frequently, academics teaching offshore are short-term sojourners or so-called 'flying faculty' who are in a foreign cultural environment for a precise role and period of time, typically in branch or satellite campuses of their institutions or in partnership arrangements with local organisations (Smith K 2009). The nature of this component of their academic work is typified by combinations of intensive sessions of individual or

team block teaching, co-working with local tutors, and operating within technologically blended virtual learning environments. Concerns have been raised regarding the mental and physical challenges arising from the complexity of this work, mostly notably, demands of travel, intensive teaching modes, simultaneous management of onshore workloads (Debowski 2005; Evans & Tregenza 2002), immediate resumption of teaching upon return, and coping with personal home issues whilst away (Debowski 2003; Gribble & Ziguras 2003; Smith 2014). In addition, the importance of maintaining a work-life balance was also identified by Jais (2012), who found there was a positive correlation between effective balance and longer term career success.

Overseas teaching visits can open up opportunities to reflect upon and refine teaching repertoires to enhance learning for academics as well as their students, but they can also present disorientating dilemmas, especially if a 'sink or swim' approach to cultural immersion is employed by institutions (Smith 2014). A lack of adequate, systematic institutional preparation and support may expose academics to making cultural gaffes that have the potential to damage their confidence and self-esteem, as well as intensifying confusion, anxiety and stress. Other effects, including delayed career progression and negative impacts on student experiences, have been reported (Blickem & Shackleford 2008; Bodycott & Walker 2000; Hoare 2013; Ziguras 2008).

Furthermore, institutional support, to be most effective, needs to take into account individual predispositions and preferences towards this type of offshore work. For example, Evans and Tregenza (2002) found three groupings of preferences for Australian academics sojourning in Hong Kong. The larger group enjoyed the international work including financial benefits, despite the extra workload and the disruption to family and personal life. Of the two smaller groups, one was enthusiastic and highly stimulated by the context, and the other actively disliked offshore work, but felt compelled to carry it out. It is probable that the two more extreme stances, in particular, would tend to either ameliorate or exacerbate responses to the more onerous conditions of offshore work and, indeed, attitudes and perceptions of teachers as to the effectiveness of the type and extent of support offered by their institutions.

Numerous researchers have sought to ascertain the key characteristics of an ideal offshore or transnational teacher. Debowski (2003) suggested the importance of certain functional skills such as cross-cultural communication, flexible delivery methods, e-learning proficiency, large group instructional techniques, culturally applicable and transferable curriculum design and assessment, and, in addition, argued that the competent acquisition of these skills required professional development by institutions. Leask, Hicks, Kohler and King (2005) identified 15 characteristics of an ideal transnational (offshore) teacher, grouped into three categories, namely, cultural knowledge, teaching skills and abilities, and policy and procedural knowledge. Leask (2008) classified four themes in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities directly related to effective teaching practice in transnational classrooms. These were: discipline expertise, skilled teachers and managers of learning environments, efficient intercultural learners, and displaying personal attitudes and attributes, such as being approachable, patient, encouraging and passionate about their teaching.

While these studies generally sought to find academic characteristics to apply to offshore contexts, Kember and McNaught (2007) highlighted that learnings from offshore work had universal relevance. They proposed ten context-independent common constructs or principles of effective teaching derived from the practices of 44 Australian and 18 Hong Kong teachers who had been nominated as exemplary by their universities. Their findings included that curriculum design should ensure aims, concepts, learning activities and assessment were authentic and consistent with learning outcomes, and generic capabilities such as critical thinking, teamwork and communication skills were incorporated, all of which should be targeted towards future student discipline areas and career needs. Ideal learning activities depended on meaningful tasks that immersed students in real life, current and local examples, and related theory to practice in planned, yet flexible, class structures that featured responsiveness and adjustment to on-going two-way feedback. Finally, effective teaching practice meant establishing genuine, empathetic relationships with students, and providing motivation and encouragement through demonstrating enthusiasm within interesting, enjoyable and interactive classes. It would seem, then, that the quality of academic work in all locations has the potential to be enhanced by synergistic, two-way learning between onshore and offshore contexts, so

identifying this potential and outcomes in practice was an intended contribution of this current study.

Other studies centred on underlying attributes of academics. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran (2004) specified that multicultural competence and a culturally responsive educational approach were directly related to teachers' understanding of their own personal motives, beliefs, values, assumptions and biases, and to possessing a knowledge of cultural backgrounds of students, and of the wider social, economic and political context. However, Kim and Slapac (2015) contended that teachers frequently took their own cultural values for granted and, thus, unwittingly transmitted their own knowledge, beliefs, values, and educational approaches to students. Therefore, prior to encouraging students to reflect on their own identities and learning preferences, academics should ensure that they also self-inquire, reflect upon, and scrutinise their own senses of identity and teaching practices. Witsel and Boyle (2017) extended this focus to include an in-depth pursuit of self-knowledge and examination of cultural biases, although they also acknowledged that such an ontological process required sufficient time and cultural exposure to achieve competence. In the current study, participants' offshore work was intermittent and short-term in nature, and so was the frequency and length of cultural immersion, therefore, the time period and contact opportunities for reflection on their experiences were necessarily limited. Reflection as a component of intercultural learning and quality is examined in more detail later in this chapter.

Skyrme and Mc Gee (2016) envisaged academic staff as experiencing tensions and being pulled in several directions due to the complexity of responding to the needs of international students. As a consequence, some teachers took a more holistic view of the academic and affective needs of students, thus altering their own teaching practices, and making suggestions for staff development such as induction sessions and professional practice forums. Others adopted the approach that students should be supported to change in order to match the expectations of particular discipline areas. Key underlying intentions of academics taking such perspectives as these can be considered in the light of Fanghanel's (2012) framework of three different ideological clusters. They are: production, which is concerned with preparation for work; reproduction, which transmits

the discipline tenets; and transformation, which emphasises social, personal, human or global change. It is probable that those academics attuned to the informed criticality of the transformative orientation would be more open to adaptability and flexibility, while reproducers, in particular, may be more likely to resist change to their teaching practices and expect their students to adjust responses accordingly. The extent to which participants adapted their teaching practices was investigated in this study.

This study sought to elicit participants' viewpoints on factors such as those above in order to shed more light on the intrinsic characteristics and extrinsic behaviours of academics that impacted on their conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. Furthermore, as Leask (2004) contended, the teaching, learning, curriculum and contextual challenges faced by academics afforded them both the imperative and the opportunity to develop their own competencies as intercultural learners in offshore programs, which, in turn, could also enhance the internationalisation of their onshore work. Therefore, a more comprehensive consideration of intercultural learning and competence is germane to gaining a better comprehension of participants' lived experiences in their offshore work environment.

Intercultural Learning and Competence

Ward, Bochner and Furnham (2015) described cultural learning as the process of acquiring culturally relevant social knowledge and skills to enable the effective adaptation to new environments. Such socially skilled individuals acted appropriately in various social milieus, as they possessed a flexible collection of behaviours based on their sensitivity to what was happening around them psychologically, and to how others responded to them. Furthermore, effective interculturality drew upon open-mindedness, interest and curiosity, supported by a reflexive mindset that questioned differences in cultural traditions and surroundings, with the intention of enriching cultural knowledge and understanding (Caruana & Montgomery 2015). Kim (2010) argued that the nature of this kind of embodied and encultured knowledge was organic, intrinsic, implicit, reflexive and spatial, rather than hard, scientific and explicitly coded. Moreover, this knowledge

was the foundation of the transnational identity capital of mobile academics, that is, it encompassed the generic competencies or personal skills that enabled them to engage with 'otherness'. While aspects of intercultural learning and competence are numerous in the literature, in this study, intercultural communication was selected as the central focus as it is a critical enabling factor for the enactment of quality academic work in internationalised higher education, particularly in the classroom.

Gudykunst and Kim (1997) argued that when meeting people from different cultures, the inclination is to regard them as strangers who belong to groups other than one's own. Uncertainty and anxiety about actual or anticipated interactions with others, arising from assumptions and impressions that exist in the group to which individuals belong, can trigger intercultural communication apprehension, especially for initial communication encounters (Neuliep & McCroskey 1997). Indeed, Kim (2005) visualised the process of cultural interaction as a cycle of stress and adaptation that grows from an intercultural stance towards groups of others, towards one of interpersonal interactions between individuals. Neuliep (2017) succinctly described the complex nature of intercultural communication as a group phenomenon which was experienced by individuals, and it was an essential component of intercultural competence. It could be argued, then, that to successfully interact with others from different cultural contexts, effective intercultural communication is a mandatory component of intercultural competence. Indeed, Crossman and Burdett (2012), Volet (1999) and Volet and Tan-Quigley (1999) argued that, as all academics, students, other staff and wider communities are influenced by internationalisation, then they also have an obligation to expand their cultural understandings and intercultural communication through intercultural engagement.

Verbal and non-verbal communication varies between cultural contexts, with intercultural communication being primarily a nonverbal act between people (Neuliep 2017). Common examples include appropriate expression of emotions, attitudes, feelings and interaction routines, as well as proxemics, posture, and touch and gesture. The implicit messages conveyed through such communications may not be clear to those in unfamiliar cultural settings, but are hidden in the background when things go awry (Burgoon 1995). Spitzberg (1997) described a competent intercultural communicator as one who

understands and abides by the rules, norms and expectations of the relationship, and is sensitive and adaptable to the context. This type of competence is comprised of three aspects: the cognitive or knowledgeable, the affective or motivated, and the behavioural or skilled. In addition, Teekens (2003) found that the depth and quality of the communication aspect of intercultural learning was not automatic, rather it tended to be inconsistent, and to be dependent on how, and to what extent, individuals were aware of and willing to draw insights from the effects of culture difference and dissonance (Biggs & Watkins 2001).

The notion of learning from dissonance in offshore work was raised by Hoare (2013), who reported on culturally-dependent issues such as ethics, authority and the expected roles of educators inside and outside the classroom that lead to intercultural miscommunications. Examples included the confusion and discord and, at times, mistrust that arose when academics sought to establish social relationships with offshore students according to Australian norms of interaction. Poole and Ewan (2010) identified the significance of culturally-based, relationship-related differences, including the South East Asian high-context national cultural tendency to emphasise status, withhold emotion and develop social trust as a basis for personal and business trust, as well as the importance of non-verbal communication.

It is also well recognised that attempts to bridge gaps in communication and understanding between teachers and students through informal methods, such as narratives, story-telling and humour, is a delicate task which relies on a balance between the astute matching of humour exhibited by academics to the type of diversity in students' cultural, educational and professional backgrounds (Baid & Lambert 2010; McKeachie & Svinicki 2006; Nasiri & Mafakheri 2015). An appreciation of the complexities of Chinese students' past experiences and cultural norms may improve intercultural and educational understanding, and enhance perceptions of, provisions for, and relationships between academics and students (Heng 2018).

It would seem, then, that the attainment of effective intercultural communication by academics teaching offshore is a cornerstone for developing their intercultural learning

and competence, which, in turn, contributes positively to the quality of the learning experience of students. There are complementary benefits to teachers: the opportunity to become more informed about the realities of life in Chinese education and culture; the extension of their individual toolkits of cultural knowledge and skills as academics; and the incorporation of internationalised learnings into the improvement of the overall quality of their academic work. Therefore, the viewpoints and practices of participants regarding intercultural communication, learning and competence, and the subsequent impacts on their offshore work, and indeed, on their overall academic work, were sought in this study.

Reflective Practice, Collaborative Learning and Teaching Teams

Effective learning and teaching, and quality academic work in general, have been linked to the utilisation of both self-reflection and peer-supported reflective practices in education. Ramsden (2003) proposed a simple, but powerful, contention regarding reflection; if the primary aim of teaching was to facilitate student learning, then all teaching actions, and activities to evaluate or improve teaching, should reasonably be judged against the expectation that they will lead to the type of student learning which was desired by lecturers. He argued that a reflective and enquiring approach where academics also learnt from their students was necessary to improve teaching. Boud and Middleton (2003) defined reflection as one of the three main components to consider in the learning context: experience, including behaviours, ideas or feelings; reflection, through returning to, attending to, and re-evaluating experience; and outcomes, which consider new perspectives, behavioural changes, and application of learning into practice. Self-reflection and critical reflection enable awareness of context, and have the potential to assist in the development of authentic and genuine engagement with others in teaching and broader life experiences (Sanderson 2008). Considering reflection within an array of critical practices is likely to assist in maintaining its critical rigour (Saltiel 2010).

Developing reflection has been described as essential for professional practice. Billet and Newton's (2010) perspective was that of 'learning practice', whereby the reliance was on

an on-going, lifelong professional learning process, rather than only on individual personal reflection or guidance from professional support. For instance, the interplay between work practices and the material environment was a focus of Engeström's (1999) activity-theory. Social interaction between educational communications and technologies and the environment were emphasised in cultural-historical theories (van Merriënboer & de Bruin 2014). Boud (2010) identified the applicability of reflection to teaching and nursing, and promoted 'productive reflection' as an organisational rather than only an individual activity. The intent was generative rather than instrumental, and included the purpose of the organisation and the involvement of multiple stakeholders. As Sweet (2010) concluded, dialogue and shared reflections between members of a whole group could lead to collective resolution of issues and create positive institutional change.

Despite these advocacies for reflection, Bulman *et al*. (2016) argued that, as yet, reflection did not provide a satisfactory knowledge basis to guide professional practice. Indeed, Edwards (2017) contended that the emphasis on 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action', along with reflective frameworks that specify stages in reflective assignments, could constrain exploration of practice, if they restrict creativity and thinking, reduce willingness to express true emotions and feelings, and point learners towards expected answers that may not mirror real experiences. West (2010) also critiqued approaches to reflection that were superficial and formulaic, and overlooked the anxieties and defences involved in professional learning and practice. Further, Edwards (2017) proposed that reflection needed to be reconceptualised to incorporate reflection-before, reflection-in, reflection-on and reflection-beyond-action, in order to more effectively support learning from practice and developing professional practice. The inclusion of reflection-before-action can assist learners to select situations to think about prior to practice, while reflection-beyond-action, incorporating the use of stories and narratives, can aid self-awareness and exploration.

Learning through action and reflection has been examined in terms of experiential education. Roberts (2008; 2012) acknowledged that while reflection was a component of most experiential experiences, the complexity of experiential education or 'learning by doing' involved the diversity of underlying theoretical perspectives that situate this type

of education in social and cultural contexts. A humanist focus, for example, centralises the individual experience and how it is 'felt', which has similarities to a phenomenological viewpoint. A social perspective of learning places importance on shared, interactive experience. A pragmatist construction is embedded in notions of social harmony, rather than conflict, while critical theory questions the intermeshing of identity, power, and culture. Thus, rather than experiential learning being homogenous learning by doing, inevitably, there will be different emphases in both the formal and informal curriculum based on the dominant theoretical perspective.

Thinking with stories (Estefan, Caine & Clandinin 2016) is one means to assist professional practice educators to sustain narrative thinking about temporal, spatial and relationship aspects of work as part of professional learning. Attention to multiple voices and stories enables a deeper and more complex understanding of experiences in professional education. Nurses, for example, reported that they developed their professional identity through interaction and sharing of experiences in a narrative and reflective way (ten Hoeve, Jansen & Roodbol 2014). For Fitzgerald, Parr and Williams (2018), the telling of authentic scholarly stories assisted reflexive description and critical analysis of learning about professional experience, both of which contributed to research and practice in university teacher education.

According to Smith (2007), the telling and retelling of personal narratives provided a stimulus for constructing self-identity, and social and individual transformation. Similarly, Craig (2011) claimed that when an event is known narratively, it has both an historical context, and provides insights into relationships, interactions and change. Küpers (2013) argued that fresh knowledge might be created, transferred and adapted through interactive stories in a shared telling and listening, transformational context. Narratives, though, can be both a potential form of cultural creativity and cultural change, and can lead to resistance and a lack of receptivity to change in individuals and organisations when they act as implicit means for constructing and reinforcing particular ideologies and blind spots, cultural control, and marginalisation. Formenti and West (2018) contended that, as relationships and stories are socially and culturally embedded, and transformational learning is a continuous lifelong and lifewide search for meaning,

truth, agency and selfhood, there is no one answer, or ultimate truth when considering transformation, learning and education. However, Saltiel (2010) argued that the analysis of practitioner narratives within the context of professional discourses could be an effective means of amalgamating reflection and critical thinking.

Thus, while the efficacy of reflection and narrative has been challenged, these processes can add new aspects to existing knowledge, contribute to making sense of, and learning from, practice experiences, encourage lifelong learning, improve development of practice and, potentially, stimulate transformative learning.

Bodycott and Walker (2000) took a specific focus on reflection in the intercultural context. They offered a series of reflective questions aimed at facilitating self-awareness and consciousness of culture distance as a basis for the development of intercultural competence in individuals. These questions addressed: underpinning cultural values, norms and biases; the enactment of cultural transference; utilising adaptive and flexible techniques and processes; sensitivity to cultural reasonableness and appropriateness; and conscious encouragement of students in cultural learning. Thus, the possible objects for reflection can be as diverse as the situations faced, and the systems and contexts in which they occurred (Schön 1983). Sirignado, Perillo and Maddalena (2015) also took an intercultural perspective in their examination of autobiographical reflection and narration. These techniques form a path towards intercultural information and embedded emancipatory value by unearthing implicit shared human knowledge and qualities. The implications for education are centred on the learner taking the lead, rather than the teacher directing the acquisition of selected knowledge and competencies.

Intercultural learning through reflective practices in group settings has also been recommended. Mezirow (1997) advocated communicative learning through discourse or dialogue to critically examine assumptions underlying intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings, and to assess competing interpretations and alternative points of view. Such an approach can transform personal frames of reference, but can also create disorienting dilemmas, ambiguity and uncertainty (Mezirow 2003). However, Wilbur (2016) proposed that reflective inquiry, if maintained over extended periods of time, also assisted in the

development of effective intercultural characteristics and skills which aided in the analysis of observations and experiences in order to better resolve confusion triggered by uncertainty. Reflective practice, then, has the potential to heighten intercultural understanding, and contribute to the exposure and rethinking of different perspectives. The contemporary context of higher education, then, is complicated by the involvement of layers of stakeholders with varied and, at times, incompatible interests, concerns and cultural backgrounds. However, it would seem that a learning and reflective orientation provides a basis for insights and understanding of current perspectives, along with options for future development of quality learning and teaching practices (Ng, Fox & Nakano 2016).

Reflective practice can be refined within peer supported learning activities and environments. The efficacy for the intercultural development of academics through semi-structured, sensitively and ethically facilitated learning communities, especially with strong institutional backing, is well documented (Debowski 2008; Dunn & Wallace 2006; Gribble & Ziguras 2003; Paige & Martin 1996). In the context of building global communities of practice, Keay, May and O'Mahony (2014) suggested that the three interrelated dimensions of a joint enterprise perspective, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire of knowledge and resources would best assist in the development of an institutional approach to offshore education which would enrich the quality of the relationship and cultural learning between global partners and their practices. According to Smith K (2009), though, significant, even transformative learning, also depended on the space, time and institutional support to foster adequate reflection for the exploration of the premises, processes and experiences of offshore work. For Killick (2018), the success of such global collaborative learning relied on carefully constituted intercultural communities of practice that spanned countries and cultures and operated within an ethos of reciprocity between members. Smith K (2009) suggested that the novel experiences in offshore contexts can encourage teachers to extend their reflections on learning, which can augment teaching practice, in general. In this way, transnational teaching experience is a developmental opportunity that can enhance teaching offshore and at home (Keay, May & O'Mahony 2014) for individuals and teams.

For participants in the current study, the primary opportunity for collaborative learning stemmed from their membership in offshore teaching teams. All participants had experience in teams comprised of staff from their home institutions and local Hong Kong staff. The following discussion reviews the characteristics, dynamics and effectiveness of offshore teaching teams.

Academics are often part of teaching teams with their onshore and offshore institution colleagues. Dunn and Wallace (2008) believed that truly effective collaboration between them depended on the formal recognition as equals of both provider and local institutions and staff. Given the variation in professional and cultural backgrounds of members of offshore teaching teams, this may, however, be difficult to achieve in practice for several reasons, including lack of shared professional standards, unregulated modification of subject matter, different teaching style preferences, and power imbalances. Dixon and Scott (2004), for instance, found the size of the pool of available staff in some locations was limited, and there were inconsistencies in the level of professional qualifications and standards of local staff, especially when lower qualified lecturers were directly recruited by host institutions (Lim 2008).

The nature and extent of adaptation of curriculum content to context provided an example of competing viewpoints and typical dilemmas arising for teaching teams. Wang (2008) advised against the imposition and indiscriminate use of Western theories upon offshore academics and students, and Ziguras (2008) noted the importance of situating theories within perspective so that students could relate them to their own experiences and social contexts. Zimitat (2008), nevertheless, highlighted that some students were motivated to choose an Australian degree for the specific purpose of attaining an international awareness and preparation for the global workforce. Shams and Huisman (2012) argued that offshore students, parents, and employers wanted the same programs and quality standards as in home institutions, but, simultaneously, they expected relevance and appropriateness to the local business and social contexts. A critical consequence of such competing perspectives, identified by Pyvis (2008), was the complexity of controlling and improving quality in offshore programs when there were wide variations in approaches to content and delivery of curriculum material amongst team members.

Differing teaching orientations also have important implications for practice for both Australian staff and their local teaching team members. For example, if efforts targeted at enhancing learning experiences of international students through participation and collaboration are imposed by institutions, they are unlikely to make sense to academics whose beliefs and preferences are firmly entrenched in the significance of reproduction of the content and norms of their disciplines and professions. As Fanghanal (2012) identified, if academics cannot reproduce or take forward their encultured values and practices, a side effect may be problematic perceptions of the attitudes, motivations and approaches of the dominant others, and individual and institutional learning and teaching interventions may well be interpreted as threatening and spark off resistance. However, Leask (2015) proposed that effective change could be attained through disciplinary-based reflection which recognised, investigated and accommodated different world views. Indeed, Fitch (2013) concluded that internationalising curriculum afforded academics the opportunity to examine discipline related ethnocentric values and narratives, and improve learning outcomes for students. Similarly, Sawir (2011) concluded that globally competent academics needed to know their subject content, but also required an openness to alternative ways of thinking that equipped them to more efficiently teach students in socially and culturally diverse classroom environments.

Thus, offshore teaching team members, such as those in this study, are confronted with making decisions about reconciling heterogeneous backgrounds and viewpoints in their professional preferences and practices, as well as meeting the expectations and demands of students, institutions and other societal groups. International education has brought confusion over identity and affiliation into practice, for instance, when tensions arise between a visiting academic's feelings of perceived power as an educated Westerner, are challenged by feelings of apprehension as a cultural outsider in an offshore classroom (Ferguson 2011). Relationship management is at the core of these cultural challenges, but it is problematic for academics when there are insufficiencies in training, recognition of skill development or ownership in the creation and delivery of offshore work (Chang 2007; Poole & Ewan 2010).

Many of the conflictual issues which emerge between members in offshore teams stem from the imbalance of control over curriculum content, learning and teaching activities and assessment. The locus of power, in general, was firmly situated with provider countries despite local staff often possessing the knowledge and experience to make valuable inputs into cultural and contextual issues of which sojourning academics had only limited comprehension (Coombe & Clanchy 2002; Dobos 2011). Leung and Waters (2017) found that, despite innovative and generative collaboration possibilities, staff interactions were dominated by monitoring and control. Furthermore, Debowski (2008) and Shams and Huisman (2012) established that local academics were, simultaneously, prone to a sense of inferiority and had feelings of alienation from an academic community of practice. Dobos (2011) contended that the professional treatment of offshore academics was paramount to the quality of their overall working life, and failing to address their concerns could have major negative impacts on the quality of their teaching and their students' learning. Hill, Cheong, Leong and Fernandez-Chung's (2014) argued that the imposition of foreign education models, without sufficient explanation and shared understanding of underpinning values, methods and intended outcomes, could lead to resentment and distrust by local staff and magnification of adverse consequences on work.

Remedies have been suggested for these types of deficits in the relationship between Australia and offshore staff and their institutions. Bovill, Jordan and Watters' (2015) offered a set of principles that demonstrated a collaborative focus and guided the quality of their own transnational teaching practice approaches. They were: modelling particular pedagogies and practices; making certain of reciprocity and mutual benefit; highlighting individual integrity and institutional credibility; and developing and supporting transnational staff. Additional recommendations included: ongoing communication and dialogue (Pannan & Gribble 2005), joint formalised planning and review sessions (Seah & Edwards 2006), and the fostering of mutual respect and willingness to be informed by, and learn and develop from, multiple perspectives (Dobinson 2015).

Leask's (2004) solution was that the role of local tutors needed to be reconstructed so that they became fully integrated and engaged members of transnational teaching teams. To achieve this aim, Dunn and Wallace (2006) and Keevers and Lefoe *et al*. (2014) suggested

maximising opportunities for effective communication. In addition, Dunn and Wallace's (2005) recommendions of formalised regular interactions on authentic pedagogical tasks to engender greater trust, understanding, and personal relationships between academics, as well as ensuring less confusion and more clarity for students, along with face-to-face contact and exchange visits, remain relevant to contemporary offshore teams. Smith (2014) endorsed ongoing mutual engagement and cross-institutional exchanges between flying faculty teachers and local tutors within intercultural communities of practice, as essential for collaborative transnational teaching teams.

Keevers and Lefoe *et al*. (2014) proposed that team members needed to be given opportunities to progress beyond basic induction activities for teaching in offshore programmes towards holistic, collaborative development aimed at improving the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment practices in transnational teaching teams. Collaborative social practices involving contextualised activities were more likely to strengthen social relations and trust, accelerate professional learning and enhance quality. Interactions with peers, who possess different and novel perspectives, can facilitate such outcomes. However, the challenge for institutions is to provide opportunities, frameworks and structures for the team members to develop new, transnational approaches to their everyday work practices, supported for example, by virtual interactions. A focus on teaching team members learning from each other through day-to-day practices, rather on acquiring predetermined knowledge and competencies, could also reduce the unavoidable differences in power relations between academics teaching across sites.

Institutional and cross-campus accountability in transnational education has complex layers that directly impact on teaching and learning. Keevers and Bell *et al.* (2014) developed a framework, and developed extensive resources, for effective transnational teaching teams which links four functions required for the development, maintenance and assurance of program quality: quality in teaching and learning, student learning, professional practice, and negotiation and communication. A shared understanding of the transnational environment and the establishment of clear communication practices and relationships based on mutual respect and trust are necessary precursors to ongoing effectiveness. Outcomes of their project included a Professional Development Toolkit

made up of Induction, and Participatory Action Learning materials; a Resource Toolkit comprised of Internationalisation of the Curriculum and Inclusive Pedagogy, Assessment Parity, International Student Collaboration and Dialogue, Intercultural Group Work, Academic Language and Literacies, and Transnational Project-based Learning materials; and Case Studies.

Based on the above consideration of offshore teaching teams, it is probable that the amalgamation of individual and collective knowledge, skills and experiences of teaching team members would result in greater empowerment, and personal and professional growth for individuals and teams, with students and institutions also being beneficiaries of the cumulative learnings. This study investigated participants' perspectives on the ways in which their experiences in offshore teaching teams influenced their conceptualisations of quality academic work.

Institutional Support for Offshore Academic Work

Knight, Tait and Yorke (2006) viewed professional learning for higher education academics as a systemic interplay between individuals and their environments, with the development of professional capabilities occurring through situated social practices complemented by event-based educational professional development. Their study of 2401 part-time teachers, and online responses from 248 full-time staff, in the UK Open University, revealed those academics' preferences for 'social learning' through conversing, consulting and mentoring with others to create shared meaning, followed by participation in collegiate and equitable learning teams, attending staff development activities and drawing upon printed materials. Reflective procedures and practices that melded experience, context, research and theory were also recommended to support both non-formal and formal learning. These perspectives, however, are in conflict with training programs for intercultural competence that take an instrumentalist, objective approach based on codified knowledge (Caruana & Montgomery 2015; Kim 2010). Thus, the question of what are the most effective forms of institutional support for the professional development of academic staff in their offshore work was asked in this study.

It is frequently advised that higher education institutions augment intercultural learning for both onshore and local staff though systematic support, particularly through formal induction programs (Dobos 2011; Gribble & Ziguras 2003; Smith L 2009), including online guides (University of South Australia 2011). Induction programs have been offered by provider universities for their home and host staff with beneficial outcomes, including increased collegiality, and a sense of belonging and identity for all academics, although if a train-the-trainer approach was employed, the likely outcome was a loss of sense of autonomy for host academics (Soontiens & Pedigo 2013).

Various approaches to redressing imbalances between home and local academics have been suggested. Leask and Carroll (2011) recommended a shift in professional development programs away from addressing knowledge and skills deficits towards the ways teachers can create learning spaces that encourage meaningful and purposeful cross-cultural interaction and engagement. Djerasimovic (2014) conceptualised transnational partnerships in offshore higher education as 'eduscapes' in which parties occupied power positions that were not automatically and necessarily hierarchical. Begin-Caouette (2013) and Forstrop (2013) visualised the notion of 'eduscapes' as global networks characterised by close and equal transnational partnerships built on mutual understanding between stakeholders. According to Allen (2014), to achieve an effective partnership, transnational institutions needed to be flexible, culturally sensitive, share a vision, and support professional development through relevant collaborative learning activities.

As Waterval, Frambach, Driessen, and Scherpbier (2015) argued, such issues were likely to become more manageable through clear and detailed partnership agreements aimed at building and maintaining effective relationships between higher education institutions. In order to do so, such relations should be characterised by a sensitive balance of the expectations of home and host countries through shared values, trust, compromise, and effective communication (Wilkins 2017). However, Caruana and Montgomery (2015) argued that in the transnational context, the relationship between academics and their institutions shifts with the institution becoming the more significant player, a

consequence of which was a reduction in academic autonomy which would hamper the effectiveness of collaborative partnerships.

Despite the provision of formal institutional support activities, informal mentoring from colleagues was a cultural learning strategy of choice for many academics undertaking offshore work (Gribble & Ziguras 2003; Paige & Goode 2009; Smith L 2009). Examples included informal mentoring programs with experienced staff prior to offshore teaching, and teaming with colleagues to construct and share understandings. Several other concerns have been raised as to the effectiveness of informal mentoring, especially when there were few opportunities available for evaluation of learning outcomes (Zachary & Fischler 2009). Both Smith L (2009) and Hoare (2013) warned that informal mentoring could reinforce inappropriate attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes, and entrenched ethnocentrism could be perpetuated when mentoring academics had not engaged in their own reflective intercultural development. Furthermore, Dobos (2011) and Soontiens and Pedigo (2013) were concerned that support and peer-to-peer mentoring of local staff by visiting academics was a manifestation of the underlying inequity and power differential between academic staff, when the purpose was to transition the teaching philosophies held by local academics to that required by home institutions.

As well as the focus on professional developmental for academics, Beer, Rodriguez, Taylor, Martinez-Jones, Griffin, Smith, Lamar and Anaya (2015) and Chan (2016) recommended the benefits from training and mentoring to prepare thoughtful and contemplative educational managers, especially as the evaluation of academic staff performance often rested with university and program managers, yet these administrators often worked in silos with limited understanding of the values and roles of others (Trowler, Saunders & Bamber 2012). Austin and Jones (2016) lent weight to the proposition for widening institutional support for professional development beyond academics. They identified resistance from academics as the possible consequence of an isolated institutional bureaucracy that prioritised corporate interests over academic freedom, shared governance and critical inquiry, especially when the quality of learning, its social impact and contribution, and the well-being of staff and students were perceived

to be devalued in favour of quantitative indicators, and the competing agendas of non-academic stakeholders.

It would seem, then, that as Lynch (2013) contended, general university professional development support did not necessarily provide adequate preparation of academics for contemporary offshore work, therefore, opportunity exists for the development of high quality activities by institutions that go beyond only teaching related issues, in conjunction with more formalised support for staff when they are offshore. Experience in teaching international students in Australia, for instance, was not deemed effective preparation for offshore work, as those students were out of their home contexts, had different concerns, and required different forms of support (Seah & Edwards 2006). In addition, as Jais (2012) established, the acknowledgement and reward by institutions of offshore teaching experience as being both important and integral to academics' career development would promote mutual quality benefits. By ascertaining the perspectives of academics who had sojourned in Hong Kong, this current study hopes to further illuminate the nature of their development preferences and needs for institutional support.

Conclusion

The first section of this literature review examined trends in international higher education approaches. The second section introduced the four education commonplaces of curricula, students, institutions and academics that shaped the initial conceptual framework. As aspects of learning emerged as an anchoring theme in the data analysis, five key learning perspectives were compared in section three. The final section focused on Confucian cultural and educational factors, and specifically on the Hong Kong context. Along with the contextual environment factors identified in Chapter One, that academic work exists in a complex global higher education environment, whose stakeholders exhibit a range of definitions of quality, the above literature review was a source of insights into the constructions and interpretations of the findings, conclusions and implications for practice in later chapters, and enabled the precise crafting and articulation of the research questions, which follow, in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three
Methodological Perspective

Introduction

The purpose of this research, as indicated in the research questions detailed in Chapters One and Two, was to investigate conceptualisations of what constitutes quality academic work in an offshore context, from the perspective of higher education academics. This chapter describes the methodological approach chosen to investigate these questions. It discusses the theoretical foundations of the research design and demonstrates the logical consistency of the chosen design elements. It begins with an overview of the qualitative nature of the research. The ontological and epistemological assumptions that provided the philosophical context are outlined, and a rationale is presented for the choice of approach and methods of data collection.

In order to situate the research, details and explanations are given for the selection of the research context and the participants, and for the purposeful sampling techniques. An explication of the approach taken to data analysis and reporting of findings follows. The clarification of the researcher stance is given particular attention, as qualitative research, rather than objectifying the data gathered, typically relies on a subjective and reflexive position in the search for meaning, interpretation and understanding that participants and, indeed, researchers attribute to the phenomenon of interest. Finally, the effectiveness of qualitative research can be evaluated according to particular criteria that are encompassed by the notion of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba 1985), therefore, this concept is defined, and examples are given of the ways in which it was incorporated into this study.

A qualitative approach was selected as most appropriate to address the research aims, as it provided the optimal opportunity to gather data about descriptions of reality as experienced by participants (Hatch 2002; Sarantakos 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The specific methodology of a 'qualitative interview study' (Weiss 1995) was positioned

within a constructivist paradigm (Hatch 2002), where participants offered their constructed meanings of conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work, and the researcher drew interpretive (re)constructions from the collective data. The complementary primary data collection method of individual semi-structured interviews (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008) enabled dense descriptions of the participants' lived experiences (van Manen 1990). These descriptions were analysed with an emphasis on inductive techniques (Hatch 2002; Strauss & Corbin 1998), in particular, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006; Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick 2008) to identify themes that sought to capture the essence of meaning and experience (Bowen 2006). Verbatim extracts served as evidence to ground and illustrate the synthesised interpretations reported in the research findings (Thorne 2008). The overall research design is visually represented in Table 3.1, and the major stages of the process are elaborated in the sections that follow.

Table 3.1: Research Design Elements

Element	Type
Research Approach	Qualitative
Paradigm	Constructivist
Methodology	Constructivist interview study
Researcher Stance	Subjective and reflexive
Participant Selection Strategy	Purposeful sampling
Principal Data Collection Method	Individual semi-structured interviews
Other Data Collection Methods	Literature review Documentation Researcher journal
Data Analysis Method	Thematic content analysis
Reporting of Findings and Conclusions	Thematic interpretive (re)constructions grounded in verbatim extracts

Dimensions of Qualitative Research Pertinent to this Study

A consideration of several specific dimensions of qualitative research assisted the shaping and refining of the research approach in this study. Hatch's (2002) eight dimensions were

found to be of direct relevance. They were: centrality of meaning, natural settings, participant perspectives, wholeness and complexity, elements of emergent design, inductive data analysis principles, the role of the researcher, and the relationship between subjectivity and reflexivity. As each of these dimensions assisted in the conception, planning and execution of the research, their contribution to the formulation of the methodological perspective are described in detail below.

Qualitative research is about endeavouring to make sense of the meanings that individuals construct in order to participate in their social lives (Hatch 2002) and, as Hassard (1991) argued, it requires a research problem which involves people's previously unexplored constructions of meanings. Thus, meaning is central to qualitative research. This study sought to identify the meanings that higher education academics constructed about quality academic work in off-shore programs. The data gathering was not undertaken in an offshore location; rather, it was situated within the setting of participants' own lived experiences (van Manen 1990) in Hong Kong programs. The search for meaning that underpinned this research depended upon their detailed and nuanced descriptions, explorations and interpretations, an aim that could not have been effectively achieved through a quantitative, positivistic approach, such as hypothesis testing in a controlled or contrived setting.

The voices or perspectives of participants are given prominence in qualitative research (Lichtman 2010), therefore, in this study the stories of participants (Rubin & Rubin 2005) formed the basis of data collection and analysis, and shaped the reporting of findings. Rather than a rigidly structured interview format, data was obtained through individual semi-structured interviews, which were guided by open-ended questions and supplemented with probes and prompts to encourage full, detailed, narrative-style responses. The resulting comprehensive descriptions, aptly labelled by Creswell (2012) as the 'texts of the research', provided an extensive and complex picture of participant perspectives.

Debate continues about the nature of qualitative data analysis, including when it should commence in the research process (Bryman & Burgess 2002; Charmaz 2014; Denzin &

Lincoln 2000; Dick 2001; Mason 2002; Strauss & Corbin 1998; Yin 2014). It is generally agreed, however, that the elements of a qualitative research design are likely to be altered in response to what emerges from the data (Hatch 2002). Therefore, the selection of the data analysis approach considered emergent design (Lathlean 2015; Lincoln & Guba 1985), along with an emphasis on inductive information processing, including analysing transcripts, identifying themes, and collating examples (Glaser & Strauss 1968; Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor 2003). The largely inductive and, for some (Burnard 2006), pragmatic, approach of thematic analysis was adopted for analysing data transcripts, identifying themes within those data, and collating examples of those themes from the text. Data analysis began early, so that emerging patterns found in the empirical data, coupled with insights from a cyclical review of literature and of other relevant documentation, could assist in on-going refinement of the research direction.

The role of the qualitative researcher is demonstrably different from that of quantitative researchers (Hatch 2002). For example, the quantitative researcher typically takes an objective or etic stance, relies on instruments, such as surveys, to gather data, and uses metrics in analysis and reporting. In qualitative research, the role is, arguably, less clear and more problematic. For example, personal concepts, beliefs and ideas form an 'ideas context' or 'theoretical framework' (Maxwell 2005), which is separate to the specific-content conceptual framework. Perry (1998) argued that qualitative researchers cannot be independent of the field data, indeed, they should, in general, be directly involved in gathering the principal data. In a similar vein, Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Watt (2007) described them as 'data gathering instruments', who favoured a subjective or emic stance and personally collected data in the forms of interview transcripts, field notes and artefacts, and maintained their own research journals. Researchers who take this stance are well situated to analyse, make sense of, and attribute meaning to participants' actions, intentions and understandings.

In this study, closeness to the data was ensured through personally conducting, recording and transcribing interviews, as well as manual data analysis. Immersion in the data aided in firmly grounding findings (Kahlke 2014; Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen & Sondergaard 2009), however, it also prompted a consideration of the inherent subjectivity in this

approach. As Hatch (2002) argued, subjective judgement is utilised by both researchers and participants to some degree, in description, analysis and interpretation stages, therefore, it is appropriate to be alert to reflexively applying one's own subjectivities. Lichtman (2010) defined reflexivity as the examination of subjectivity and bias, and for Hatch (2002), it was the capacity to bracket biases, and to monitor influences and emotional responses. Given my own familiarity and experience of the research context, subjectivity and reflexivity were highly relevant considerations.

The dimensions of subjectivity and reflexivity were addressed in several ways. Finlay's (2002) suggestion of acquiring the habit of journaling and reflecting on day-to-day research activities was adopted, and fine-tuned by following Cousin's (2009) recommendation to capture thoughts, feelings, ideas and hunches that arose during interviews and transcriptions, while reviewing literature, and from reflections on personal experiences. Eposit, Freda and Piccone (2017) suggested that researchers adopt reflexivity lenses to investigate the data from the outside in, with the intention of scrutinising and throwing a sharper light on component elements. In this study, reflective insights were gained by applying sensitising concepts distilled from the literature and unearthed during cycles of date collection and analysis. Given the criticality of learning to offshore quality academic work identified in Chapter Two, a learning lens, in particular, was applied throughout the entire research process. For Marshall and Rossman (2006), the conscientious employment of such reflexive activities enhanced integrity and rigour in the overall qualitative research process, while, simultaneously, enabling immersion in the data.

Other techniques were gleaned from the reflexive approach used by Ladson-Billings (1995), whose constructivist interview study of teachers, skilfully demonstrated a balance between explicitly addressing researcher reflexivity, while preserving the authenticity of participants' subjective experiences. Lastly, an extremely useful practical technique to embed reflexivity, was writing brief summaries immediately after each interview for later comparison with audio recordings and notes taken during interviews (Cousin 2009). This activity, in conjunction with interview data, and substantive literature and other documentation, served as a valuable form of triangulation (Patton 2002), and as an

indicator of any data filtering, such as emphases, biases, omissions or inconsistencies. Similarly to Watt's (2007) experience, conscious reflexive activities in this study, both illuminated underpinning assumptions, and contributed to a disciplined research approach.

The detailed consideration of Hatch's (2002) dimensions of qualitative research embedded in this section assisted in establishing fundamental concepts, ideas and rationales for the most appropriate methodological perspective to address the research questions, as well as providing practical guidelines for enacting research activities. As demonstrated above, the 'ideas context' for the methodological perspective was informed by interrogating literature and theoretical concepts, my own previous academic work experiences, and a conviction that offshore quality academic work was an important component of contemporary higher education. The following sections expand on the underlying research paradigm and detail the progressive formulation of the methodological approach.

A Constructivist Paradigm

Research paradigms have certain assumptions, strategies, methods, limitations and evaluations that reflect broader ontological and epistemological underpinnings. Confronting complex paradigm issues, and exploring assumptions and implications of different ontological and epistemological perspectives, early in the research process forms the basis for theoretical integrity and logical consistency (Hatch 2002). Crotty (1998), De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2011) and Polenis (2015) agreed that an elaboration of the theoretical perspective aids in surfacing assumptions, and justifying and making sense of the choice of methodology, methods and findings.

A comparison of classifications of qualitative research paradigms, variously called frameworks, approaches or methodologies, revealed that, although there were some commonalities in terminology, there was no general agreement as to a definitive typology (Blaikie 1993; Burrell & Morgan 1989; Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013; Creswell 2014;

Crotty 1998; Hatch 2002; Lincoln & Guba 2000; O'Donoghue 2007; Schwandt 2000). Further, a "cacophony of diverse epistemologies" and a "welter of names … and sub-species" (Pallas 2001 p.7), confusing to the novice researcher, were encountered. It is essential, however, to determine whether a central research question can be answered within the context of a chosen paradigm.

Hatch (2002) posed five questions designed to help researchers surface their assumptions and perspectives, and match them to 'paradigm descriptions'. They are: What is the nature of reality? What can be known? What is the relationship of the knower to what is to be known? How is knowledge gained? What form of knowledge is produced? My responses, as researcher in this study, (using Hatch's terminology, which is indicated in single inverted commas) follow. The nature of reality entailed 'unique multiple realities' rather than any one absolute reality. The knowledge of interest was composed of participants' 'individual constructions of reality', offered through specific, local, experientially-grounded 'individual perspectives', based on their lived experiences. The primary method of data collection, the semi-structured interview, was consistent with a 'naturalistic inquiry-style' approach. 'Interpretive (re)constructions' formed the knowledge outcomes.

These responses are most consistent with key characteristics of a constructivist paradigm, where research aims are generally concerned with searching for understanding of participants' complex lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba 2000; Schwandt 2000). As the central research question sought to elicit data about individual participants' perspectives of offshore quality academic work constructed from their own experiences, which were then synthesised into collective findings and interpretative constructions, a constructivist paradigmatic framework was deemed appropriate for positioning this study.

A Constructivist Interview Study Methodology

"Stories are a way of knowing ... (and) telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process" (Seidman 2006, p.7), whereby people must reflect on the details of their experiences and give them some order so as to construct their stories. From this

viewpoint, it can be said, then, that a researcher's goal is to seek understanding of the meanings people make of their experiences. Keeping in mind that three typical sources of qualitative data collection are interviews, documentation, and observation, it is contended that neither observation nor documentation, by themselves, were likely to provide the data required to effectively answer the central research question within the research context and parameters. Thus, the face-to-face individual interview was chosen as the most effective primary method of data collection to obtain participants' personal perspectives, that is, their stories, opinions and ideas about their experiences. As secondary sources assist in the triangulation of data (Yin 2014), and supplement the rigour and trustworthiness of qualitative research, reviews of both substantive and methodological literature, and of relevant documentation, such as reports, as well as a researcher journal, were included. These sources supported the development of the research design, the analysis, and making sense of interview responses.

Weiss (1995) distinguished qualitative from quantitative interviews. The former uses guided elicitation of fuller descriptions and development of information, while the latter follows a uniform and standardised list of questions. Qualitative studies based on interviewing as their primary data collection strategy are termed 'qualitative interview studies'. They are a suitable choice when research aims include: developing full, detailed descriptions of individual experiences, integrating multiple perspectives, developing holistic descriptions of interrelated situations, learning how participants interpret their experiences, and providing the reader with vivid insider accounts and imagery. Each of these aims accords with the intentions of this study.

Furthermore, as Hatch (2002) explained, such interview studies can be adapted to a range of research approaches. A constructivist interview study, for instance, is one where interviewers and participants, to some extent, jointly engage in constructing subjective realities, which are, in turn, generally reported as reconstructed interpretations or narratives by the researcher. The extent of co-construction varies with the intent and nature of the research, the level of collaboration between the researcher and the participants, and the degree of researcher engagement in the research setting (Gray 2009; Mishler 1991). The constructivist nature of this study was evident in several ways.

The constructivist approach was symbolically reinforced by selecting the term 'participant', as compared to 'informant', which could be perceived as having negative connotations (Weiss 1995), or 'respondent', which is commonly associated with quantitative research. The first two participants were chosen for pilot interviews as they had both extensive offshore work experience, and expertise in qualitative research design and interviewing skills. They contributed detailed content data, reviewed and gave feedback on my summaries of their interviews, and offered tips on conducting interviews. Their input was accommodated in minor adjustments to interviewing techniques and timing, and in additional prompt questions. These actions were also the first steps in maintaining a consistent chain of evidence and audit trail throughout the research process (Carcary 2009; Cutcliffe & McKenna 2004; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Yin 2014).

Other demonstrations of collaboration were that interviews were conducted interactively, akin to guided conversations (Patton 2002), with frequent two-way member checking (Lincoln & Guba 1985) for clarification and understanding, such as rewording questions or using additional probes and prompts. Feedback on the interview experience was invited, and opportunity to review interview summaries was offered. Five participants read their summaries, and confirmed their satisfaction with accuracy. Finally, recommendations of other potential participants were sought, which resulted in three selections. The extent of constructivism, however, did not extend to participant involvement in formal analysis or write up stages. The interpretative (re)constructions presented in later chapters are closely aligned to the interview data, and are characterised by a consistent display of participant voices through direct quotations and paraphrases.

While a constructivist interview methodology was well-suited to the research aims, all methodologies have limitations. Some (Atkinson & Coffey 2011; Atkinson & Silverman 1997; Gubrium & Holstein 2001) criticised the use of interview studies for putting too great a reliance on interviewing as the major method of data collection, whilst not ensuring that participants' accounts were based on rigorously collected data or subjected to systematic analysis. A further criticism was that participants' responses in interviews could be heavily influenced by the activities of the interviewer, thereby limiting possible

inferences about behaviours in other contexts. These types of criticisms, though, usually stem from positivistic paradigm assumptions, and, as Hammersley (2003) argued, such features neither precluded responses from being accurate representations of participants' realities, nor that what happens in interviews carried no reliable implications about people's attitudes and perspectives. Criticisms serve, nevertheless, as helpful reminders to carefully consider issues of generalisability to other contexts, and of the necessity for a rigorous and systematic approach to all research activities. The guiding principle employed in this study was to remain alert to, and reflect upon, advantages and limitations throughout all stages, and to explicitly address their implications in Chapter Seven.

Aligning the Conceptual Framework, Context and Sampling Strategy

Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) categorised research as either more focused towards theory testing or towards theory building. While more rigid and defined theoretical/conceptual models are better suited for testing or modification in quantitative approaches (Bowen 2006; Coffey & Atkinson 1996; Patton 2002), a more flexible, conceptual frame of reference is recommended as more appropriate in qualitative research. Bowen (2006) proposed that frameworks of sensitising concepts provide points of reference and guidance in approaching empirical data, as well as acting as interpretive devices. Hence, they are both conceptual frameworks, and components of the analysis. For Cousin (2009), a framework of sensitising concepts effectively accommodates emergent patterns in data and progressive theory building, which are pivotal to many qualitative methodological approaches. These contentions are in line with Hennink, Hutter and Bailey's (2011) argument that a flexible approach supports and enhances theory building through a dynamic, cyclical interplay between theory, and data collection and analysis. This section explains the nature and selection of the initial conceptual framework, the research context and the participant sampling strategy.

In this study, a conceptual framework, comprised of four sensitising concepts, along with matching research sub-questions, were devised from the literature reviewed in Chapters

One and Two. Concepts one and two were chiefly concerned with clarifying participants' general notions about academic work and quality, which also assisted in orienting participants towards the central research topic, and acting as a checkpoint that each participant's characteristics fell within specified study parameters. They were designated as contextual environment concepts. In essence, they functioned as foundation concepts, or a platform, for in-depth investigation of concepts three and four, which focused on characteristics of , extrinsic factors (curriculum, student, and institution) and intrinsic factors (academic) of offshore quality academic work.

The sensitising concepts which make up the conceptual framework, along with the research sub-questions, are summarised in Figure 3.1. The initial framework was developed progressively throughout the study, from logically connected concepts and themes identified in patterns in the data (Birks & Mills 2011). The culmination of this theory building is demonstrated in Chapter Six, and its implications in Chapter Seven.

Central Research Question

How is quality academic work conceptualised by Australian academic practitioners in higher education offshore programs?

Conceptual Framework

The nature of contemporary academic work exists in a complex global environment
There are a range of definitions of quality held by stakeholders in higher education.
There are curriculum, student and institutional factors, extrinsic to academics, that impact on quality academic work in the offshore context.
There are factors, intrinsic to academics, that impact on quality academic work in the offshore context.

Research Sub-questions

1. What are academics' conceptualisations of their academic work?
2. What are academics' conceptualisations of quality in higher education?
3. How do extrinsic factors contribute to academics' conceptualisations of quality academic work in the offshore context?
4. How do intrinsic factors contribute to academics' conceptualisations of quality academic work in the offshore context?

Figure 3.1: Conceptual Framework and Research Sub-questions

As the focus of this study was on individual academics, the characteristics and behaviours of participants were labelled as their intrinsic factors, while the influences surrounding the participants were labelled as three types of extrinsic factors, namely, curriculum, student and institutional factors. As explained in Chapter Two, these factors were adapted from Schwab's (1973) four commonplaces of education.

The context chosen to investigate the central research question was Australian higher education institutions' offshore business programs conducted in Hong Kong. There were several reasons for this choice of setting. Firstly, numerous institutions run offshore programs in the Asian region, with Hong Kong being a well-established and economically significant example of this market (Australian Government, Department of Education and Training 2018). It was anticipated, therefore, that outcomes would be of interest to educational and other stakeholders. In addition, the Hong Kong context provided a wide variety of programs, and a substantial pool of information-rich participants. These conditions had the advantage that any individual institution, program, course or participant was easily de-identified and their confidentiality protected, both of which were ethical requirements of this research.

A further selection consideration was the greater likelihood of finding homogeneity in cultural backgrounds and educational experiences amongst students studying Australian programs in Hong Kong compared to other Asian offshore locations. The targeted Hong Kong programs consisted of, largely, local students, who shared a Chinese 'Confucian-Heritage Culture' and educational background (Watkins & Biggs 2001; Wong & Wen 2001). As found in Chapter Two, this common background was linked to certain student preferences, including expectations of teaching practices, favoured learning styles, and classroom interactions (Chan 1999; Wang 2007). In this current study, homogeneity acts, not as a quantitative control variable for objective examination of variation, but as a 'stabilisation' of selected concepts. This technique is consistent with the assumptions and practices of qualitative research, as it allows not only in depth scrutiny of readily identifiable concepts, but also facilitates detection of less obvious, or emergent ones. (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Thus, explicit acknowledgement that student cohorts in Hong Kong were likely to share a range of culturally-influenced characteristics was conducive

to both identifying their impacts on participants' conceptualisations, and to unmasking less overt characteristics.

In terms of sampling strategies and selection of participants for research studies, Patton (2002) recommended first deciding upon the appropriate unit of analysis. In keeping with the central research question, the parameters of the research context, and scope of the study, the participant profile was 'lecturer level academic or equivalent, who taught in the same business degree course in their Australian institution and in Hong Kong'. This grouping was chosen for two reasons. Offshore academic work was mainly concerned with classroom learning and teaching activities, and, secondly, this type of academic was relatively neglected in higher education research compared to, for example, early career academics, or senior academics in research, specialist or management roles.

The condition of teaching the same business degree course, onshore and offshore, was intended as a point of comparison from which to unpick any features that impacted exclusively on offshore quality. The selection of business courses had three pragmatic elements. Firstly, they were prevalent in Hong Kong, so they provided numerous suitable potential institutions and participants, which increased options and aided in confidentiality. Secondly, the variety of business disciplines provided opportunities to compare impacts of their accompanying educational approaches and learning perspectives. Finally, my extensive academic experience in these settings and courses meant I had relevant background knowledge and an insider perspective to enhance sense making, and developing (re) constructions of participants' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. This is akin to Glaser (1978) and Strauss and Corbin's (1990) concept of theoretical sensitivity, whereby researchers, through their professional and personal experiences, engagement with professional literature, and robust approach to analysis, can offer particular awareness and insight into the nuances of meaning in, and the pertinence of, the data.

The sampling strategy employed in this study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) assertion that qualitative inquiries typically focus in depth on relatively small samples that are selected 'purposefully' (or purposively), rather than the 'representative' sampling

approach frequently used in quantitative research. For Sandelowski (1995), purposeful sampling was the selection of participants with shared knowledge or experience of specific phenomena. Similarly, Engel and Schutt (2014) claimed that purposive sampling targeted individuals who are especially knowledgeable about the issues under investigation. In addition to possessing relevant knowledge, Rubin and Rubin (2005) identified a willingness to participate, as a valuable and practical characteristic.

According to Patton (2002), the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in its adherence to the principles of selecting information-rich cases, in order to learn in detail about issues of central importance to the research purpose. Typical selection bases include: theoretical constructs from previous studies, conventional practices, researcher intuition, and recommendations of 'knowledgeable others' by existing participants. In this study, the selection of the purposeful sampling strategy was determined by a combination of sources, namely: the conceptual framework developed from the literature review; examination of the methodological literature; suggestions from existing participants; and insights from my insider knowledge and experience. To foreshadow the detailed discussion of the categories of participants in the 'Selecting the Participants and Collecting the Data' section later in this chapter, a total of 16 participants from three institutions were interviewed in four stages.

The above section demonstrates the interconnections and the consistency in the alignment of the central research question with the research context and the participant selection strategy. The following section identifies issues related to preparing, designing and conducting semi-structured interviews, including suitable interviewer skills, as these aspects were pivotal to the success of the interview method of data collection.

Preparing and Conducting Semi-structured Interviews

Several types of interviews are available to the qualitative researcher, such as structured, semi-structured, unstructured and in-depth interviewing. The constructivist interview study methodology required complementary methods of data collection that were

conducive to sufficient interaction between the participants and myself to effectively explore their accounts and perceptions. The semi-structured interview was chosen as the most appropriate means of producing relevant and rich empirical data within the scope of the study.

Several images of semi-structured interviews, and the interviewer role in them, were considered for designing and conducting the interviews. The type of interviewer-participant engagement, and relevant interviewer skills were significant, given the constructivist approach, For example, Cousin's (2009) conceptualisation of semi-structured interviews was of a 'third space', where the interviewer and interviewee jointly developed meanings, while Burgess (1990) and Shank (2002) viewed them as 'conversations with a purpose'. Cousin's (2009) insightful analogy of the interview as an 'interactive performance', which required preparatory scripting based on a scholarly understanding of theory, and stage management through a repertoire of prepared and impromptu questions, also resonated. For Holstein and Gubrium (1997), an 'active interviewer' was needed to extend understandings, think 'with' interviewees, and be concerned with both the 'what' (content) and the 'how' (ways in which content is assembled) of interviews. This relational nature of semi-structured interviews, where both the researcher and participants actively collaborate in meaning-making (Alldred & Gilles 2002; Holstein & Gubrium 1997; Schostak 2006), was its fundamental appeal as primary data collection method in this constructivist study.

Crotty (1998) advised conducting interviews using a flexible, non-directive form of questioning, however, achieving this aim, requires effective conversational skills, such as listening, observing, encouraging, prompting, reflecting back, and showing empathy. Listening skills, in particular, support successful interviewing. For example, Rubin and Rubin (2005), in their 'responsive interviewing model', emphasised 'listening to hear the meaning in data'. Similarly, Hatch (2002) described listening for meaning, and Kvale (1996) advocated listening sensitively for nuances. These images and concepts provided increased awareness and insights in both interview guide preparation, and in how interviews were conducted.

All types of data sources inevitably have their own strengths and weaknesses (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays 2008), however, as Yin (2014) recommended, their dependability is enhanced by maintaining a clear 'chain of evidence' that can be traced from initial research questions through to conclusions and vice versa. A systematically constructed interview guide is a fundamental step in this chain. Moreover, the interview guide can be envisioned as the nexus between theoretical and practical aspects of this study, as questions composed to unveil participant's experiences, also represent the initial conceptual framework devised to address the central research question. Hatch's (2002) three recommended steps for developing qualitative interview guides were followed: namely, begin with a broad, overarching research question; follow with sets of sub-questions, which remain general, but offer more direction; and, finally, construct a more detailed guide with additional questions consistent with the chosen interview style and overall intentions of the research design.

The interview guide started with general questions to set a conversational tone, and to make a record of participant details, and interview time and venue, along with demographic questions to capture a picture of the participants' experiences in onshore and offshore work, discipline areas, and a brief overview of the components of their academic work commitments. A draft set of trigger questions developed from themes in the literature review were constructed, and, then, incrementally amended to incorporate feedback and suggestions from supervisors, community of practice peers, Victoria University research proposal approval and ethics committees, knowledgeable professional colleagues, and the two pilot interviews. Valuable ideas were provided on content, and on relevance, clarity, breadth and sequencing of key questions (Rubin & Rubin 2005), along with possible prompts, probes, and follow-up questions (Gardner 1999). The interview guide was made up of open-ended questions that were flexible enough to encourage detailed, expansive, narrative-style responses, which, as proposed by Rubin and Rubin (2005) and Saks and Allsop (2007), facilitated the understanding and interpretations of subjective meanings in participants' experiences. The four research sub-questions and their key trigger questions, which were constructed for the interview guide in this study, are shown in Appendix A.

After completion of the interview guide, ethics clearance was obtained from the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, and formal ethics requirements for other institutions were ascertained and completed. Potential participants were emailed a brief outline about the research and a copy of the interview guide. Acceptances were followed up by telephone call to make personal contact, and to arrange a convenient interview time and venue. A second email contained an information letter and consent form in accordance with Victoria University research ethics requirements.

Three main principles underpinned all interactions with participants. They were: provide full information regarding the research purpose, and intended use and security of data; enact activities in a transparent manner; and maintain confidentiality in all stages. Participants were advised they could terminate their interview at any time; were not obliged to answer questions perceived as uncomfortable; and could withdraw their raw data, although not de-identified, reconstructed data. These principles were demonstrated by reinforcement that the study focus was not about identifying any specific institution, program, course or person, but, rather, the intention was to elicit each participant's perspective on factors that influenced the quality of their offshore academic work. Signed letters of consent were obtained prior to interviews in order to safeguard the interests of all parties involved in the research, in the event of any dispute or misunderstanding. Finally, as differential power relationships between interviewers and participants are of ethical concern, it was ensured that no workplace power relationship existed between myself and participants. I was neither employed in any of their institutions nor engaged in any context with them at the time of interviews. Due to my career as an academic experienced in offshore programs, I was, however, acquainted with some participants, or knew of them. Indeed, this proved an advantage when contacting potential participants, and in quickly creating rapport during interviews.

Interviews were conducted in English and held in Australia. To facilitate the sharing of thoughtful responses in a timely manner, participants were encouraged to think about the interview questions in advance. All participants consented to audio-recording of interviews. While this technique gives a verbatim record, if it inhibits the interviewee, it becomes a problematic source of bias (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013). In this study,

participants neither reacted to audio recording or note taking with visible signs of distraction or inhibition, nor did they articulate any concerns. The interviews were recorded using a Livescribe Smart Pen, a device that enabled observational notes, written during interviews, to be uploaded, and viewed simultaneously when playing back recordings.

Interview timing and pace were taken into account, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2013) and Whitman (2004) noted that overly long interviews result in interviewee fatigue and reduced interviewer concentration levels, which result in below optimum interviews. The two pilot interviews, of 70 and 105 minutes duration, were useful indicators. Participants were alerted in advance that estimated interview length was 60 to 110 minutes. Actual times ranged from 49 to 123 minutes. For further preparation for interview contingencies, and to enhance specific skills found to impact on semi-structured interviewing effectiveness (Stewart & Cash Jr 1999; Weiss 1995), the pilot interviews were utilised to test recording techniques, estimate interview timing, and practice interviewing skills. In addition, two research developmental activities were valuable and safe spaces to learn from expert modelling of skills, and to receive community of practice member feedback on my interviewing skills.

Finally, all forms of interviews have limitations, indeed, Minichiello, Aroni and Hays (2008) identified that semi-structured interviewing may reduce the comparability of interviews within a study, and the generalisability between similar studies. Yet, a valid explication of participants' perceptions of reality is a probable outcome, and this was a central aim of the study.

Selecting the Participants and Stages of Data Collecting

The data collection process was in four stages; two initial categories of participants, based on the extent of their offshore experience, were followed by two stages undertaken to more closely inspect emergent themes. The choice of initial categories was determined by the comprehensive literature review, anecdotal information from academic colleagues,

and my personal experience. As no evidence was found to indicate that there was a predominance of either male (M) or female (F) academics teaching in Hong Kong programs, equal numbers were chosen. It was judged that academics, experienced in offshore teaching (E), and holding on-going, full time employment (O) at their Australian institutions, would be 'information-rich' cases, who would be able to give 'thick' descriptions (Denzin & Lincoln 2000) in relation to the central research question. Therefore, three male and three female participants, respectively, MEO and FEO, were selected. 'Experienced' was defined as six or more offshore teaching visits. Stage Two introduced the category of 'less experience', which was designated as fewer than three offshore visits, within twelve months prior to interview. The data from two male (MLO) and two female (FLO) less experienced participants were sufficient to compare similarities and differences with their experienced counterparts.

Preliminary data analysis commenced alongside these initial data collection stages in order to reveal evolving themes. A persistent or repeating idea (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003), namely, employment status, directed the third interview stage. Three of the ongoing participants had been casually employed while undertaking previous offshore work, and all ten had worked with casual staff in offshore teams. In addition, the trend towards greater casualisation in contemporary academic work identified in Chapter One, suggested that casual academics are likely to become commonplace in offshore work. Therefore, this pattern in the data warranted deeper consideration. Stage Three, the casual academic grouping, was labelled C, and it entailed four participants (MEC, MLC, FEC and FLC). The scope of this study limited casualisation aspects to those which directly impacted on offshore quality academic work.

The progressive focusing approach employed (Parlett & Hamilton 1976), where participant categories were based on predicted abilities to enlighten surfacing concepts, (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2013; Creswell 2012; Minichiello, Aroni & Hays 2008), led to the final interview stage. It investigated impacts of academics' cultural origins. This category had neither been consciously selected nor excluded in the earlier stages of participant selection. However, the preliminary analysis and revisiting of data from three participants of non-Western origin revealed certain issues they perceived as impacting,

quite acutely, on offshore work. By applying this cultural origin lens to each participant's responses, it was also found that four 'Western' participants had made observations about their perceptions of differences in experiences of academics from other cultural origins.

The proliferation of higher education globalisation and internationalisation literature in recent decades points towards cultural origin becoming increasingly significant. Thus, two participants, MEON and FEON, who were predicted to be particularly information-rich in their knowledge and experience, were chosen to further illuminate issues associated with non-Western cultural origin. Similarly to the treatment of casualisation in this study, exploration of cultural origin was confined to influences on offshore work.

Figure 3.2 depicts the sampling strategy stages, interview categories, and individual codes assigned to participants. The abbreviations used are as follows: Male/Female - M/F, Experienced/Less experienced - E/L, On-going/Casual - O/C, and Non-Western origin - N. Individual codes contain a letter and number, which, respectively, represent the main characteristic under exploration, and the interview number, for example, E1 equates to experienced participant, interview one, and C3 represents casual participant, interview three. As well as organising and systematising the data collection, codes assist in protecting participant identity, which is a particularly important with small sample sizes.

Stage One: Initial Category 1– Experienced participants
MEO (E1)   MEO (E2)   MEO (E3)   FEO (E4)   FEO (E5)   FEO (E6)

Stage Two: Initial Category 2– Inexperienced participants
MLO (L1)   MLO (L2)   FLO (L3)   FLO (L4)

Stage Three: Emergent Category 1– Casual participants
MEC (C1)   MLC (C2)   FEC (C3)   FLC (C4)

Stage Four: Emergent Category 2 – Non-western participants
MEON (N1)   FEON (N2)

Figure 3.2: Stages of Data Collection and Categories of Interviewees

A final point concerns the appropriate number of participants required to satisfactorily answer the central research question in a qualitative study. While quantitative analysis typically relies on a statistically determined sample size, qualitative studies seek a logical saturation point (Lichtman 2010) or, in Nelson's (2016) terms, conceptual depth. Although, seemingly, a somewhat nebulous and problematic concept, Bryman and Burgess (2002) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) described data or theoretical saturation as the repetition of patterns and themes until there is no new information emerging from the data, while Watling and Lingard (2012) regarded saturation as the point when data collection is sufficient for the researcher to gain an adequate understanding of the concepts and themes critical to addressing the central research question. In Bowen's (2008) words, saturation occurs when the researcher gathers data to the point of diminishing returns, and nothing new is appearing. In this study, it was judged that data obtained from 16 participants, over four stages, provided sufficient information to thoroughly explore the phenomenon of offshore quality academic work within the parameters of this study. Detailed profiles of participants were not included in the write up of the study, as the focus was on building collective constructions, rather than individual narratives.

Analysing the Data, Reporting the Findings and Building Theory

A key intention of data analysis in qualitative research is mapping the meanings found in the data, rather than, for example, calculating statistics, which is typical in quantitative analysis. The essence of meaning or experience is captured in the themes distilled from the empirical data. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argued, the exploratory, developmental nature of qualitative research relies upon an ongoing interaction between research design, data collection and data analysis. Indeed, Merriam (2002) contended that its effectiveness is wholly dependent upon simultaneous data collection and analysis. Further, inductive techniques are emphasised, such as searching for patterns, categories and themes within the data, rather than pre-determining and imposing them prior to data collection (Patton 2002). Some (Hatch 2002; LeCompte & Schensul 2010), however,

argued that all data analysis includes a degree of both inductive and deductive thinking. Similarly, Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) identified that inductive and deductive techniques play a role in the complex cycle of data analysis activities. Glaser (1978), for example, recommended using an inductive approach to generate codes from data, followed by a deductive phase where developing theory guides the direction of on-going data collection, as do conceptual frameworks and reflective insights of the researcher.

The research approach and design in this study were predicated on the value of inductive knowledge development (Thorne 2008), where theory building was intricately connected with the empirical evidence (Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007). The analysis strategy relied heavily, but not exclusively, on inductive techniques. Analysis stages were informed and systemised by adopting elements of Creswell's (2013) Data Analysis Spiral, Hutter and Hennink's Qualitative Research Cycle (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011), and Hatch's (2002) Inductive Analysis Model, and Interpretive Analysis Model. These models were compatible with the constructivist perspective. Table 3.2 collates the similar elements in these models that contributed to the approach to data analysis and interpretations.

Table 3.2: Steps in Data Analysis and Reporting of Findings

	Creswell (2013)	Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011)	Hatch (2002)
Informing Models	Data Analysis Spiral	Hutter Hennink Qualitative Research Cycle	Inductive Analysis Interpretative Analysis
Analysis and Synthesis	Data Organisation	Development of Codes	Create Categories Prioritise Categories
	Reading Note-taking Reflection	Description and Comparison,	Identify Themes within Categories
	Description, Classification, Interpretation	Categorisation	Identify Themes across Categories
Reporting Findings	Representation of Data	Conceptualisation	Express Relationships

Although the information is displayed in the table in a linear sequence for simplicity and clarity of presentation, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted, qualitative data analysis is not a linear, neat or stepwise process in practice, but rather, data collection and data analysis activities are undertaken, simultaneously, and revisited, cyclically and episodically, to refine existing and new themes.

Guided by the informing models, the data analysis occurred in four broad, but overlapping, phases. They were: transcribing the interview recordings; categorising data sets; identifying and making sense of themes; and synthesising, classifying, and representing final overarching themes. Sandelowski and Leeman (2012) defined a theme as a coherent integration of the disparate pieces of data that constitutes the findings, and Braun and Clarke (2006) viewed a theme as capturing something significant about data in regard to the research question, and representing a response pattern or meaning within the data set. The central focus on themes is closely aligned with the theory building intentions of this study, therefore, thematic analysis was chosen to bring out the richness of the data, and to provide a logical structure for the presentation of findings and conclusions.

Boyatzis (1998) described thematic analysis as 'a way of seeing' that moves through the three inquiry phases of recognising or seeing important moments, then encoding and interpreting them. Furthermore, as qualitative researchers are an integral part of the data, effective thematic analysis relies on specific researcher characteristics. These are: conceptual flexibility, or sustained openness and flexibility to perceive patterns; tacit knowledge relevant to the research topics; and cognitive complexity, which involves the ability to perceive multiple causes and variables, and to conceptualise the relationships between them, within a contextual or conceptual framework. In this study, these desirable researcher features were practiced through conscious application of a reflexive stance, sustained engagement with the data in conjunction with relevant discourses, and adherence to systematic analysis and reporting. The following paragraphs outline the key steps in the analysis process, and Chapters Four and Five report the detailed findings of the thematic analysis.

Hatch (2002) contended that interpretations are better grounded in the data if researchers spend time engaging with the data in descriptive and analytical ways. The interview guide acted as the initial descriptive-analytical framework for data analysis (Patton 2002). Merriam (2002), Patton (2002), Ravitch and Carl (2016) and Silverman (2011) proposed early 'immersive engagement' with the data. In this study, verbatim transcriptions of recordings, notes taken during interviews, and reflections after interviews were held in individual files, which were read several times to ensure familiarity with the raw data, and to note down initial ideas.

The next iteration grouped each participant's raw data under the four sub-research questions, and a second set of files were created. While not themes, in themselves, these questions provided a broad organising framework for aggregation of data across individual interviews. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), initial codes were systematically generated for 'interesting features' collated across data sets. This open coding approach to categorising data (Neuman 1997; Silverman 2011; Strauss & Corbin 1998), included highlighting similar key words and phrases, as well as contrasts and gaps.

In conjunction with relevant concepts raised in the literature review, further 'playing' with the data (Yin 2014), including axial coding to reveal interconnectivities, culminated in the construction of numerous tables of tentative data categories, and provisional lists and maps of possible themes. In order to further refine and prioritise these themes, interview responses were revisited, as were observational notations taken during interviews, such as the intensity and frequency of comments, specific jargon, variations in tone of voice, and changes in body language. The combination of these activities assisted in surfacing and labelling themes from deep within the data (Yin 2014), and generating a thematic map which demonstrated interconnectivity amongst themes (Braun & Clarke (2006).

To ensure the integrity of the analysis process, and to select vivid and compelling extracts for supporting findings and conclusions, interview transcriptions were frequently cross-referenced for illustrative examples. This familiarity with the data ensured participants' voices were prominently and authentically represented in the thematic interpretive

(re)constructions in this study (Hammersley & Atkinson 1983). This thematic analysis, which utilised a dynamic, cyclical process to integrate both specific concrete details and abstract concepts (Silverman 2011; Tuckett 2005), meant that identified themes and their components were finely honed and firmly grounded in the data. The unifying intention was to encapsulate participants' descriptions of the phenomenon of offshore quality academic work, through the construction of a coherent narrative that described concepts and themes, and the linkages between them (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2011). For Strauss and Corbin (1990), storylines that utilised descriptive narratives about a study's central phenomenon, were an articulation of theory built from the data analysis. The data analysis process described above, demonstrated the evolution of this study's narrative, from the raw data in interview transcripts, towards the identification and interpretation of patterns and overarching or core themes, which related directly to the research questions.

Evaluating the Quality of the Research

When designing a methodological perspective, it is necessary to be attentive to the evaluation of the quality of the research methods and outcomes. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that criteria for evaluating research quality derived from one perspective, may not be appropriate for judging approaches taken in other perspectives. Indeed, as Hammersley (2007) found, there were serious differences in perspective across researchers' evaluation of what was good quality work. For example, quantitative studies were typically evaluated according to characteristics based on objectivist and positivist assumptions, such as validity, reliability, and generalisability, but when research is embedded within a qualitative and constructivist paradigm, trustworthiness and rigour, demonstrated by credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability, were more relevant (Denzin & Lincoln 2011; Guba 1981; Hatch 2002; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba 2007; Thorne 2008).

In this study, trustworthiness was addressed through a systematic and rigorous process. A carefully constructed research design was followed. The central research question and sub-questions were carefully devised, and clearly stated. The interview guide was

constructed to elicit in-depth responses, and to establish a robust foundation for the collection of data. A systematic, organised and categorised data base was kept of all interview audio recordings and transcripts, researcher reflexive journal notes, copies of all iterations of categorisations of data, as well as annotations of insights from the review of literature. A cyclic approach was followed, with frequent and simultaneous revisiting and refining of collection, analysis, and synthesis of data and themes, which culminated in logically connected findings, conclusions and implications for practice.

Research quality was demonstrated in several ways. A triangulation strategy of multiple viewpoints for individual interviews, ideas from literature, and insights from the reflexive research journal enhanced the research credibility. The dependability and transparency were shown in the meticulous maintenance of the data base that ensured there was a chain of evidence (Yin 2014) or audit trail in the step-by-step formulation of themes, which were logically linked and traceable to initial participant data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006). Other audit activities involved member checking of summarised interview transcripts with participants (Lincoln & Guba 1985), and regular deliberations about the progress of the research with supervisors and community of practice peers.

Ezzy (2002) agreed that the personal experience of the researcher was an integral part of the qualitative research process. Eisner (1991) and Patton (2002) contended that the importance of researcher sensitivity towards collected data was that it increased audience confidence in the research methodology and findings, which, in turn, enabled stakeholders to determine the extent of transferability of learning they took from one context to make meaning in another (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Merriam (2002) described this characteristic as user or reader generalisability where the general is drawn from the particular. My experience as an academic practitioner in offshore Hong Kong programs gave me the advantage of being familiar with the research context and the type of work. It helped to establish my credibility with regard to the research topic, and contributed to developing a quick rapport with participants, especially through the sharing of a common language of offshore experience. This emic, or insider, perspective added depth to interpretations by facilitating the clarification and sharing of meaning during interviews.

Patton (2002) described the stance of the researcher as one of empathic neutrality, and, for the purposes of this study, a deeper understanding of the engaged, but neutral, researcher role was gained from a consideration of balancing emic and etic perspectives. Fetterman (2010), Helfrich (1999) and Matsumoto and Juang (2008) recognised the merit of a combination of emic and etic perspectives to form a more complete picture. While an objective, etic perspective is more commonly associated with a quantitative rather than a qualitative approach, as it places greater emphasis on pre-existing theory or empirical findings to shape how researchers orient their own inquiry and make sense of the results, it also aims to reduce researcher and participant bias. Therefore, with both perspectives in mind, useful techniques were adapted from the etic perspective which further enhanced the rigour and credibility of the research. For example, the use of the semi-structured interview guide provided a degree of consistency and structure as to the way interviews were conducted, and a systematic approach was taken to the analysis and interpretation of the data (Fox, Martin & Green 2007).

The presentation of findings and conclusions were carefully structured to mirror the organisation of the literature review and key research questions. Recommended interviewer techniques and skills, and continuous reflexive and reflective practices were consciously applied. These included: tuning into, and acting upon, verbal and non-verbal signals from participants during interviews, although not giving personal opinions; allowing sufficient time for immersion and absorption in the data; and regularly recording contemplations and interpretations about the data in the researcher journal.

This study was attentive to the qualitative research quality criteria, as well as ethical procedures, and the researcher stance. In addition, the construction of the research narrative was alert to enabling the reader or audience to position or situate themselves in the context of the participants and the researcher, in order to more effectively evaluate the quality of the research process and outcomes. In this constructivist study, this positioning was addressed through the liberal use of extracts from participants' responses, and clearly expressed researcher interpretations.

Finally, the overall approach taken to the study took into account Silverman and Marvasti's (2008) four criteria for good quality research. These were: methods were demonstrably appropriate to the central problem; findings were empirically sound; theoretical concepts were used to think through, and with, the data; and contributions were made to the discourses of practice and policy. The activities described above, strengthened the quality of the research process and outcomes, however, as Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas (2013) asserted, one of the best means of judging the quality of research findings was whether new insights have increased the understanding of the studied phenomenon, which was a key intention of this study.

Conclusion

Essentially, qualitative researchers attempt to interpret, or to make sense of, the meanings that people bring to phenomena of interest. The qualitative methodological perspective underpinning this study was appropriate to address the central research question regarding the ways in which academic practitioners conceptualised their offshore quality academic work. This constructivist interview study approach drew upon the lived experiences of participants to seek a deeper understanding of their perceptions and experiences. Thus, it was highly compatible with the aims of the research. The purposeful selection strategy facilitated both the initial targeting of participants with extensive offshore experience that enabled them to provide detailed information, and allowed for variation through emergent themes. Cycles of data collection, analysis, and synthesis culminated in the logically connected themes that scaffolded the findings and conclusions of the four research sub-questions, which are presented in Chapters Four and Five. The conclusions and implications of the study, in its entirety, are consolidated with insights from relevant theoretical concepts in Chapters Six and Seven.

Chapter Four

Contextual Environment Factors, and Extrinsic Factors: Curriculum, Student and Institutional Attributes

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate how higher education academic practitioners conceptualised the quality of academic work in the offshore context. This chapter and Chapter Five present the results of the data collection and analysis, the approaches to which are detailed in Chapter Three. The discussion of the data is then extended in Chapter Six, where key findings are revisited in the context of the literature reviewed in Chapters One and Two, and conclusions are drawn from the patterns and details found in the data. Three broad types of factors that contributed to conceptualisations of quality academic work were identified in this study. They are: the contextual environment factors, the factors that are extrinsic to the academic, and factors that are intrinsic to the academic. The contextual and extrinsic factors are examined in this chapter, and the factors that are intrinsic to the academic are the focus of Chapter Five.

In order to convey the findings effectively, these chapters discuss the major patterns and themes unearthed from the systematic analysis of data from the participants' qualitative responses to the research questions; specifically, their perceptions, experiences and conceptualisations of quality academic work. The findings were obtained from 16 semi-structured interviews conducted with lecturer-level academics, who were selected, purposefully, as either more experienced or less experienced in Hong Kong programs. The analysis of this qualitative data was made complex by the necessity of merging the synthesised patterns that demonstrated participants' notions of quality academic work, with the 'particulars' found in the data. Suter (2012) likened the rich details in qualitative data to the pieces in a jigsaw, bits in a kaleidoscope, or notes in a symphony. Such images reinforce the importance of skilfully blending raw data with emergent patterns as

evidence of the trustworthiness of synthesised findings, which, as Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2013) contended, is a key requirement of qualitative research.

To bring these considerations together, this chapter is clearly organised around major findings that are aligned with the research issues articulated in Chapter Three. By establishing general ideas of 'academic work' and of 'quality' from the perspectives of participants, the first and second research issues aimed to provide a contextual setting regarding elements of contemporary higher education of particular relevance to this study. Furthermore, they were designed to be sensitising concepts in order to lay the foundation for an in-depth exploration of research issues three and four, which were the key foci of the study. Thus, this study sought to elicit conceptualisations of both what constitutes quality academic work, as well as the factors that impact on its enactment and effectiveness in the offshore context. The examination of these issues eventuated in the construction of a framework entailing extrinsic and intrinsic factors relevant to offshore quality academic work.

The central extrinsic themes are represented by the curriculum, student and institution attributes, while factors intrinsic to the academic practitioner are encapsulated within the academic attributes. As explained in Chapter Two, the labelling of these attributes was influenced by Schwab's (1973) commonplaces of education (curriculum subject matter, learner, milieu and teacher), but the terminology (curriculum, student, institution and academic) was adapted to more accurately reflect the language used by participants, which was also in keeping with the higher education setting parameters of this study. The term 'attribute' was carefully chosen to avoid leading interview responses towards any specific outcomes, but rather, to enable the encompassment of the broad range of factors that participants associated with quality academic work, for example, knowledge, skills, behaviours, and characteristics.

The themes, sub-themes and categories clustered within the attribute types are presented in this chapter and in Chapter Five as collective 'thematic (re)constructions'. They are firmly grounded in the voices of participants through numerous direct quotations and paraphrased examples. Given the complexity of the data, frequent syntheses and

diagrammatic representations of emergent patterns found in the data are included, so as to assist with a progressive picture of findings. Thus, both patterns and details are highlighted in the interests of a nuanced presentation of findings. This approach to presenting the outcomes of the data analysis was devised to reflect this study's qualitative, constructivist methodological perspective. It is pertinent that while interviews were with individuals, the syntheses of core findings were constructed as representations of the collective responses of participants, rather than being specific to any individual.

The first and second sections that follow, take an overview of the broad concepts of academic work, and of quality, with the aim of shedding light on the study's general contextual environment. In this way, participants' notions of what is involved in quality academic work were identified. This is followed by an elaboration of the factors that contributed to this work in offshore programs. The major findings and matching themes for each of the three extrinsic attributes (curriculum, student and institution) are addressed. These attributes have been identified from the data analysis as being the critical enabling inputs and supports with which academics engaged, in order to carry out quality academic work in Hong Kong programs. The fourth attribute group entails the factors intrinsically linked to the academic, that is, their personal enabling characteristics and effective practices. It is examined in depth in Chapter Five.

The overall approach to presenting the findings is that the components of each attribute are first deconstructed to examine the detail of the data and then, synthesised, to highlight patterns. Meanings are (re)constructed through discerning and evaluating overarching patterns and themes. Figure 4.1 provides a visual overview which positions the factors that contributed to participants' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic within the structure of the study as a whole. The elements of this figure are developed progressively throughout the reporting of this research. Analysis of the specific contextual environment and extrinsic factors follows.
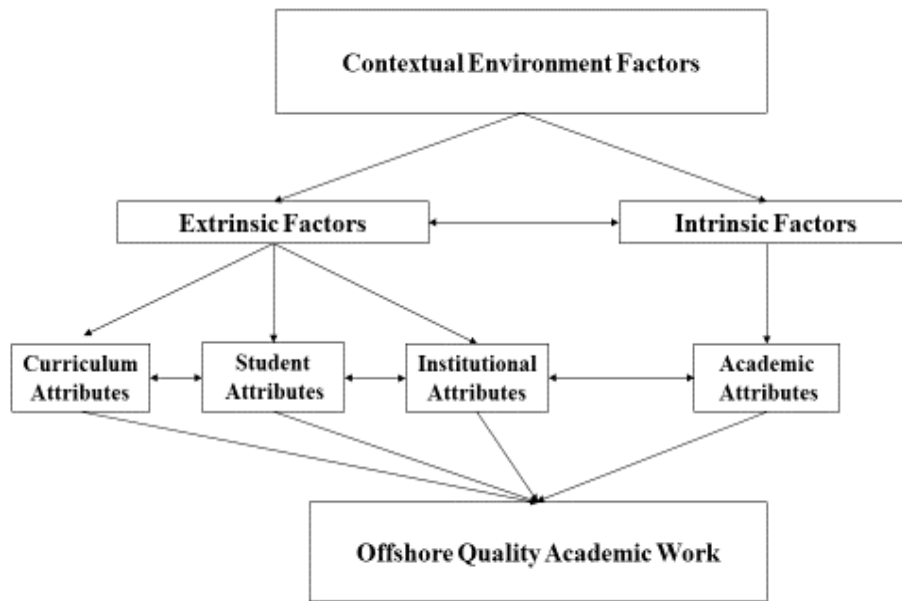
Figure 4.1 Structure of the Study – Elements of Offshore Quality Academic Work

Contextual Environment Factors

The Nature of Academic Work

The major components of academic work involve research, teaching and administration, along with, but to a lesser extent, other roles such as consulting, institutional leadership and community-based activities. In terms of total work load, the 'lecturer' level participants in this study ranked these components, in order of proportion of time spent, as teaching (60-80%), followed by administration (10-30%), then formal research (10-20%), with only very small amounts of time available for other activities. In the offshore context, while the order remained the same, the teaching component was higher at 80 – 95%, administration was reduced to 5-20% and formal research was a minimal 0-5%. Other activities were restricted by the limited face-to-face contact opportunities available during brief teaching visits. Thus, teaching activities were central to academic work, especially in the offshore context; indeed, 14 of the 16 participants opened their interview discussion with the teaching aspect before describing other components.

The study exposed the tensions, dilemmas and uncertainties experienced by participants as they sought to reconcile the often competing demands of the components of their academic work, in what they perceived to be an uncertain and contested higher education environment. This section briefly overviews the ways in which participants characterised the teaching, administrative and research components of their academic work, and it identifies what they perceived to be the major contextual challenges in the higher education environment.

Interview responses showed the pertinence and immediacy of teaching to the experience of academic work, and they exposed the different levels of satisfaction and commitment towards teaching. Attitudes varied. E6's comment, "teaching is mandatory", suggested compliance. Others, such as C3 and E5 were disillusioned and disappointed. They said, respectively, that "it's what I'm good at, but it's no longer valued by some colleagues or the institution and that's disheartening", and "it's losing its meaning and purpose, which makes it so much harder to stay committed". However, enthusiasm was also expressed, with E3 describing teaching as "the most enjoyable aspect of work. I still love it even with the changes and pressures". The two aspects of teaching that figured most prominently were curriculum issues and the increasing use of information technology.

Over two-thirds of the participants associated teaching with course curricula activities, which mainly involved making contributions to relevancy and currency of teaching materials. There was a consensus that this work was important, although opinion was somewhat divided about the degree of individual responsibility for its execution. All casual staff and two less experienced participants (L3, L4) strongly maintained it should be done, primarily, by course coordinators. By contrast, many experienced staff (E1, E2, E4, E3, N2) felt it was an integral responsibility of all teaching staff and, if they were excluded from the process, their professional autonomy was threatened, and their flexibility to adapt to students' needs was, necessarily, limited.

Most participants offered examples of being given a standardised course package, which they stated was the usual practice, particularly for offshore programs. They voiced

dissatisfaction that curriculum design was often not in the hands of the academic delivering the content. Only three participants cited recent and significant involvement in design work, which was in the onshore context. Comments such as: "they design it; we deliver it. There's not much room for flexibility in how we teach content." (E1), and "we're just on the receiving end of a production line, so we can only tinker around the edges" (E3), captured the feelings of frustration for individual academics at constraints imposed by institutions on the input to curriculum content and design. As L2 stated, "the contribution for most of us is limited to a balancing act of reinforcing the standard content of most courses with directly relevant localised examples".

A further pressure on teaching was the rapid proliferation of programs, particularly in offshore contexts, which utilised new forms of information technology (IT) for blended or fully online modes of delivery. Several participants commented that these programs required a reconsideration of teaching and learning approaches. Increased utilisation of IT was accepted as an inevitable component of contemporary education. Creative teaching and learning opportunities were recognised, but participants raised several concerns: user expectations, understanding of the technology itself, and impacts on stakeholders' interpretations of quality. C3, E4 and E5 expressed exasperation at the expectations and demands of students and institutions that academics should be IT specialists, who should be contactable on a 24/7 basis, and respond to queries in very short time frames, irrespective of location or time zone. Many participants felt that they became targets of dissatisfaction when students had IT issues, as the latter often assumed that the academics were responsible for fixing online problems. For example, E5 described events in an offshore course:

> I was 'volunteered', but it was definitely a direction, to take part in an IT project that was trialling a new type of assessment software. I went to a few briefings, but then was really left to get on with it without much support. The package failed in the pilot program, and the students reacted with complaints and very negative feedback, and then I got unbelievably low scores on my teaching. I had to explain and defend myself and other staff about the scores, but the program was the problem, not teaching. It was so unfair and unpleasant. I certainly haven't put my hand up for anything else since then, and I still feel it damaged my reputation.

It could be said, therefore, that the distancing of academics from curriculum design and development, coupled with the pervasiveness of information technology, appeared to have, on balance, hindered the participants' opportunities to produce high quality teaching outcomes.

The continuing internationalisation of higher education, including offshore programs, was singled out as adding complexity to teaching. E3 spoke of escalation of student numbers, which was not commensurate with resourcing. Others were concerned with compromised standards due to poor English language skills (C3, E6, L2). Different learning preferences, and cultural and educational backgrounds of students, were viewed as both a potential source of rich shared learning, but also of differing expectations, misunderstandings and conflict. Negative consequences were: international students, especially offshore, saw lecturers as experts who should provide all information, so students were reluctant to ask questions, or engage in class discussion (E6); and within student teams, despite the rhetoric about the value of collaboration, interaction levels between local and international students were often superficial (C2, C3, E1). From a curriculum perspective, all participants commented on the time commitment required to balance Westernised literature in standardised curricula with international examples and localised case studies. However, the contributions expected from staff, and the level of support and freedom to experiment they were given, varied greatly with the leadership approaches of different coordinators (C4, E2, N2).

The second major academic work component involved administration. The overwhelming nature of administrative work was a frequently mentioned factor of concern and tension raised by all participants, with many emphasising the blurring of boundaries between 'academic administration' and 'general administration'. The former was associated directly with student learning, such as co-ordination of content, support of teaching staff, and development and evaluation of assessment activities, while the latter involved managerial tasks, such as producing reports, processing results, supervising examinations, and advising on technology issues. Administration was complicated through growth in local and international student numbers, larger class sizes, multiple delivery modes and locations, greater student and staff diversity, employment trends such

as casualisation, as well as closer scrutiny of academic quality standards by Australian and international accreditation agencies (C1, C3, E4, E6, L3, N2). In addition, E1 and E3 spoke of centralisation of institutional administration, which caused misunderstandings, mistrust, resentment and disconnection between academic and administrative staff, especially at program and course levels. There was overall agreement that bureaucratisation of procedures and policies and their accompanying documentation and metrics had intensified.

Administrative activities were most often demonstrated in the descriptions of program and course coordinators' roles and tasks. They engaged in a plethora of activities within three broad groups. Content issues included organisation and distribution of course content materials, and grading and moderation of assessment tasks (E2). Staff management entailed selecting and briefing academics, organising access keys and cards, approving payments, and providing performance feedback (E5). Representational activities involved marketing and promotional events, and liaison with internal institutional stakeholders, and industry and offshore partners (E3). It appeared that as the volume of administrative activities expanded, many traditional clerical tasks were devolved to academics. This was magnified in the offshore context where coordinators were the on-the-ground institutional representatives who were expected to project manage both academic and administrative roles. As exemplified by E1's comment of, "admin is a necessary evil that just keeps getting bigger, with less time allowance and not much recognition", many participants felt encumbered by, rather than rewarded for, undertaking administrative roles.

Furthermore, the administrative complexities and tensions accompanying the massification and internationalisation of higher education reflected a dichotomy of values, with academics perceiving themselves as striving for educational processes and outcomes, while institutions and general staff were driven by economic, financial and market motives. This was strikingly demonstrated by a recurring use of combative language and metaphors. Pertinent examples were: "it's a battle between the market-driven economy and the autonomy of the academic world" (E5), and "I feel like I'm in a tug of war between money raising and academic values" (E2). The frustration of many

participants about the changing state of the professionalism of their academic work was captured within the sentiments expressed by E4:

> I wonder about the future. Students want instant responses and high grades without much effort. They are like demanding customers, so I'm reluctant to give hard feedback. It's a shift for the worst in academic discretion and autonomy. Everyone's a stakeholder who wants to question my work. Where's the long term view of academics shaping society and communities for the better? I feel like we are just peripheral, almost collateral damage to making money and reacting to what the market wants, now. Our professional identity is always being challenged.

To these participants, the image of students as customers seemed to be taken for granted by institutions, and acted out by students, while they tended to perceive this attitude and behaviour, as threatening to their own professionalism, and to the overall integrity and quality of higher education.

The third major component was research. Participants identified six types of activities: teaching scholarship, doctoral qualifications, journal articles, conference papers, research projects, and consultancies. Several used the term, 'scholarship', to describe more informal research that involved updating curriculum content, adapting materials for added relevance to diverse student groups, and ascertaining best practices and methodologies for teaching and learning. This type of research about learning and teaching was seen as having relevance to day-to-day class content, but its significance in the eyes of institutions was doubted. As E5 commented: "It's not really valued, because it's about teaching rather than a discipline area, but it's a start and it keeps me under the research quota radar, so far". Similarly for E4: "they give out awards for learning and teaching innovation, so they can't turn round and say I'm not researching about something relevant, can they?". In the offshore context, informal scholarship linked to improving content and teaching, was the most common form of research undertaken by participants.

Eight of the participants held doctorates. Three of the fulltime academics in mid to later career stages, and one of the casuals, were currently pursuing doctoral qualifications. For the ongoing staff, motivation for undertaking formal studies was a concern or fear for future employment opportunities. For casual academics, in particular, there was a

dilemma in deciding whether or not to commit to formal study. Advantages included the greater likelihood of on-going employment, more collegiate interaction, development opportunities through mentoring and supervision, and institutional resource support, such as office space and equipment. However, aspirations for other career paths, age and life stages, family demands, and consulting activities were competing demands. Although only one of the four casual academics was enrolled in a doctorate, all acknowledged that a doctoral qualification was a prerequisite for future full time positions, and was, indeed, already favoured for securing casual work. These observations reflected two increasing, and, potentially, conflicting trends in contemporary higher education, which was that of professionalism, particularly in the form of credentials and research output, and of casualisation.

Six participants had peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers, and consultancy projects, and five had internally-funded learning and teaching projects. There were three instances of industry-based consulting. Although collaborative research with colleagues and mentors was said to be a favoured means of facilitating research output, there were only two instances of joint research with offshore academics. Publication in highly ranked journals was frequently raised. As C3 stated with some exasperation, "I feel a definite pressure to get research into top journals, or you're just labelled a lower level teaching academic. So it's obligatory, but many of us are too busy with heavy teaching and administrative loads with no time or headspace for formal research". The increasing complexity and quantity of research metrics was also noted, and viewed as "just another form of time-consuming administration which doesn't really enhance research output" (E1).

Several participants expressed frustration at the frequent raising of the bench-marks for research output, for example, the acceptable levels and types of journals. E2 and E4 saw this as a form of standardisation of staff performance criteria, which would ultimately narrow possibilities and creativity for both research and teaching. E3 questioned "whether this formulaic approach actually constituted any real improvement in quality". More than half of the participants did, however, describe their discipline area research in positive terms. Typical expressions were: essential for on-going scholarship (L3), inherently

interesting and professionally stimulating (L4), puts expertise into practice (C2), necessary to keep up with quality standards and changing business concepts (C3), and a source of confidence and information in class (L1).

Finally, the sentiments of many participants regarding the tensions between the three key components of contemporary academic work were crystallised in E3's comment:

> Teaching is urgent. I have to be ready in front of my classes, but research is what seems to be important to the institution, so the expectation for formal research output is like a cloud always looming over me. And then there's admin. It feels inescapable. It just keeps on replicating itself, like writing reports on reports. It's busy, bureaucratic work. It's annoying that I take teaching scholarship seriously and do lots of informal research, especially for offshore classes, but that doesn't stack up against attracting big funding, and getting accreditations.

Teaching activities were the main focus of day-to-day work roles, but formal research was perceived as being the most valued and rewarded by institutions. Whilst participants spent most of their time engaged in teaching and administrative activities, all considered administrative work a major source of tension, as it reduced time available for research and teaching preparation, and there was an unclear boundary between academic and general administration. A common refrain was the desire for a reduction in teaching and administrative tasks to free up time for individual and collaborative formal research. Overall, participants clearly recognised formal research output was a key element of academic work, but there were very few research activities in the offshore context.

Notions of Quality

Several definitions of, and approaches to, quality were identified and described in Chapter One; of these, the three predominant viewpoints found in this study were quality: as fitness for purpose; as a change process; and from stakeholders' perspectives. Although there were elements of more than one perspective for most participants, their preferred positions were identifiable in the data. This study revealed that, irrespective of their particular concepts of quality, all participants positively correlated quality with aspects

of student learning, and for most, with their own professional learning and development. This section outlines the three quality perspectives, demonstrates the consistent emphasis on learning, and provides evidence that participants relied to a greater extent on informal, qualitative feedback than on formal, quantitative metrics as genuine indicators of quality learning and teaching. A conspicuous gap was that only three participants mentioned quality in research or administration.

The fitness-for-purpose notion was most frequently mentioned in the data. EL, E5 and E3 spoke of 'purpose' and 'fitness' in terms of outcomes which enabled students to be industry ready, and prepared for the world of work. For example, E5 stated that:

> Student performance needs some purpose to aim for, and some benchmarks for comparison. The emphasis is on measuring teacher effectiveness, but we need better diagnosis of student entry level standards, and, more importantly, after program completion. Employer feedback on graduate's workplace readiness would reflect what they'd learnt. Learning's about applying and transferring concepts into practice.

Fitness for purpose was linked to skill sets. For C1, this meant academic rigour resulting in students who could competently read, conceptualise, argue and present. E5 concurred with a focus on depth and breadth of learning, comprehension and application of academic knowledge to real life situations. Critical thinking and writing was the outcome favoured by E6. It could be argued that these outcomes were predicated on embedding sustained, ongoing learning in students. Interview responses indicated that participants believed the achievement of this type of learning was directly dependent on creative, relevant and holistic forms of assessment (C2, C3, E1, E4), which were equitable in grades and standards across all locations, and that a dedication by academics to engage students' interests, would lead to more effective learning outputs for students and lecturers (C3, E1, E3, E5).

A second perspective on quality was related to processes of changes in learning. E4 described quality as the journey between input, delivery and outcomes. This quality emphasis was on ensuring opportunities to develop, demonstrate and support progressive outcomes. For example, the contribution of appropriate methodological design to quality

learning was highlighted by E1 and E6, while C3 recommended materials that added value to knowledge and skill development. E2 and E5 identified that ongoing administrative support was needed, so physical and human resources were available for students and staff. C1 and L1 illustrated, respectively, the mechanistic influences underpinning this approach, and its limitations for determining quality.

> Quality these days is mostly a staged and linear process. Students are inputs, and we are too, to some extent, but I hope we are change agents as well. We orchestrate learning through inputting our expertise. Course materials and classroom activities are the steps along the way, punctuated with assessment tasks. Admin makes sure the wheels keep turning, and records are kept (C1).

> Learning is ongoing development. It's incremental change, so feedback is vital, but not as valuable as it could be. It's too late when courses are over, and the next cohort of students is sitting there. Online feedback templates are generic and impersonal. Metrics and stats are easier for institutions to measure, but they're about a very narrow view of outcomes, not learning processes. Good academics value feedback from their everyday classroom interactions, more than scales and scores (L1).

Others (C3, E1, E2, E5, N2), identified constraints on the effectiveness of learning processes particular to the offshore setting. They gave three main restrictions compared to Australia. Notwithstanding materials and schedules being standardised, the physical resources, such as libraries and study spaces, were generally lacking in variety and availability. Different cultural expectations and backgrounds hampered the approaches to learning that were commonplace in Australian classrooms. Administrative activities were complicated by asynchronous delivery timetables across locations, a wider range of tasks, and inconsistent levels of staff expertise and experience.

The third perspective, evident in participants' data, was a recognition that there was a range of stakeholder views on quality. This stakeholder perspective was articulated in many ways:

> Quality needs to take the audience into account, and what learning outputs they expect (C2).

> It's mainly a combination of lecturers, students and support staff, but we can't forget the other stakeholders, like employers and professional bodies, and

even parents. We're probably most concerned about quality learning and teaching activities, but others focus more on outcomes (L2).

Client group needs partly define quality, but how we find out what those needs really are, and which ones should take priority, is the question (E3).

Customers are important. There are many of them, but some are very remote from our day-to-day experience as lecturers. Students and bosses are most relevant (E5).

Quality is about the relationship between policymakers, academics and students, but it's hard to find out what everyone values in education (C1).

Offshore programs add more interested parties, like their local staff, government departments, recruiters, and accreditation agencies. They all have their own opinions (N1).

The complexity of this perspective was demonstrated by the wide range of possible stakeholders. Individuals and groups will, inevitably, hold expectations of quality that range from competing to compatible, and interests may be unclear or unknown. This study demonstrated that, while participants were cognisant that stakeholders would vary in their quality perceptions and expectations, academics were key players in a web of tension between stakeholders. No detailed suggestions were made by participants for more effective stakeholder engagement.

Although participants were able to offer several perspectives on quality in general, initially there were few direct references to the impacts of institutional policies and procedures on their quality ideas and practices. Given the prevalence of quality as a theme in academic research and in institutional terminology, this was unexpected, therefore probing questions were asked. Participants tended to differentiate between what some termed formal or 'big Q quality', and informal or 'little q quality'; the former was linked to institutional requirements, and the latter reflected the ways in which academics actually undertook their work. This was succinctly described by E2 as: "It's a divide between quality with a big Q, and the day-to-day best efforts that lecturers make to promote student learning, and to improve our own knowledge and practice".

There was a spectrum of views about the impacts of policies and procedures on notions of quality. Views which identified positive aspects included comments that suggested

quality policies and procedures were a guide to the way people should behave to maximise student outcomes (N2), and policies were intended to support practices (L4). C1 appreciated the need for accreditation structures and auditing by external agencies to uphold and compare standards across institutions. L3 saw the standardisation and auditing of course materials in education as parallel to the documentation of quality processes in industry. For E6, quality assurance activities meant clearer expectations of students, but, at the same time, students exhibited more demanding expectations of academics and institutions. These observations tended to present institutional quality as valuable in principle, but concerns were raised about difficulties in accessing information, and that insufficient resources were available for ongoing professional development of academic, administrative, support, and library staff to keep up with changes, and to consistently apply quality guidelines in practice. This could be characterised as a gap between policy and its implementation to support frontline academic work, with higher tiers of managers taking an organisation-wide, top-down perspective, while lecturers operated at the face-to-face level.

By contrast to these more positive opinions, E4 likened centrally mandated, standardisation of product approaches to quality (for example, all programs having the same numbers of courses), as the McDonaldization (Ritzer 1996) of education. Similarly, E1 argued that systemic, structural standardisation was not consistent with sound education policy, which should free up, rather than constrain, opportunities for innovation and creativity. C2 believed that policies were more to serve the reporting mechanisms of universities, than to assist student and staff learning, and E5 saw the time consumed in bureaucratic, administrative paperwork as detracting from more important learning activities. E2 was more conscious of collecting documentation, such as student satisfaction surveys, but doubted they contributed to significant improvements in practice.

The use or, indeed, the misuse of evaluation instruments as a measure of quality, was often mentioned. The majority of participants doubted their efficacy for full elicitation of the quality of learning experiences, for example, they perceived that feedback was largely from outliers (E4). Flawed instruments meant flawed processes, so decisions were based on faulty or incomplete data (C1, E4, E5). Some participants had been involved in poorly

conducted quality audits that overlooked informal and undocumented contributions to quality (E1, E3, E6). Thus, it is realistic to suggest that the more thorough incorporation of 'little q quality', such as regular informal feedback drawn from a range of stakeholders, would assist in a closer alignment of institutional policies and procedures with the practices of academics.

While the majority of the discussion about notions of quality focused on learning and teaching issues, there were, however, some comments on research quality and the nature of administrative support. For L3, the increasing emphasis on the quality of research was, simultaneously, a challenge and an added burden. Focused support and mentoring was needed when academics were unfamiliar with the expectations of quality research. Others described the pressure to publish in the more highly regarded journals as a necessity for academic survival and progression (C3). E2 took the approach to quality research as reaching a wide internal and external audience, so as to have an impact on theoretical concepts, as well as on refining and improving learning and teaching practices. Finally, only two comments were made about administration. The key terms used, which could be construed as relating to quality, were: accuracy, efficiency, relevance, support and timeliness, but quality administration, from participants' perspectives was, ideally, an enabler, rather than a driver, of academic work.

Participants viewed quality across a spectrum of perspectives. Regardless of favoured perspectives, a consistent unifying thread across interview was an emphasis on ensuring the quality of student learning experiences and teaching practices. Engagement with quality policies and procedures was mainly limited to student evaluations, which were judged as having limited value for quality improvement. Participants preferred to rely on their own experiences, and on informal feedback from students and colleagues, to evaluate learning impact. Little attention was given to notions of quality research and administration in interviews. This study indicated that there was a gulf between institutional level quality policies and procedures, and academics' practices. More collaborative interactions with stakeholders, readily accessible information, specific institutional support and training, along with feedback from expert academics, may assist in bridging this disjuncture in concepts of quality.

The exploration of participants' perspectives on the nature of academic work and on notions of quality established the broader contextual scene of the study, and provided fundamental sensitising concepts for the investigation of the specific context of Hong Kong programs. The following sections of this chapter present the key findings from the data analysis for the curriculum, student and institution attributes, which, this study found, made up the extrinsic factors that contributed to participants' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work.

Extrinsic Factors

Curriculum Attributes: Standardisation versus Contextualisation

The major finding from participants' discussion of the relationship between curriculum and concepts of offshore quality work was that tension existed between the required utilisation of standardised curriculum 'packages', and academics' contextualisation embellishments to them. Interview responses were confined, almost exclusively, to the key issues of: limitations of prescribed materials, inconsistent and transient nature of contextualisation inputs, and academics' perceptions of the value placed on their expertise by institutions.

A common experience for participants was that others had greater input to curriculum materials. Formal course materials were generally designed in Australia by more senior colleagues, curriculum specialists or, in two cases, educational technologists. Coordinators or team leaders then distributed these packaged materials to teaching staff. These formal course materials were typically described as 'identical', 'similar' or 'equivalent' to those in Australian courses. Although packages usually contained some contextual materials, such as regional or local case studies, they were largely composed of Australian and global content, rather than targeted local content. Few participants had had any in-depth involvement in design curricula.

In the interests of better explicating content and providing more relevant learning experiences for their Hong Kong students, participants added local examples and classroom activities to contextualise these generic, standardised materials. L4 described this as "putting the content into a context understandable to our offshore students is an imperative to improve their learning. We transfer concepts to their familiar situations". The wide variety of resources used, included case studies, journal articles, newspapers, and professional magazines, as well as online case studies, TED talks and television programs. Content was personalised through anecdotes from Hong Kong staff and

students, experienced Australian colleagues, and local business managers and past students.

These sources were intended to improve curriculum quality and for more effective transfer of learning, but individual, *ad hoc* contextualisation meant contributions were mostly one-off or short term, rather than consolidated for on-going curriculum development. The situation had a range of impacts. L3 questioned the use of personal time and effort, as "it's a waste of my resources when my good ideas and materials aren't incorporated into the course for next time". L4 highlighted the impact of differences in levels of staff expertise: "inexperienced staff, and those who teach offshore occasionally, didn't have many relevant examples. They don't have much local knowledge or experience, or sometimes, no long term interest". The issue was linked to students' expectations by C3, who observed that "students expect some cultural expertise, and they compare with friends in other classes. They're quite negative if they don't have similar experiences". Finally, E2 believed informal contextualisation was dependent on the willingness of individual academics to communicate, cooperate and share information, but was constrained by the time-compressed, intensive delivery format of many programs.

Further probing questions were used to uncover different categories of opinion on the appropriate extent of contextualisation of standardised curriculum materials for quality offshore work. More experienced participants used and valued contextualisation, but expressed concerns about academic freedom. E1 described high quality academic work as the flexibility to respond to students' existing knowledge and experience bases, and to stay abreast of local business issues. C1, E2 and E6 reinforced these sentiments. For them, highly structured curriculum materials reduced freedom to make learning and teaching choices, and to adapt to contexts. E4 strongly stated stance was that:

> Creativity gets stifled when formal course materials are too rigid. Content packages are fine as basic overviews for students and new staff, but I've got years of offshore experience to share. I don't need telling what to do in my class. I didn't become an academic to be churning out repetitive content.

These examples indicated that contextualisation was perceived as adding quality to standardised curriculum packages, but its informal nature, variations in expertise and interest, and the structure of offshore programs meant benefits to learning and teaching were not fully realised. Yet, these experienced participants were also concerned that if more formalised approaches to contextualisation were instigated by institutions, their academic autonomy work would be reduced. By contrast, less experienced participants associated standardised curricula with reassurance about standards, including content consistency across classes, and easier comparison of student outcomes between programs (L3). L2 expressed relief that:

> When everyone follows the materials, I don't worry about what to add, so saves preparation time, which hardly exists, anyway. The teaching timetable means you're flat out over there, and workload still goes on at home. Team members aren't the same every trip either, but at least we can do the same thing.

Further insights were gleaned about notions of offshore curriculum quality from two other participant categories. Casually employed participants exhibited a disconnection to offshore contextualisation, and, indeed, to most elements of curriculum work (C2, C4). Non-Western participants expressed disappointment that their cultural expertise and native language abilities were not sought out (N1, N2). Chapter One identified the increasing representation of these two categories of academics in Australian universities, therefore they, and their concerns, are likely to be more prevalent in future offshore programs. Finally, two comments aptly illustrated the quality dilemmas faced by participants in curriculum contextualisation:

> Contextualisation is a double-edged sword, with enrichment on one side, and potential for quality slippage on the other. The incorporation of our knowledge and skills as individual academics, and how we work together is absolutely vital, but it can work against the benefits of a more systematic approach (E3).

> There is definitely a need for targeted institutional support for curriculum development, but essentially, it should remain in the hands of academics, and not just become a standardised data base of dubiously relevant resources, managed by a centralised administrator, buried somewhere in the hierarchy.

We should be pivotal in the design, not just passive recipients of the end products (E5).

This study revealed that there were obvious tensions between the explicit institutional expectations of adherence to prescribed curriculum packages, and the more informal, fluid and flexible approach to contextualisation that was favoured by many participants. The ambivalence of some participants towards contextualisation did, however, serve to highlight the complexities associated with offshore work. Finally, there were indications in the data that mirrored underlying contentious trends in the changing nature of the contemporary higher education academic workforce.

Synthesis of Findings on Curriculum Attributes

The uneasy relationship between curriculum standardisation by institutions and contextualisation by academics was the overarching thread which emerged from the analysis of data pertaining to curriculum attributes. Patterns in the data revealed a number of tensions which suggested that participants found standardised materials to be insufficient for quality offshore curricula, so there was impetus for additional contextual inputs.

No participant questioned the importance of quality in offshore curriculum materials, but they identified that they were usually not included in the design process and, indeed, were largely excluded from the development of formal course packages. Both activities were carried out by others, who were seldom actively engaged in offshore classroom teaching. Thus, it could be said that a schism existed between the development and delivery stages. In response to perceived limitations in the standardised materials, all participants had engaged in informal contextualisation, which they drew from many sources. This process was generally viewed as an essential, although problematic, component of academic work. On the positive side, it contributed extra value and, therefore, quality to teaching practices, which in turn, enhanced learning opportunities for students. However, as few, if any, regular mechanisms were in place to share and consolidate individual work, the

resources produced were often not captured for inclusion in future courses. This hampered any continuous improvement of quality.

There was acknowledgement, especially from less experienced academics, that formal curriculum packages provided a consistent standard of content, and served as a shared knowledge platform for both students and academics. As these materials were cheaper, and easier to monitor and measure, they were also, presumably, a better fit with institutional quality metrics. The less standardised nature of contextualised materials, however, was more educationally satisfying and professionally appealing to experienced participants, regardless of flaws in approaches to their creation. In addition, these participants weighed the desire for more institutional support for contextualisation activities against their apprehension of excessive institutional interference and reduced autonomy. Casual staff felt alienated from curriculum work, and non-Western Australian staff believed that their cultural knowledge and language skills were under-utilised, despite having specific offshore relevance. As these two categories of staff represented the emerging trends of increased casualisation and of internationalisation of academic staffing in contemporary Australian higher education institutions, their specific concerns were likely to be more prominent in future offshore work.

In this study, institutional perceptions of curriculum quality were viewed by participants as manifesting in standardised curriculum packages, while contextualisation activities represented the professional discretion of academics to influence the quality of offshore learning and teaching. The tensions resulting from this complex interplay suggested that institutions and academics may have different values and conceptualisations in relation to what constituted quality curricula. As these perceptions of curriculum quality were mainly confined to comments on subject matter, the discussion of findings in Chapter Six includes an overview of broader notions regarding the nature of curriculum. As many participants expressed feelings that their professional expertise was not sufficiently valued, a collaborative stakeholder approach could provide a more comprehensive and shared picture of offshore quality curricula.

Student Attributes: Learning Skills and Dispositions

Participants linked the quality of their work, especially the effectiveness of their teaching practices on students learning, to the characteristics and behaviours of their students. Descriptors of the relationship with students varied from L2's assembly line imagery: "they're the raw material in the educational process. They're the resources, and our job is to make them into successful products", to E3's view that: "obviously, students and I have quite different cultural and educational backgrounds, but it's a joint journey of learning and understanding". Irrespective of descriptors, effective learning and teaching involved a mutually dependent interaction between academics and students. Participants perceived that specific student characteristics and skills impacted on the effectiveness of these interactions. As institutions provided little or no prior information about students, participants relied on their own classroom observations, for example, "I'm immediately gauging behaviours for signs of attitudes and skills, then I mentally judge the best ways to tackle content" (E1).

Participants frequently expressed their concerns about the effect of Hong Kong students' learning skills and dispositions on the quality of learning and teaching. Three themes were discernible in the data. These are designated as student (S) themes: S1 English language proficiency, S2 Cultural and social characteristics, and S3 Learning and teaching styles preferences, and are explored in the following sections.

Theme S1 English Language Proficiency

Most participants, especially before their first Hong Kong teaching trip, anticipated that English proficiency levels would be lower than onshore, however, they presumed that selection criteria would ensure a consistent standard of English skill levels to enable students to achieve outcomes comparable to their onshore counterparts. The mismatch between their expectations and experiences was evident in interviews. In particular, proficiency in English language skills was inconsistent both within and between student cohorts. E5 noted, for example, that "you can't depend on comprehension and language

skills being anywhere near uniform. I found they're very patchy, so it's hard to plan activities in advance". Possible contributing factors for this inconsistency in proficiency were suggested. E2, for example, commented that the emphasis on learning English in Hong Kong secondary education had changed along with Government policies, so standards varied according to when students had studied. An additional complication occurred when programs allowed advanced standing entry based on completion of previous local studies, but without proficiency in English writing and speaking as a specific selection criterion (E6). The impacts of English skills proficiency on quality were important to participants for two main reasons: upholding standards of learning activities and assessments comparable to those onshore, and the efficacy of feedback.

While there was agreement that English skill levels varied widely, there was no consensus about making allowances for low proficiency levels, especially in written work. Comments from a lenient standpoint included: "the most important outcome is students showing they understand concepts. Education's supposed to be global, so we need to accept deficiencies in English" (C3). L4 pointed out that, as the offshore context had specific constraints of reduced contact time and learning support, there could not be exact parallels with onshore. By contrast, E4 believed that "quality is about equity and fairness for everyone, so, if courses are offered in English, then language skills must be adequate everywhere". E6's standpoint was that comparable English skills levels were essential for ensuring institutions, academics, and past and future graduates were associated with a reputation for high quality education. Ethical concerns were also raised:

> Ethical responsibility really begins with selection processes. If institutions accept these students and take their money, I can understand how they'd reasonably expect they had skills to cope in class and pass. I bet their parents and bosses do too. And it's a lot of extra work for us too, when English levels are so unpredictable (C1).

> Comparable standards are absolutely central for ethical education. It's a no-brainer that we need to be transparent and stick to very clear assessment standards for all students. Everyone's heard of 'soft marking', even if it's too controversial to talk about it openly, but we need to avoid it as a default, easy answer when too many students' writing and comprehension just aren't up to scratch. We should focus on good quality learning, and not worrying about justifying ourselves (E1).

In Hong Kong classrooms, proficiency in spoken language skills were especially significant for participants, as they held strong preferences for using verbal learning activities and assessment tasks in their teaching. (The details of these teaching practices are explored in Themes A2 and A3). Hong Kong students, in general, displayed greater reluctance to interact verbally than onshore students, and, similarly to their written English levels, there was a broader range of oral skills within and across cohorts.

As verbal classroom activities were part of preferred teaching practices, and they were integral components of onshore work, most participants had persevered with them in Hong Kong classrooms. However, there were many comments indicating a questioning of their value, and a reluctance to incorporate them to the same extent as onshore. For example, E4 candidly admitted that: "when presentations involve mandatory participation, it's often excruciating for everyone. Some students stumble through their reports with poor language and confidence". E6 commented that: "it can be too embarrassing for all concerned. Sometimes students just don't turn up, or they say they're sick or simply disappear before their turn to speak". For C3, learning opportunities were lost: "when you're distracted by coming up with some positive feedback to smooth over awkward delivery, there's no room left for rugged engagement with the content". The prevailing view in this study, then, was that the level of spoken English skills reduced the quality of verbal interactions in Hong Kong classrooms.

English language proficiency levels were also linked to the effectiveness of giving and receiving feedback. Two-way feedback between academics and students, and amongst students is widely accepted as a fundamental component of quality education. Participants provided feedback to assist student learning, but also tried to elicit feedback from them as a check on understanding of concepts, and as an indicator of the success of teaching techniques. This combined approach of giving and receiving information suggested that effective feedback relied on a 'mutual dependence' within the academic-student relationship. However, this study found that when proficiency levels were inadequate, feedback was most often one-way, from academic to students. C2 described the experience as: "students seem to avoid asking us questions, or giving us feedback. I feel

I'm always working with limited information and second guessing where they're at, and then I compensate by getting too directive". C3 felt the benefits of collaborative learning were lessened when two-way feedback between students was lacking. Participants reported that they tried to obtain qualitative feedback in the classroom, but E 4, L1 and L3 believed that students preferred the anonymity of survey forms. The quality limitations of the latter form of feedback were identified earlier in this chapter.

Overall, participants' responses suggested that there were quality concerns as a consequence of the proficiency levels of students' written and verbal English skills. There was no definitive agreement about the best approach to address the issue of comparability of written assessment standards between onshore and offshore students. There were clear indications that participants held a shared belief that verbal interactions, especially presentations and two-way classroom feedback were integral to facilitating quality student learning and teaching practices. However, offshore, the efficacy of verbal interactions, in particular, eliciting verbal feedback was negatively affected by oral English language skill levels.

Theme S2 Cultural and Social Characteristics

Based largely on direct student feedback, and observations and interpretations of student classroom engagement, participants identified two main types of cultural and social characteristics that they agreed impacted upon Hong Kong students' commitment to study and attitudes to learning. These were external motivational factors, especially competing demands, and hierarchical classroom interaction patterns.

Hong Kong students generally worked full time while studying, which led to extra time pressures and stresses. This was compounded by competing demands from family, religion and community. In intensive mode programs, clashes with Saturday morning work and religious or family duties on Sundays led to absenteeism, which resulted in missed information, incomplete understanding of content and assessment tasks, and disruption to group work (C1, C3, E4, N1).

Participants' comments suggested that they judged Hong Kong students as being less intrinsically interested in personal learning and development, and more driven by pragmatic external motivators. Indeed, C1 was told by many students that their incentives to study were for quicker work upgrades, rather than for any long-term personal and professional development. Others wanted a certificate from any Western institution for career advancement (N2). Overall, perceptions were that external demands outweighed commitment to studies, in spite of program costs, and the limited opportunities to interact with visiting academics

Hong Kong student cohorts were described as having a wider range of ages and a greater variety in length and depth of work experience, but a more homogeneous cultural background, than was typical in onshore programs. Some of these characteristics became overt in students' classroom behaviours. A common pattern observed by several participants was labelled by E3 as, "a hierarchy of perceived authority amongst students in the classroom". It typically manifested as the more senior students (by age and employment level) dominating discussion, and the more junior students deferring to them. Indeed, E1 believed that the older students deliberately took spokesperson and team leader roles as both a right and a responsibility. At the same time, the juniors colluded by looking towards seniors, both literally and metaphorically, to lead activities. This exercise of power was most apparent in group work where senior students allocated roles and directed group assessments, a process which was likened by C1 to "a cultural pecking order in the classroom". In addition, E2 speculated that, as many students knew each other through organisational contacts, those with higher workplace status wanted to also take leadership roles amongst student peers. Gender was interwoven within these behaviour patterns; female students with little work experience were often reticent to speak in front of classmates, and were allocated peripheral roles by seniors, such as scribes, but not presenters, for group activities.

As opportunities for participants to evaluate skill levels and developmental needs of offshore students were largely confined to observing the extent of their visible involvement in classroom activities, hierarchical interaction patterns between students

had the potential to influence perceptions of an individual student's overall knowledge and ability. As C3 mused:

> Even though I can see these patterns going on, I have to acknowledge that the more vocal students are easier to remember. When you can put a face to a name, it can have a bit of a halo effect so that all their work seems better. I do try to be really conscious of not letting my classroom impressions bias fair marking.

A related issue was that most participants were reluctant to openly question hierarchical student dynamics in offshore classrooms. The essence of this unease was captured by L2's reflection:

> When I'm back home in my familiar surroundings, I'm confident, and wouldn't hesitate to challenge this type of group behaviour, and even use it as a topic for class discussion. In another culture, though, there must factors I'm not aware of, so I could spark off underlying issues that I wouldn't have the know-how or time to contain and work through. We're only there for short stays, so it's safer to just leave things be. But, I'm still very uneasy. Education should cause change, not avoid it.

It could be inferred from these and similar anecdotes that the ways in which specific cultural and social factors were enacted in classroom activities, especially in group work, tended to consolidate the status quo of relationships between students by reinforcing seniority and gender stereotypes, and collusive group dynamics. While participants recognised resultant inequalities in student learning, some lacked the confidence to challenge behaviours, as they had insufficient cultural understanding, and program structures were not conducive to developing a deep familiarity with students. Indeed, in some instances, the data suggested a degree of unspoken complicity between academics and students to gloss over uncomfortable classroom dynamics.

It is reasonable to speculate, then, that offshore student cultural and social characteristics favoured the learning of those students who already possessed higher levels of interaction skills. Thus, they could be imagined as 'bridges' to further levels of learning for already skilled students, but 'barriers' to improvement for those with lower skill levels.

Theme S3 Learning and Teaching Styles Preferences

The third theme involved preconceptions of Hong Kong students' likely learning and teaching styles preferences, which participants held prior to their first trip, compared to their actual experiences. Most described their anticipation of a Confucian or Asian learning style, which had been shaped by discussions with colleagues, institutional training activities, and, in a few cases, literature, in particular, by Watkins & Biggs (1996). Two common initial images, shared by at least ten participants, were that offshore students were surface, rather than deep, learners, who preferred teacher-directed, lecture-style classes, and their analytical skill levels were lower than their onshore counterparts. Comments included that students would: "come with preferences for description" (L1), "reiterate expert viewpoints from textbooks and lectures" (E1), "be less creative thinkers" (E6), "be reluctant to articulate an opinion contrary to lecturers" (E4), and "interact less in class" (C4). Most participants had re-evaluated their assumptions to some extent after teaching offshore. In particular, observations of group work, comparisons of onshore and offshore students' approaches to critical thinking and creativity, and teaching certain categories of students gave them a more nuanced understanding of the nature of students' learning and teaching style preferences.

Several participants reported elevated levels of discussion, noise, enthusiasm and output when students were involved in small groups, as compared to class plenaries. C3 proposed that groups were a more sensitive approach to learning in Hong Kong, as "students could chat in their first language, and then reformulate their collective ideas back into English, before presenting". E5 emphasised that "it's important for students to 'save face', so groups are safer than being in front of others in big classes. But it's a cultural concept many Australian academics don't understand". E4 suspected that "students prefer group work because the responsibility for answers is shared, so no individual can be blamed for getting it wrong". It could be inferred from these examples that group work stimulated collaborative interaction, but was, simultaneously, a hiding place for students who wanted to avoid active engagement in the larger class context.

Participants direct experiences of offshore students' abilities and approaches to creativity and critical thinking tended to reinforce their assumptions that these skills were less developed than in onshore students. Some, however, had modified their viewpoints through observing that, although Hong Kong students were more uniform in their answers and less willing to challenge their academics, there was evidence of a logical approach to critical analysis, which involved memorised concepts applied with the aid of guided questions. E2, for example, found that an approach bounded by clear instructions supported creativity:

> I've seen lots of creative work, but when I think carefully about how it happened, it's usually been within a standard framework or set guidelines. There's more a lack of what I'd call 'original thinking', than creativity. That's probably an outcome of their traditional approach to education and the conformity expected in society.

Variations in students' preferences were exhibited in three types of program contexts: different discipline streams, stage in study program, and previous experience of Western education or work environments. For example, students in more people-oriented streams, such as marketing and human resources, were more willing to be interactive than those in technically-focused streams, such as information technology students (E3, L4). Later year students, who were more familiar with each other, the institutional system, and lecturers' expectations of interactive classrooms, were notably more at ease with verbal learning activities (C2, L3, N2). Students with previous Western work or study experience were described as more outspoken, aware of nuanced humour, and quite open to styles of teaching that emphasised discussion and debate (C3, C4, E1).

This examination of participants' preconceptions of Hong Kong students' preferred learning and teaching styles as compared to their face-to-face encounters, assisted in a closer scrutiny of commonly-accepted but, arguably, superficial perceptions about offshore student preferences. Based on their experiences, most participants believed that there was no single preferred learning or teaching style, but the influences of cultural and educational backgrounds resulted in a narrower range of styles than in onshore classrooms.

Synthesis of Findings on Student Attributes

In this study, participants perceived that proficiency of English language, cultural and social characteristics, and learning and teaching styles preferences were significant influences on the quality of students' learning, which, in turn, impacted on teaching practices. These student attributes manifested most obviously in the nature of classroom interactions.

Offshore students' levels of proficiency in English language skills varied more than onshore students, which resulted in three major negative impacts on quality processes and outcomes for students and academics. These were: dissent amongst academics about standards of assessment tasks; fewer verbal learning opportunities provided for students; and difficulties in engaging students in on-going, informal feedback. Layers of complexity were added by cultural and social dynamics that led to hierarchical power structures amongst students. Consequently, students with the most experience and skills were better placed to take advantage of interactive learning opportunities, rather than those, who, arguably, needed more development. Furthermore, for many students, competing work, family, and societal demands appeared to be stronger motivators than was learning for its own sake. This was enacted through poor attendance or less willingness to engage in interactive learning activities, which detracted from academics' efforts to facilitate effective learning opportunities. In general, students were perceived by participants as having strong external influences on their approaches to learning, while academics depicted themselves as driven, primarily, by the quality of student learning activities and outcomes, and the demonstrable effectiveness of their own teaching practices.

Learning and teaching style preferences was the theme to which participants gave most attention in their interview responses. Their expectations and explanations of classroom behaviours were linked to their perceptions of students' Confucian cultural and educational backgrounds, regardless of the degree of their understanding of what such a Confucian approach to learning and teaching would entail in practice. However, based on their actual experiences, many participants had amended their perspectives to recognise

that, within structured conditions, students had evidenced productive group outcomes, and had shown some evidence of analytical and creative approaches to learning and assessment activities. In addition, contextual factors including specialist streams, program stages, and previous exposure to Western education and work experiences were directly linked to variations in the quality of classroom behaviours. These factors further reinforced that there was neither one uniform learning nor teaching style that was favoured by all students, although it was perceived that offshore student cohorts were likely to show less variation in style preferences than was typical in Australian classrooms.

In summary, students were perceived as favouring small group work, being less willing to challenge academics, and preferring to work within structured guidelines, although variations in discipline areas, and work and previous education experience were observed to influence these characteristics. However, as offshore programs were often conducted in intensive rather than protracted modes, there was limited opportunity to observe and become familiar with the specific learning attributes of individual students.

Institutional Attributes: Supportive Resources and Leadership

Schwab's (1973) commonplace, the milieu, encapsulates the contextual aspects of education. In this study, participants' academic work was largely situated within their onshore and Hong Kong institutions, therefore the scope of contextual issues is deliberately bounded by those institutional attributes that participants identified as influencing their notions of quality academic work in Hong Kong. This study is, however, cognisant of the wider milieu of internationalised higher education, as evidenced in the literature reviews in Chapters One and Two.

The focus of offshore work revolved around teaching visits, and it was evident in the data that those visits were part of a cycle of work that was supported by institutional resources. Therefore, the findings in this section are organised around the concept of a quality cycle involving three institutional (I) themes which cascade into sub-themes when a finer level

of analysis is warranted by the detail and complexity of the data. These are: Theme I1 Preparation and Review (These are considered together as they represent the beginning and ending of a work cycle.), Theme I2 Situational and human resources, and Theme I3 Institutional leadership.

Theme I1 Preparation and Review

A quality cycle typically begins with preparation and planning, so participants were invited to comment on the types, availability and effectiveness of 'pre-departure' activities offered by their institutions to support staff preparation for offshore work. Discussion about review activities was included as, from a perspective of continuous quality improvement, the review stage marks both the completion of one cycle, and the beginning of the next cycle.

While participants described the degree of helpfulness of a range of formal and informal 'induction' type activities, there was little evidence of effective feedback or review processes. No participant mentioned a compulsory attendance requirement for either type of institutional activity.

Nine participants had attended general staff development presentations and roundtable discussions where fellow academics shared their experiences about working offshore. These activities were described as 'quite interesting' and 'of some general value', but most participants wanted targeted information about specific locations. Some had accessed online induction manuals, which they described as comprehensive, but too focused on introductions to institutions as a whole. By contrast, first-hand accounts from fellow staff were seen as convenient, helpful and informative. Many participants felt similarly to E5, who said that:

> Reading from an online manual does give you a few good travel tips, and some have lots of useful general information if you're new to an institution, but they're too detailed and far less interesting than talking to someone who's been there, and you can ask very specific questions and get responses about

what really concerns you. And it makes more sense to discuss things when it's closer to the visit.

Overall, then, participants preferred face-to-face, targeted and timely information from their more experienced colleagues.

The institutional choice of expert staff presenters for induction sessions was also raised in interviews. While it was generally acknowledged that these staff possessed relevant cultural expertise, they were often from psychology, counselling, or student support areas, and they were not always practising academics with offshore classroom teaching experience. This was a concern for many participants, who judged their input as having limited practical value about specific locations and programs, although the importance of cultural information was recognised. As E4 emphasised:

> Things like guidance for internationalising materials are useful, but what's absolutely essential is raising staff awareness about cultural behaviours in different countries, and in the classroom. You can make a faux pas without realising it, and you won't get immediate feedback, but it will show up later in poor student evaluation scores or not being offered any more offshore work, without explanation.

Some participants also noted the low level engagement in, or absence from, induction activities by learning and teaching coordinators and quality experts. It is reasonable to assume that these institutional roles would be directly relevant to overall quality academic work, however, this study raises the question of the extent of their involvement in offshore programs.

Learning from teaching colleagues was the most desirable induction method identified in this study. Ten participants emphasised that input from those academics who had 'real', 'true' or 'legitimate' expertise had the most positive influence on the quality of their offshore academic work. When asked to expand on expertise, there was a shared view that it must be based on extensive hands-on experience in specific locations. As E5 reported:

Australian academics often lump all Asian countries together. There's a naïve assumption that their cultures and education must be much the same, but once I had a chance to teach in some different places and compare them, I realised how superficial my view was. The right information for each context is essential.

Indeed, a non-Western participant, who had 'taken it for granted' that Hong Kong would be much the same as their own Asian country of origin, encountered many cultural differences in acceptable social behaviours, educational systems, and nuances in communication.

The opportunity to teach in offshore teams with supportive, experienced colleagues was ranked by most participants as the most valuable form of practical induction in action, providing all staff were willing to openly share their expertise and information. This was likened to "an apprenticeship really, if you're prepared to learn from peers" (E1), and "an extra cultural bonus is when you have the chance to work with good offshore locals. You get a much more rounded perspective" (E3). However, this study revealed that learning from colleagues, while desirable, was not without pitfalls. Several participants (C2, C4, E6, L1, N1) acknowledged that the effectiveness of the academic and cultural guidance from colleagues depended on competency levels, interest and time, and also on the quality of communication skills and cordial relationships between staff. If these conditions were not met, the information provided and, indeed, acted upon, ran the risk of being inconsistent, unstructured, and idiosyncratic.

A comparison of categories of participants revealed clear differences in their exposure to induction activities. Experienced staff reminisced about their 'early days', when offshore programs were less common and in fewer locations, with smaller student numbers, and the development of structure and content was a planned, evolutionary process. They recalled preparation meetings with co-ordinators and teaching colleagues before departure, and meetings and social occasions with offshore colleagues and administrators. In addition there were review meetings, during and after trips, to record suggestions for future refinements of content and materials, and to share travel tips and 'survival' anecdotes. As E3 observed "it was actually, then, a lot more about consistency, standards,

reviewing and changing things, and we had more time. Now I think about it, that's a good concept of quality".

Inexperienced staff, by contrast, had encountered only general offshore preparation activities and online materials, but had no formal feedback or review sessions. Most identified the need to take the initiative to seek out guidance from more experienced colleagues, in particular, co-ordinators, and to do their own information gathering about locations. L2, for example, had "expected something more organised and personalised, which is routine in business. You have to be a self-starter, and find out who's been there before, and go and ask, especially the co-ordinator". Casual staff were surprised and concerned when they faced their first trip with scant information, and when staff with little offshore experience were given coordinator responsibilities. Interview responses highlighted issues not only regarding adequacy of preparation, review, and on-going guidance, but also pointed towards possible underlying institutional assumptions about staff selection, in particular, that all staff already possessed sufficient international capabilities to make them suitable lecturers in other cultural settings.

Finally, the review phase of the offshore work cycle was often neglected in contemporary academic work. Five types of explanations, which are reflected in the comments below, were given by participants: post-visit competing time demands, short term staffing strategies, unclear roles and responsibilities, staff employment status, and lack of incentives. Thus, a wide range of issues worked against effective staff engagement in reviews.

> Many people have good intentions to meet up afterwards, but we're just too busy and on to the next thing as soon as we're back home (E5).

> It's a bit of a waste when you don't know if, or when, you'll be on the same course next time, or who else will be with you (N2).

> The coordinator needs to organise meetings as it's their responsibility, not staff members (L2).

> Casual academics often have other commitments, so they don't always have time or interest after trips, and they may not get paid for extra work (C3).

> If the students and everyone are happy with marks, and survey scores are good, then why change anything, and it's a new group of students next time (C2).

In the cycle of offshore work, institutions provided, largely voluntary, face to face, and online preparation and induction activities to support offshore teaching. Participants found these sessions and materials to be of generic cultural interest, but they were often not linked directly to specific locations and programs, planned to align with teaching visits, nor matched to individual needs. Some participants also noted the lack of involvement of senior specialist academic staff, especially from learning and teaching, and quality roles, which was perceived as a lower level of importance placed on offshore work. Participants preferred to learn from colleagues, but this approach was dependent on individual competence, good will, and appropriate skills, rather than on institutionally led support. Review sessions were 'conspicuous by their absence', with feedback on the quality of learning and teaching often limited to metrics from student grades and satisfaction surveys. This was in contrast to the experiences of participants with long term involvement in offshore work, who reported that review meetings, during and after trips, were the norm. The logical consequence of such incomplete offshore work cycles was that learnings from one cycle were unlikely to be fully examined and incorporated into subsequent cycles, so there were lost opportunities for continuous quality improvement. Many participants viewed these conditions as undervaluing offshore work.

Theme I2 Situational and Human Resources

All work activities within the offshore work cycle required institutional support in the form of situational and human resources. Participants raised several practical issues associated with the resource support provided by both their Australian institutions, and their Hong Kong counterparts. This study unearthed underlying assumptions and interpretations held by many participants that the nature and level of support was an indicator of the degree to which their institutions valued offshore work in general, and the work of individual academics in particular. Four sub-themes emerged from the

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analysis regarding impacts of resourcing on conceptualisations of quality academic work; three were primarily situational resources, and the fourth encompassed human resources. These are: I2.1 Standards of travel and accommodation I2.2 Competing demands, I2.3 Standard of facilities, and I2.4 Human resources.

Sub-theme I2.1 Standards of Travel and Accommodation

Travel arrangements and hotel accommodation affected the physical and emotional well-being of staff, and, consequently, their ability to effectively perform high quality academic. At first inspection, these elements appeared to be mainly about physical comfort and convenience, yet further investigation revealed that many participants interpreted the parameters for standards and choices of travel and accommodation, imposed by their institutions, as a reflection of an underlying dichotomy between institutional-financial values and academic-educational values.

From a practical perspective, the most important specific aspects of travel and accommodation to participants were the standard of hotel facilities, safe locations, and transport proximity to teaching venues. Most hotel accommodation was considered to be comfortable, although, as E1, L1, L2, L4 and N2 found, small rooms without proper business facilities, high noise levels, sleeplessness, and frequent hotel maintenance interruptions were not conducive to adequate rest. Nor did it help in keeping up with ongoing aspects of other academic work, such as onshore academic and administrative tasks, and research. Some participants, especially those on longer visits, for example, of two weeks duration, described experiencing loneliness and the inconvenience of 'living out of a suitcase'. There were generally positive views about safety in Hong Kong. C3 commented that "Hong Kong is easy enough to get around on foot, and public transport's convenient and reasonably priced. It helps if there's easy access between the hotel and work". Four staff, three of whom were female, placed a high priority on teaching and hotel venues where they felt safe after late evening classes.

The available choices of travel and accommodation were, however, perceived as a measure of the importance institutions placed on offshore programs and staff teaching in them.

> Hotel accommodation and travel choices seem to be determined by the whims of managers and administrators who haven't any idea of how demanding it is to teach large numbers of foreign students for several days. It's usually the cheapest deal with no understanding of class times, teaching hours, or pressures of travel. They don't get that we need time to familiarise ourselves with venues and colleagues (E1).

> You'd think we're on junkets or holidays. Teaching offshore is hard work, so when we get there and where we stay affects how well we teach. It's a small investment in us for very good money in return. But there are some management staff who seem like they take trips for shopping and sightseeing. It feels like 'us' and 'them'. Even local staff ask us how we're enjoying our holiday in such nice hotels (E4).

Many similar vignettes described the attitudes and behaviours of management and administrative staff on institutional business trips, for example, graduations and promotional tours. Anecdotes generally mentioned business class flights, higher standard hotels, extra travel days, and shopping trips. The contrasting conditions between academics and administrators prompted participants to question the value placed on offshore academic work by institutions.

A recurring story in interviews described a common event that had reinforced participants' perceptions of institutional attitudes to offshore work. On their day of departure, they were obliged to take their luggage to class, and leave directly from there to catch their flights, rather than spend an additional night. They saw this as purely financially driven and exploitative. Several negative effects on perceptions of quality were identified. Most participants believed that students were left with the impression of being 'short-changed' on personal contact, especially as there was a cultural preference to meet individually with academics after classes. Many speculated that students would perceive academics as being of low importance to their institutions. An impact on onshore work was also identified. Participants felt that their own readiness for work following their offshore trips was reduced by tiredness. In response, some participants, with

reluctance, and in some cases with lingering resentment, had paid for additional accommodation or upgrades on flights.

A final factor involved one of the few gender-related issues which emerged in this study. Female participants provided accounts of preferential treatment for their male counterparts in hotels, such as room upgrades and business centre add-ons, while women were offered tourist information and shopping brochures (C3, E5, E6, L3, N2). Individual reactions to these events varied greatly, from mild irritation at presumed prevailing societal attitudes, to direct demands for equal treatment. A related effect was that some felt under extra pressure to pre-empt any similar assumptions in the workplace, by quickly establishing their academic credentials and status with students and local staff.

The nature of the anecdotes above indicate that the experience of offshore academic work was permeated with diverse physical and emotional demands, and that, at least to some degree, the perceptions and expectations of institutions and their academics were at odds in regards to how standards of travel and accommodation contributed to quality academic work. Travel and accommodation arrangements had, simultaneously, a practical surface aspect, and a deeper symbolic meaning. Participants' sentiments could be broadly summarised as: institutions placed value on offshore programs essentially for the financial benefits they generated, but did not sufficiently recognise, support or reward academics for their offshore work.

Sub-theme I2.2 Competing Demands

Participants had difficulties in balancing offshore work concurrently with onshore work and home life. More than two thirds of them reported feeling more distracted and less focused than they thought was desirable to accomplish consistent, high quality work. Comments that encapsulated the notion expressed by many were that: "it's like being in three places at once" (E2), and "you're expected to give full attention to onshore and offshore work at the same time, but it's also about dealing with on-going family issues. No one at work seems to consider this, unless a crisis occurs" (E5). Three main issues

were raised: personal life factors, concurrent onshore work, and use of information technology.

From the shared stories, it was apparent that many participants were conflicted about managing difficult aspects of their personal lives from a distance. The at-home responsibilities most often mentioned involved children, elderly parents, sick partners, and in two cases, pets. Gender was a differentiating factor, with all female participants describing more demands than their male counterparts. Females were more likely to portray themselves as the primary decision makers on family matters, even when offshore. Four males (C1, C2, E2, L2) also commented that women appeared to have more hands-on family responsibilities. There were several examples of feelings of guilt, and the physical and mental stresses of trying to focus on offshore work while managing complex home issues.

All participants reported some degree of stress from coping with onshore work, while offshore. Three participants described formal institutional mechanisms for assisting academics in managing concurrent onshore work. These were the use of substitute lecturers, and offshore timetables planned to avoid peak onshore workload periods. However, several informal or 'under the radar' arrangements between colleagues to fill the gaps in institutional support were described, such as combining, cancelling or rescheduling classes, setting research tasks or online activities, covering classes for colleagues, and arranging for guest speakers (C3, E1, E3, E4, E6, N1). Although beyond the scope of this study, the extent of these informal 'fixes' for what participants' perceived as insufficiently supported offshore work, flagged a likely negative flow-on to onshore quality.

The increasing prevalence, and dependence on, information technology in academic work was frequently mentioned. A plethora of hardware and forms of computer-enabled technology were in use, amongst them were: laptops, iPads, mobile phones, email, course websites, discussion boards, blogs, wikis, Skype, Facebook, and other social media. Participants described both their advantages and disadvantages when used offshore. For E5, "IT is my approach to juggling many jobs at once. I can keep up commitments to

students and colleagues, no matter where I am". Extra time was required to update skills, for, as E3 found: "it's mandatory to continually develop new skills, just to keep in touch with how students communicate". Others (C2, C3, E1, E6, L3, N2) were apprehensive that the increased use of online communication added to, rather than alleviated, tensions caused by concurrent offshore and onshore roles and responsibilities. E4's comment reflected a collective concern:

> All the technology gadgets started out as great tools to monitor what's happening with Hong Kong students between classes, and to respond to issues that crop up at home. But, there's been a big change in expectations. Everyone wants an immediate reply 24/7 or they complain and cc everybody. Students or staff, especially admin, don't think about the time difference or the teaching timetable. I feel like I'm an extension of my computer.

Similarly to views on standards of travel and accommodation, the exploration of competing demands revealed that participants perceived deficits in support for managing onshore roles and responsibilities while offshore, as a consequence of their institutions not equally valuing onshore and offshore work. C1 said:

> It's clear that we need more institutional support and appreciation for our offshore work. If they really did value it and us, there'd be more acknowledgement of the effort it takes to cope with all our roles. It wouldn't just focus on reducing expenditure, but would be more about recognising that our home life goes on, and so does our usual workload. It makes me question if institutions have any real interest in the educational value of offshore programs, even if I do.

Finally, given that many comments were laced with similar explicit and implicit complaints about lack of institutional support, this begged the question as to why individuals undertook offshore work regardless of the, for some, quite onerous competing demands. There was a diverse range of personal reasons including the following: an institutional requirement or expectation, extra payment, a trade-off for onshore class time, a good opportunity to interact with a wider range of colleagues, a change of environment, a free overseas trip, an opportunity to become immersed in another culture, and the potential for joint research activities with offshore colleagues. While participants tended to dichotomise their perceptions of values of academics and institutions in their interview

responses; the former being depicted as, primarily, educational, and the latter, as largely, economic, the variety of motivations for partaking in offshore work, as noted above, suggested underlying interests were not always purely educational in nature for every academic.

Sub-theme I2.3 Standard of Facilities

Several responses about institutional support clustered around the standard of facilities offered by offshore institutions; their impacts on academic work were discussed in some detail in interviews. E6's comment encapsulated the significance placed on facilities by many participants:

> The physical layout is very important to support effective teaching and learning activities. I think a classroom needs to be attractive and comfortable as well as functional. Students need to feel they're in professional, educational environments, so they'll take study seriously. And appearance means prestige to them as well.

A wide variety of teaching venues were used. They ranged from well-established, purpose-built, educational facilities, to rooms in office buildings and hotels. Common problems with 'non-educational' venues were: noisy and crowded, location and type of building felt unsafe at night, minimal administrative and technical support, and temporary room set-ups with unsteady folding tables and uncomfortable chairs unsuitable for long classroom sessions.

Two particularly graphic examples demonstrated the negative impacts on quality of learning and teaching when standards were inadequate. They also illustrated a seeming schism between the values and understandings of quality education for academics and offshore administrators. The first scenario involved 'the L-shaped room', and the second described classroom overcrowding.

> I was literally flabbergasted. The huge room had a table, a chair, a computer and screen at the top of the 'L' for me, but about a quarter of the 130 or so students were seated around the corner, literally out of sight. Others had desks

behind big pillars, and they'd peek around them at me. Amazingly, nobody else seemed to think it was a problem. It was just a way of squeezing in big numbers of students. I decided to lecture from the back of the room, so I could at least see most of the students. But it was a long day with no board or screen, and students were even reluctant to turn their chairs around to face me, so they just looked over their shoulders at first (E1).

The lecture theatre was so full that students sat on steps. When I told the admin staff, they said 'don't worry' as 'students would be so uncomfortable, they wouldn't come to the next session, so there'd be plenty of room'. And they were right. Problem solved. I discovered it happened quite often with big classes" (E4).

These anecdotes were told with some degree of wry humour, but also with evident concern that local institutions lacked awareness of, or disregarded the need for, adequate facilities for quality learning and teaching, rather, the focus held by these local institutions appeared to be financial rather than educational.

Participants also included the standards, availability and consistency of ancillary support as contributing factors to their professional approach, in particular, computer technology, air conditioning, catering and cleaning. Depending on the venue, the quality of information technology was a frequent problem that affected the delivery of consistent, high quality learning activities. E2, E3. L3 and N2 cited hardware incompatibility, unreliability or slow connectivity, lack of skilled support, and in inconsistent standards between venues.

Malfunctioning equipment undermines my confidence, and colours the students' impressions of me and our programs. Poor quality visuals and sound really distract from concentrating on the content. If things don't download or play properly, you improvise, but not always effectively, without all the usual resources I have at home (C1).

When our presentation standards slip, students see it as cutting costs, but with no saving or benefit to them. They seem to get angry and critical of whoever's standing out the front. I once got a low teaching score, but the negative comments were complaints about the morning tea, freezing then overheated room temperatures, and messy toilets (L1).

In addition to impacts on student perceptions, standards of facilities also manifested in negativity in collegiate relationships. Recurring comments suggested a link between

inconsistent facilities between parallel classes. Five participants reported observing or experiencing competition among staff for preferred venues, that is, those that were more attractively located and serviced, and 'favouritism' by those who allocated classes, usually Australian coordinators or offshore administrators. L4 elaborated that "while this might seem a relatively small and petty issue, offshore work has a lot of sensitivities and pressures already, so everyone should be treated fairly, and be seen to be". E2 and E5 concurred that these real or perceived inequities reduced team spirit, as members were polarised into 'in' and 'out' sub-groups. It is questionable, then, whether effective teams or communities of practice, which are powerful spaces for collaborative learning and professional growth, will develop under such conditions. The nature of offshore teams are examined in Theme A3, in Chapter Five.

Overall, participants felt that the contribution of situational resources to quality academic work was often overlooked, misunderstood or undervalued by institutions. At a practical, surface level, concerns were expressed that inadequate and inconsistent travel conditions, lack of recognition of workload demands, and varying standards of facilities reduced individual and collegiate opportunities for quality of learning and teaching. However, as these conditions were also perceived as indicators of the value that institutions gave to offshore work, they had a deeper symbolic significance for participants.

Sub-theme I2.4 Human Resources

In addition to physical resource issues, there were also specific human resource concerns, which centred on the 'staffing mix' in many Hong Kong programs. While combinations of full time, part time and casual staff were commonplace in Australian institutions, when offshore, teaching teams often included local staff, whose roles included conducting parallel classes, being follow-up lecturers after the Australian staff had departed, and taking the position of tutors and assessors. The two main concerns that participants had about this type of staffing mix were the limited opportunities for interaction between Australian and local staff, and the variation in level of qualifications and teaching experience of local staff. Interview responses suggested that these conditions occurred

more frequently when offshore administrators, rather than academics, were responsible for the initial sourcing of staff, and few, if any, induction, development or review activities were available for local staff, or joint activities for all staff.

In Australian institutions, academics generally had sufficient opportunities to develop effective working relationships over extended periods of interaction, but, in many Hong Kong programs, time constraints, multiple venues, and changing composition of staff teams meant that Australian and local staff had only brief and irregular meetings. E2, for example, described that "on some occasions, my local tutor was introduced to me by an admin person as we walked to the first session. This makes it very difficult to function as a teaching team". This situation was exacerbated by the variation in background education, work and teaching skill levels of local staff. As E6 explained: "there's a limited pool of local staff available, and you can't count on much consistency as some are academics from other local institutions, a few expat managers, retirees, even past students". There was general agreement that there was insufficient time to ascertain local staff members' content knowledge and teaching skills, or to reach agreement and clarity about course expectations prior to teaching. A further complication occurred "when the Australian team was thrown together at the last minute as well, so that definitely means fragmented classroom teaching approaches and assessment standards" (E1).

Three main consequences of offshore staffing issues that affected the quality of academic work were discerned from the data: differing approaches to teaching and assessment, students' perceptions of staff status, and team collegiality. Firstly, staff from dissimilar backgrounds often had quite different perspectives on assessment activities and measures, which were based on their own educational history and teaching experience.

> For some local staff, their backgrounds act as real blockages to understanding Australian teaching. Our student-centred teaching approaches are critical to maintaining quality, and acceptable assessment standards in all our degrees. I've seen huge variations in results for Australian and local staff. Then we get student complaints, low scores on surveys, and 'please explain' demands from managers. More shared preparation and less reparation would be better for everyone" (E3).

A second staffing consequence revolved around participants' perceptions that students had stereotypes of higher quality academics. Five experienced participants described instances of students complaining about being disadvantaged by having local staff as their allocated lecturer, rather than an Australian academic. Indeed, some participants suggested that patterns in student satisfaction surveys indicated a clear 'order of status' for academics, namely: co-ordinators, Australian fulltime Westerners, Australian Casuals, Australian Non-Westerners, and then, locals. Two casual participants interpreted instances of students asking for confirmation of information from other staff members as a lack of confidence in the authority and competence of non-fulltime staff (C2, C4). Some non-Western participants talked about 'layers of cultural biases', and being 'shocked and embarrassed that instead of having more in common and an easy rapport, I was looked down on by some students'. Other participants said that these sensitive staffing issues were discussed in private conversations, but given their controversial connotations, for example, racism, and potential negative influence on future work opportunities, they were avoided in public forums. This presumed stereotyping of academics by students could, therefore, be termed an institutional 'undiscussable' staffing issue, yet participants' experiences suggested it had significant covert, as well as overt, implications for the quality of offshore work.

The third staffing consequence involved team collegiality, which entailed, in this study, sharing resources, team teaching activities, joint moderation of assessment, and social engagement. The frequency and effectiveness of these activities were believed by participants to be dependent upon effective team selection and development.

Three typical examples were:

> E4 articulated a common view that there was a prime institutional cause underlying poor teamwork: "some managers definitely believe academics are interchangeable and anyone can teach anything, anywhere. You have to wonder what that says about their ideas of what we add to offshore teaching".

> C3 believed that: "institutions need to give attention to choosing team members and co-ordinators who can work together to make a good offshore team. If the offshore co-ordinator doesn't have the right touch with

leadership, it ends up with inconsistent teaching and dysfunctional relationships in teams".

L4 identified that: "the lack of a long term view of team membership is an on-going negative factor. It prevents planning ahead and incorporating positive changes from visit to visit, and it feels like a merry-go-round of staff, not a dedicated, consistent team".

The human resource issues raised in interviews suggested that the bringing together of disparate staff in a carefully planned mix, with the intention of developing and utilising team collegiality for quality educational outcomes, was considered by participants as having the potential to enhance the academic work of both individuals and teams. However, working against this desirable quality outcome were: the tensions arising from limited availability of suitable local teaching staff; few opportunities for developing and maintaining consistent approaches and standards within staff teams; the culturally and educationally embedded perceptions by students of what constituted the profile of a high quality academic; and insufficient institutional attention and support for carefully constructed team membership.

Theme I3 Institutional Leadership

In addition to forms of resource support, a specific contributing factor identified as necessary for ongoing improvement in offshore programs was organisational leadership, especially in the form of top-down commitment and role modelling. In this study, designated offshore co-ordinators were regarded by most participants as the face of leadership of their home institutions, and their influence appeared to permeate several aspects of academic work. The term, 'offshore co-ordinator', refers in this study to an individual appointed by their institution to be responsible for offshore programs, courses, subjects, or teams. Thus, the aspect of institutional leadership, which was most directly pertinent to the focus of this study, centred on the characteristics and behaviours of offshore co-ordinators. Their roles included: team leadership, advisors and decision-makers on academic matters and administrative issues, official liaison contacts with

offshore institutions, and designated representatives of their Australian institutions in promotional activities.

At least twelve participants described coordinators in ways that could be encapsulated by the image of a lynchpin between key Australian and offshore stakeholders, including Australian and local academic staff, current, future and past students, institutional managers, administrative staff, future students, government agencies, and the business community. Coordinators were, therefore, pivotal figures whose position allowed them to enable or hinder the quality of academics' work. Approaches to coordination were found to vary greatly, but there was a consensus in interview responses that they could wield more power and control over the work of academics than onshore coordinators, albeit within the briefer timeframes and the episodic structure of many offshore programs. The wide range of tasks and responsibilities and the high degree of decision-making autonomy meant coordinators played a key role in the quality of academic work.

All participants referred to leadership style and its consequences. There were numerous negative, as well as positive, descriptors including: officious, directive, rigid, disorganised, disinterested, absent, ambitious, supportive, helpful, accommodating, and mentoring. Illustrative samples included:

> Their leadership influence is most definitely more impactful on my work offshore, but it varies a lot with individual personalities; some co-ordinators 'go native' and tend to rule offshore programs and staff as their own little kingdom, while others definitely prefer to abdicate with their heads in their laptops (E1).

> I've found coordinators' philosophies and approaches made a big difference to how well I perform. Inconsistency's the biggest problem; sometimes they're overpowering, autocratic micromanagers, then others are so laissez-faire I've floundered not knowing how much initiative to take (C3).

> The pushy co-ordinators make it unpleasant when their aims and personal agenda don't gel with the needs of team members, so they're either too busy with their own more important work, like research, or they want to pry into everything (N2).

I remember learning so much about teaching tricks and team work from a few great coordinators. They weren't didactic, but were happy to share their time and experiences, answer my questions, and be encouraging about my ideas as well. But you need to be willing to listen and learn from really good role models (E2).

Given the frequency and depth of participants' discussion of the impacts of coordinator leadership styles on offshore work performance, perceptions of preferred styles were explored in more detail in interviews. In summary, there was a general preference for knowledgeable and approachable coordinators. Ideal characteristics were grouped around personal characteristics and behaviours. Most notably, these leaders were: skilful at solving problems in a sensitive, participative, empathic, consistent and fair manner; engaging in a socially pleasant, but not overly intrusive level of interaction with others; possessing and sharing relevant content knowledge; being well organised in preparation of materials and processes; and being aware of pertinent institutional policies and procedures of both home and offshore institutions.

While there was general agreement about the characteristics of a most preferred leadership style, there was some variation in opinions about the least preferred style. Experienced participants tended to dislike the restrictions from more rigid-directive approaches on their academic freedom in the classroom resulting, such as closely standardised content of materials, teaching activities and assessment tasks. By contrast, some of the inexperienced and of the casual participants expressed an appreciation of the more directive approaches, which gave them a greater sense of security and confidence about doing the right thing. An added benefit was positive feedback from students when all classes were receiving consistent information.

In general, participants preferred knowledgeable and personable coordinators, but the more experienced participants felt a better fit with participative style coordinators, who tended to allow academics greater flexibility, discretion and professional autonomy, while the less experienced and casual academics were reassured when given more direction.

Synthesis of Findings on Institutional Attributes

All participants had engaged in some forms of voluntary offshore induction-style activities provided by their institutions, such as seminars, specialist presentations, and online, self-paced materials. These activities were evaluated as only partially helpful, as their content was usually generic rather than specific to Hong Kong programs, and expertise offered was often cultural in nature, rather than based on extensive offshore classroom practice. Participants preferred to learn about offshore work through face-to-face engagement with colleagues, an approach that had been common in early offshore programs. It was acknowledged, however, that the quality of such learning was often inconsistent, as it was directly dependent on the characteristics of individuals. A noticeable institutional gap, from the perspective of the quality of offshore work cycles, was that few participants had been involved in any formalised post-trip reviews, debriefings or feedback. Evaluation of academic work was often limited to student feedback in the form of metrics from post-course surveys, supplemented by unstructured qualitative comments.

The perceived advantages and disadvantages of institutions' current approaches to offshore induction activities suggested that experienced participants, in general, preferred some aspects of previous approaches. By comparison, inexperienced participants emphasised the importance, and, indeed, the necessity, of taking the initiative to do one's own research about locations and course content, and to seek advice from more experienced colleagues, especially coordinators. The differences in responses between these participants indicated that institutional activities, which support academics in preparation and review or their offshore work, may have been reduced over time. These observations reinforced the possible inference that institutions may assume that present day academics already possess the necessary competencies to accomplish quality offshore work, but the reported concerns of participants in this study suggest that this assumption be revisited.

Acceptable levels of situational and human resources were found to be necessary to enable the accomplishment of quality offshore work. Institutional approaches to the

provision of physical and human resources, as described by participants, suggested these resources were perceived to have two components: a practical aspect that shaped the opportunities for effective classroom learning and teaching activities, and an abstract element that reflected the value that institutions placed on offshore programs, and, by extension, on the value of the work of academics teaching within them. The most frequently mentioned forms of support were: appropriate, fair and equitable choice of travel and accommodation, and teaching venues and facilities; sufficient formal institutional recognition and support of competing work and home life demands; and evaluation of the benefits and deficits of resources, such as information technology. The human resource issue of most significance to the quality of offshore work was the staffing mix of Australian fulltime and casual academics, and local staff. The three main areas of impact on quality were assessment perspectives, students' perceptions and categorisation of staff expertise, and the influence of coordinators on development of team collegiality. Participants appeared to interpret deficiencies in physical and human resources as meaning that their institutions did not place a high enough educational value on the work of academics in offshore programs.

Finally, in the cycle of offshore academic work, coordinators were seen as the primary vehicles through which institutional leadership was exhibited. They were regarded as the representatives of their institutions, who were in powerful positions to play influential roles in the offshore context. The personal attitudes and behaviours of co-ordinators, labelled as leadership style, was identified as the primary determinant of the nature and extent of their impact on the quality of participants' academic work, particularly in their degree of control over standardisation of content, processes, and assessment, and in the facilitation of team learning and collegiality. Although some inexperienced and casual participants indicated that directive styles provided more guidance and engendered a sense of security, in overall, participative, collaborative approaches were preferred to overly directive, micromanaging styles, as the former was perceived by participants as being more in keeping with academics exercising their professional autonomy in offshore classrooms. Figure 4.2 presents an amalgamation of the key themes and sub-themes for the contextual and extrinsic factors identified in this chapter.

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Contextual Environment Factors:

Components of Academic Work
Notions of Quality
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Extrinsic Factors
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Curriculum Attributes:
Standardisation versus Contextualisation
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Student Attributes:
Learning Dispositions and Skills

Theme S1 English language proficiency
Theme S2 Cultural and social characteristics
Theme S3 Learning and teaching styles preferences
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Institutional Attributes:
Supportive Resources and Leadership

Theme I1 Preparation and Review

Theme I2 Situational and human resources
• Sub-theme I2.1 Standards of travel and accommodation
• Sub-theme I2.2 Competing demands
• Sub-theme I2.3 Standard of facilities
• Sub-theme I2.4 Human resources

Theme I3 Institutional leadership
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Figure 4.2 Contextual Environment and Extrinsic Factors

Conclusion

This chapter reported the findings for the contextual environment and extrinsic factors that contributed to participants' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. Firstly, the general sensitising concepts of academic work, and of quality, were explored. To recap, academic work existed in a contested environment characterised by competing demands. For participants in this study, their three significant components of academic work were teaching, administration and research. There were tensions in balancing these activities as teaching and administrative tasks dominated their workload, but all wanted more time allocated to formal research. Secondly, there was a spectrum of perspectives of quality, but, irrespective of preferred viewpoints, a uniting thread was an emphasis on the quality of student learning outcomes and processes and, also, on the ongoing development of teaching practices. Finally, a clear gap, arguably a consequence of lack of accessible information, insufficient support and training, and ineffective utilisation of

two-way feedback, was revealed between institutional level quality policies and procedures, and the practices of academics.

The extrinsic factors in this study entailed curriculum, student, and institutional attributes that contributed to participants' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. Key findings were that: tensions existed between curriculum standardisation by institutions and contextualisation by academics, and quality enhancement was compromised when there were inadequate mechanisms for consolidating individual contributions to curricula.

Participants linked quality academic work to student learning dispositions and skills, specifically, English language proficiency, cultural and social characteristics, and learning and teaching styles preferences. While participants preferred classrooms with more interactive environments, which they believed would better promote student learning, and effectively utilise their own teaching styles, the extent and quality of student interaction was tempered by the complex mix of student characteristics and classroom dynamics. Opportunities for a deeper understanding of classroom cultures were limited by compact offshore program structures.

Institutional factors revolved around the offshore cycle of work. In the preparation phase for offshore trips, some induction activities and materials were utilised, but learning from experienced colleagues was preferred. Post course reviews were uncommon with most feedback derived from post-course surveys. Quality academic work was also influenced by the adequacy of physical and human resources for classroom and personal support. Competing onshore work and life demands added complexity to the types of support resources required by academics. The standard and consistency of this support, both in terms of teaching venues and of accommodation, were perceived as reflecting the value that institutions placed on offshore academic work. Human resources support issues centred on staff selection and development, especially in terms of the impacts of co-ordinators' leadership styles on the perceptions and performance of academics as individuals and as team members.

This chapter initiated the process of analysis by identifying and sorting many of the 'pieces' 'bits' or 'notes' in the data into patterns related to contextual environment and extrinsic factors. Taking the image of the symphony, the 'notes', however essential, are of restricted value and use, if not performed with skill by the players. Chapter Five builds on the above findings through the analysis and presentations of factors, intrinsic to the academic, which this study found were necessary for the performance of quality offshore academic work.

Chapter Five
Intrinsic Factors: Academic Attributes

Introduction

The preceding chapter identified and reported the findings related to the contextual environment factors in contemporary higher education, and to the factors, extrinsic to the academic, that specifically influenced participants' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. This chapter completes the presentation of findings of the thematic analysis, by examining factors that were intrinsic to the academic. These academic attributes were comprised of enabling personal characteristics and effective practices, which facilitated the achievement of this type of work.

Personal Characteristics and Effective Practices

As foreshadowed in Chapter Four, the effective presentation of results from qualitative data analysis requires a fine balance between the rich particulars of the data, and the synthesised patterns which reveal the findings. This is a complex challenge when data are extensive and multilayered. Participants provided data that were very detailed, and rich in breadth and depth, which was not unexpected, as they were describing their own attributes, and those observed in others. Participants drew upon self-knowledge, and their interpretations and constructions of meaning from others' behaviours.

Several stages of data sifting were necessary to effectively present the patterns discerned from interviews. This process began with the two broad groupings of factors: enabling characteristics, and effective practices factors, which were distilled into three themes. The first theme focused mainly on characteristics of academics, and the second and third themes were primarily concerned with practices, although, inevitably, there was overlap between them. Indeed, this study indicated that the enabling factors were foundational to,

but also functioned in unison with, effective practices. Designations are: Theme A1 Personal Characteristics, Theme A2 Effective Classroom Teaching Practices, and Theme A3 Working in Teams with Colleagues. Where warranted by the extent, richness and complexity of data, sub-themes and categories were constructed to tease out a clear and comprehensive picture that encompassed both details and overall patterns

Figure 5.1 situates the following discussion by displaying the broad elements, intrinsic to academics, which formed their conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. This chapter is structured around these elements. Frequent summaries and syntheses of interim findings are included, where it is judged that they best elucidate the findings for this multifaceted attribute.
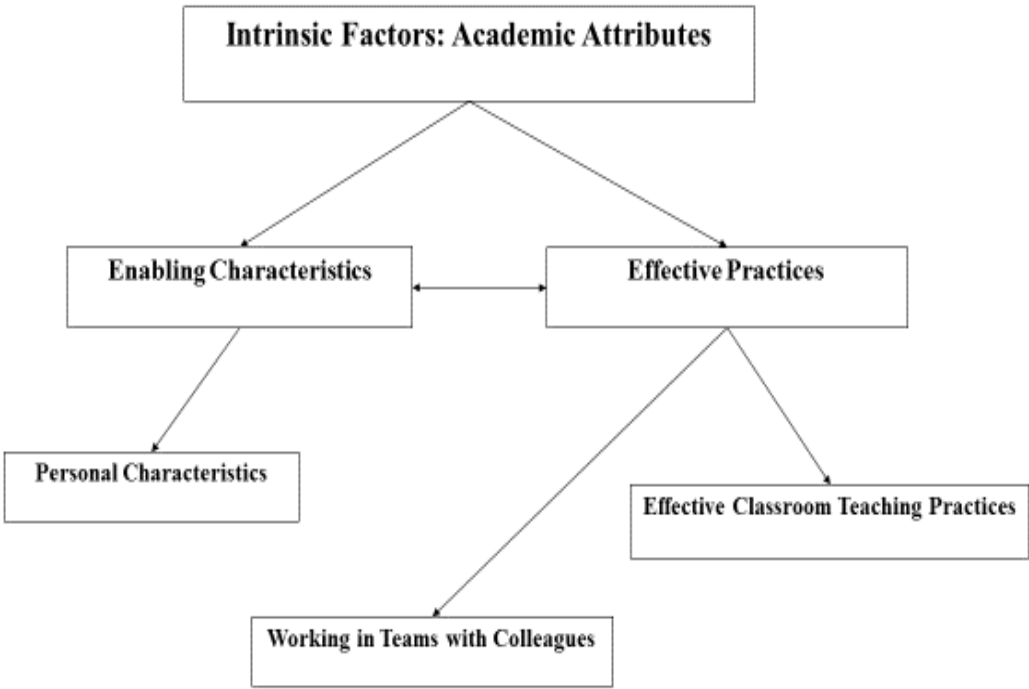
Figure 5.1 Intrinsic Factors

Theme A1 Personal Characteristics

All participants described a range of their own personal characteristics, and of those observed in others, that they perceived made a significant impact on offshore quality academic performance. It is also timely to reiterate here, that in the offshore context, academic work for participants, was almost entirely related to teaching activities. Three sub-themes were constructed from the data: A1.1 Cultural Curiosity, A1.2 Personal Resilience, and A1.3 Reflective Practice Orientation. There titles were created to have a specific meaning in this study, and, therefore, a brief definition is warranted by way of introduction to them. Cultural curiosity was used as an umbrella term to encompass the personal stimuli and actions that supported an individual in their interactions within an offshore culture. Personal resilience encapsulated characteristics and behaviours that allowed participants to cope, effectively, with the physical, emotional and social demands encountered in Hong Kong. Lastly, academics with a reflective practice orientation exhibited greater openness to learning, experimentation, and applying improvements in their knowledge base and practices across all their teaching locations.

Sub-theme A1.1 Cultural Curiosity

All participants described dealing with cultural differences as an inevitable aspect of offshore work, and, indeed, it was a prerequisite for internationalised higher education. Cultural curiosity was the culmination of characteristics that enabled them to actively engage with other cultures, including students, local staff, offshore institutions, and the wider social environment. Interview responses pertaining to cultural curiosity fell into three clusters: predispositions, influences and developmental actions.

For over two thirds of the participants, cultural curiosity was the starting point for moving from viewpoints that were embedded in only one, typically Western, home culture, towards the incorporation of international components into their teaching activities. This position was clearly articulated by E2:

Raising cultural awareness and sensitivity in staff is important, but it needs to go deeper than just a superficial political correctness that smacks of Western ways being unquestionably more superior to anything else, to a real openness to the learning benefits from deeper cultural exchanges that take into account international aspects of curricula, assessment, student diversity, staff diversity, mobility, and different campus locations.

In terms of predispositions, three key attitudes were apparent in the data. In essence, they were: a belief that no one type of knowledge or learning approach was sufficient in itself (E6); an authentic appreciation of cultural diversity as mutually beneficial (E3); and a true interest and desire for liking others from different cultures, gained through respectful interactions (C4). The tenor of these comments implied that cultural diversity was valued at more than a rhetorical or surface level.

A variety of influences sparked cultural curiosity. More experienced participants (C1, C3, E1, E3, E4, E6) gained in-depth, longitudinal insights into Asian cultures from regular teaching trips and conference attendances. C3 and E4 developed cultural interests and awareness through research, which they felt increased their confidence in displaying theoretical and contextual understanding in front of students and other academics. E2 and E5 plunged themselves into everyday activities, such as public transport, restaurants, markets and entertainment venues. Four less experienced participants paid tribute to the generosity of colleagues in sharing cultural information (C2, C4, L1, L2). Institutional activities, such as in-house workshops or seminars targeted at international and cultural aspects of education, were of general interest to over half of the participants.

High levels of cultural curiosity were honed through undertaking two main types of developmental actions intended to refine specific Hong Kong teaching practices and overall cultural knowledge. They were study programs, and consciously building relationships with students. C4, E2 and E5, for example, had committed to longer-term action plans involving cultural or language studies, which were prompted, partially, by dissatisfaction with existing institutional development offerings. They described four key quality advantages of these activities: greater ability to facilitate classroom interactions; increased appreciation, admiration and cooperation from students; a more finely-tuned ear for making sense of local metaphors and indirect, non-verbal messages; and added

cultural understanding in classrooms, offshore institutions, and the external environment. For some, commitment to these developmental actions was also driven by ambitions for future employment or research in Asian contexts.

The second type of action relied on the degree to which participants chose to interact with students beyond the classroom, in class breaks and after-hours social activities. There was dissent as to appropriate parameters for conscious relationship building with students. Four participants believed that such interaction with students facilitated mutual cultural learning and development. For example, two non-Western participants, N1 and N2, suggested that a deeper, two-way cultural immersion might stimulate students to recognise their own cultural prejudices, such as a perception that visiting non-Western academics were 'Asian foreigners', who were, by default, lesser quality academics.

Three participants maintained a polite distance, rather than becoming too involved in local culture with students (C2, E6, L1). A particular concern was the possible perception of familiarity as favouritism. Furthermore, they believed that students expected a degree of aloofness from Western experts. Finally, it was noticeable that no participant mentioned being given specific guidance by their institutions to aid in determining the appropriate extent and type of out-of-class interactions, despite the potential for misunderstandings and misinterpretations of such activities.

Sub-theme A1.2 Personal Resilience

A second sub-theme evident in anecdotes was that academics experienced stress from the extra demands encountered in Hong Kong programs. Academics who possessed personal resilience, that is, a combination of physical, emotional, and social resilience, coped more easily with offshore conditions, which, in turn, enabled higher quality performance. These three types of resilience entailed: an awareness of, and proactive responses to, physical conditions; a range of attitudes and orientations emotionally sensitive to classroom and general cultural contexts; and a set of attitudes, skills and behaviours which smoothed social interactions. Although interdependent and interlinked, these characteristics are

initially examined separately to obtain a clearer picture of the role each plays in overall personal resilience.

Category A1.2.1 Physical Resilience

Participants unanimously agreed that they encountered more physical demands when working offshore than onshore. They used several graphic descriptors, such as 'needing stamina', 'feeling enervated', 'being drained', 'wrung out like a dishcloth', and 'barely able to stand or speak at the end of a long day' (C2, E1, L2, E5, L4). Causes of physical stress were situated within situational, structural or design factors.

The most impactful situational factors were travel, hotel accommodation, time differences, diet changes, local transport, and language barriers. Most participants had experienced, on occasion, tiredness, anxiety, stomach upsets, sore throats, coughs and colds. The major structural factors were: older, slower or incompatible technology, inefficient heating and cooling systems, few special-purpose teaching spaces, limited educational resources, and inadequate ancillary support. The design factors of greatest concern were: intensive delivery modes with very long hours and large class sizes; the combination of teaching and administrative roles while dealing with students' anxieties and concerns; the additional time and resources required to contextualise curriculum content; and responding to consequences of low or inconsistent levels of students' language proficiency and academic preparedness. The cumulative stresses meant that adequate physical resilience was required to remain alert and active in the classroom.

Suggestions to improve physical resilience and ways of coping were offered: being well-prepared, seeking information about travel and facilities prior in advance, minimising changes in sleeping and eating habits, socialising in a moderate way, and engaging in exercise. However, participants provided many more descriptions of stressful conditions than of coping strategies, which was, perhaps, a reflection of their perceptions of having little influence to altering institutional factors that exacerbated stress. Two illustrative examples were:

It's obvious that facilities and structures aren't chosen for the benefit of students or academics, or conditions would be better. I'd say it's obvious that institutions make the decisions in their own financial interests, not for long term educational ones, and we are expected to just make the best of it (C1).

There's not much understanding of irritating practical problems by program designers and administrators. They're too far removed from the classroom, and just don't value our efforts, as long as the financial spreadsheet works for them. We're just dismissed as whingers and complainers (E4).

It would seem, then, that all participants had typically encountered more physical factors that contributed to stress in offshore work, than they had in onshore conditions. It was apparent that achieving quality offshore academic work was hampered by juggling multiple tasks and roles, and having little, if any, involvement in, or control over, their work conditions.

Category A1.2.2 Emotional Resilience

At least two-thirds of the participants felt that achieving offshore quality academic work also depended upon managing more complex emotions within themselves, and having more sensitivity to the emotions of others, than in onshore locations. The generic term, emotional resilience, was adopted to encompass the various descriptors used by participants, which included emotional strength, emotional intelligence, emotional awareness, and emotional coping.

There was a similar resonance in comments which pointed towards perceptions that high emotional resilience enabled academics to react more effectively to offshore demands. The most common features of emotionally resilient academics were: an optimistic outlook that saw learning opportunities in new and different circumstances (E1, E2, E3); an outgoing and collaborative orientation towards others (C3, E5, L4, N1); a proactive approach to taking control of circumstances, such as adapting teaching approaches to resources (C1, E4, E6); and an attitude of genuine liking, valuing and respecting of other people and cultures (C4, E5, L1).

A frequently-mentioned factor was the importance of having an attitude of positive self-control in response to difficult circumstances.

> Over a long time and several trips, I've found the best examples of those who coped well, kept a sense of humour, and looked for enjoyment in their work. They've got lots of energy and stamina, and put a positive spin on handling stressful situations. They keep their emotions under control. Even when they're feeling frustrated with situations they actively try to find ways around problems, and they get on easily with others. I worry a bit, though, that this positiveness is pandering to polite expectations, and it's a taboo to be openly negative or down. It might look like you're not suited for offshore work (E6).

Others described this emotional resilience characteristic as having a belief in themselves that they could exert a positive influence on their work. This was exemplified by E2:

> Even if I can't actually change the surroundings, when I consciously control my own attitude and look for the best outcomes, I feel much more enthusiastic, and that makes my students more confident. And it helps the teaching team get along.

Participants' comments suggested a positive, synergistic relationship between physical and emotional resilience. A conscious awareness of emotions enabled them to better understand and alleviate the impacts of physical stressors, whilst physical resilience helped to manage some of the mental and emotional stresses arising from demanding conditions. However, an underlying concern was that an open display of negative emotions could be construed as an inability to cope with work demands, with the possibility of lost work opportunities.

Category A1.2.3 Social Resilience

The third form of resilience was identified from numerous references to terms such as social awareness, social sensitivity, sociability, social engagement, social inclusiveness, and social skills. The term, social resilience, was adapted in this study to encompass the various social characteristics which contributed to the fostering of relationships with

colleagues and students, as well as general involvement with the wider society. Academics with well-developed social resilience were adept at role-modelling appropriate social behaviours, and in initiating and interacting in group activities with colleagues, as well as managing classroom dynamics to facilitate high quality student learning. There were benefits to both individuals and institutions. For example, E2 said that "it's really helpful to have good social awareness and the ability to interact appropriately to manage the pressure of travelling and working in other cultural settings", and E3 pointed out that "it doesn't do the reputation of our Australian institutions any good, or help academics build a rapport with offshore students and colleagues, if they're not socially appropriate. It makes an embarrassing and negative impression all around".

Three key characteristics were highlighted by participants as essential underpinnings of effective social resilience: an extraverted personality orientation, a collaborative approach to interactions, and preparedness to develop social awareness and skills. Several participants concurred that an outward or extraverted orientation was a key factor, as these personalities were more likely to easily display typical characteristics of social resilience than introverts. Extraverts described themselves, and others expressed perceptions of them, as outgoing, energetic, confident, engaged and enthusiastic. Several advantages were associated with an extraverted predisposition, for example, E1 found that:

> I'm definitely an extraverted personality. Behaving as an energetic academic makes me feel good about myself, and it's challenging, fulfilling and motivating for me. I'm sure it rubs off on students, they're keener to get involved, and more willing to listen. Altogether, it's a better environment for teaching and learning. It keeps me and the students awake! They've told me they tell their friends about enjoying our classes.

Some participants believed that it took more personal effort, and caused more physical and emotional stress, for those with introverted personality orientations to be socially resilient. E6, who identified with an introverted personality orientation, stated that:

> Introverts can perform, of course, but they get worn down more quickly by the physical and mental strains of long sessions where you're at centre stage leading classroom interactions, and then expected to socialise with team members afterwards. It can be quite draining for less outgoing lecturers who need time to recharge.

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A second indicator of social resilience involved leading and seeking out opportunities for collaboration with colleagues, and orchestrating interactive learning experiences for students. Typical social engagement activities included sharing meals during and after teaching commitments, as well as taking part in local tourist attractions. Collaborative work interactions were most prominently displayed in teamwork activities such as team teaching, and sharing knowledge and material resources, especially when contextualising content. As E3 emphasised:

> Making the social effort to share knowledge and experiences with colleagues, during and outside work, is an important ingredient of a successful offshore trip. You do need to rely on each other for support, and to learn from colleagues, much more than at home, so the effort pays dividends.

Socially adept academics emphasised collaborative classroom learning. They were skilled designers and implementers of group learning experiences, who carefully planned classroom dynamics with a consideration for the socio-cultural expectations and comfort levels of students, such as allocating seating arrangements and team membership. In addition to developing content knowledge, the focus of these activities was building relationships and rapport conducive to supportive learning environments.

The third characteristic was a willingness to learn about social awareness and skills, especially by reflection on personal practice and that of expert others. Several learning approaches and experiences were described. At least eight participants had learnt their most valuable social interaction techniques from observing socially adept fellow academics. Four participants attributed the refinement of their skills to exposure to effective role modelling and constructive feedback during formal teaching qualifications or informal training courses. Three participants reported having their skills scrutinised on an on-going basis in their external business consulting work. Many participants sought out, and reflected upon constructive advice and feedback from offshore colleagues and students, in order to avoid socially inappropriate communication and behaviours.

The above analysis of social resilience revealed a further layer of nuance in the understanding of participants' perceptions of personal resilience. It appeared that

outgoing, collaborative approaches, underpinned by a willingness to seek opportunities that sharpened social awareness and skills, supported academics in dealing with the physical and emotional challenges of offshore work. This study suggests, therefore, that superior quality academic work was more likely to be exhibited by academics who possessed a well-balanced combination of physical, emotional and social resilience.

Sub-theme A1.3 Reflective Practice Orientation

As indicated above, offshore work was generally perceived by participants as providing them with thought-provoking opportunities to learn more deeply about their own knowledge, characteristics and practices as academics, and about those of others. A recurrent topic was the importance of ongoing learning and development through reflection on experiences, therefore, a reflective practice orientation is the third sub-theme of personal characteristics in this study.

The term, reflective practice orientation, is used here in relation to the personal reflective predispositions of academics to learning and development, that is, the openness of their attitudes towards continuous improvement of quality in their work. (Orientation to reflective practice is distinguished from reflective practice behaviours, which are embedded in Effective Practices Themes A2 and A3). Evidence of a reflective practice orientation was most common in communication and team work aspects of offshore work.

Many detailed examples of learning through reflection focused specifically on subtleties of communication. E3, E5 and L2, for instance, prompted largely by Hong Kong students' reluctance to ask publically for clarification, had learnt more about identifying concerns and through focusing on facial expressions, body language, and voice inflections, and seeking feedback to check mutual understanding. The particular importance of being consciously aware of language usage, especially figurative language, is reinforced by the following anecdotes:

> Idioms don't translate easily, so it takes quite an effort to be constantly aware
> of adjusting your own language, and students can be too polite or embarrassed

to say they don't understand. It's certainly made me more aware about colloquialisms, and even generational differences in language (E1).

I just couldn't understand what he was getting at; and finally out of sheer frustration and in upfront Aussie style, I said, 'can you just say what you mean, or can anyone else help explain, please?' An older student quietly said: 'we believe that the bigger the bush, the more beating around it needs'. I've pondered that one many times, and besides the different take on the metaphor, it always reminds me that directness is only one way to communicate. There may be many layers to work through to get the message, and the more important and complex the matter, the more convoluted, it's likely to be (E3).

Such stories demonstrated that when participants thoughtfully reflected on their communication experiences in Hong Kong, their understanding of differences in communication styles, and the importance of seeking out underlying assumptions and meanings hidden in language, were enlightened. This sensitivity to the nuances of communication was a beneficial transferable learning to onshore classrooms, especially for interactions with international students, and it better equipped participants to communicate in general in the Hong Kong environment. (The further significance of communication to quality academic work is considered from a practice perspective in Theme A2).

There were also several insightful comments which indicated that participants had reflected about engagement in offshore team activities. The examples below suggested that the unfamiliar cultural setting, lower levels of institutional support, and the concentrated opportunities to share learning during team teaching, had encouraged participants to reflect on offshore team work. Most cited the positive learning aspects of team membership, but, for some, the offshore experience triggered questions about the underlying assumptions and agendas that led to its routine acceptance as an essential vehicle for learning.

What I learnt over there helped me be more creative and culturally confident. I asked my team for feedback on how well my usual techniques worked in Hong Kong, and I picked up fresh ideas from watching them. It improved all my teaching (C2).

When you're out of your cultural comfort zone, you do feel more empowered about your own teaching when you've got colleagues to share new ideas with,

> or even to help retrieve situations when there's not much other institutional backup available to sort problems (E5).

> Offshore work is one of the few chances to teach together and see others in action in the classroom environment. Teaching can so often be a solo activity, but the proximity in offshore teams is a great chance to reassess your ways of doing things, and to learn different techniques (L2).

> Team activities for students and academics seem to be accepted as just routine, but I started to rethink whether it's just a convenience to take some pressure off the teaching staff and the students, or if it's really educationally relevant, especially in different cultural contexts. Becoming more thoughtful about the actual effectiveness of teamwork for learning was a big positive 'take-out' for me from my offshore work (C1).

It is timely to note here that Theme A3, Working in Teams with Colleagues, expands on the specific contributions to quality offshore academic work, from the perspective of effective teamwork skills and practices.

Thus, a reflection practice orientation enabled participants to develop a more complex and subtle understanding of communication differences by heightening their consciousness of the impact of their communication, especially in their choice of language, non-verbals, and images. Secondly, involvement in offshore teamwork provided learning opportunities for both reflection in action and reflection on action about teaching. In these ways, this enabling orientation sharpened participants' awareness of the learning benefits and challenges associated with their offshore work.

Synthesis of Findings on Enabling Characteristics

Three clusters of academic characteristics, which enabled high quality academic work in the Hong Kong context, were identified in this study. They were: cultural curiosity, personal resilience, and reflective practice orientation. In combination with effective practices, they made up the academic attributes component of this study.

Participants regarded some degree of cultural curiosity as a personal characteristic necessary for academics to accomplish quality offshore academic work. For most of them,

it entailed more than a superficial level of awareness and sensitivity about obvious differences such as food, dress and languages, rather, it was a combination of three elements. Firstly, predispositions were determined mainly by personal attitudes towards other cultures. Secondly, influences included learning from colleagues and students, from formal cultural development activities conducted by their institutions, and from the degree of their proactivity to engage in general cultural experiences. Thirdly, specific developmental actions involved undertaking formal cultural activities, and building relationships with students. The latter action was a contentious issue. While cultural curiosity was acknowledged as an important aspect of the offshore work, there was great variation in opinion as to the appropriate nature and extent of interactions with students beyond the classroom.

The second cluster was personal resilience, which was composed of physical, emotional and social components. When in synergistic combination, these types of resilience equipped individuals with enabling characteristics for greater personal leverage in coping with unfamiliar or difficult offshore work conditions, which, in turn, meant they were more likely to accomplish high quality academic work.

Physical dimensions included: the pressure of travel and hotel accommodation, health issues, limitations to physical, educational and administrative resources, characteristics of program design, and cultural and language differences. Beyond a recognition of the extra physical demands associated with offshore work, additional and, arguably, more complex issues emerged. These included: a lack of opportunity for involvement and control over offshore work; imposed institutional expectations to undertake multiple roles; and a vivid perception that institutions put financial considerations ahead of staff and students concerns, as evidenced by the limitations of offshore work conditions. Participants' main perceptions of academics exhibiting high emotional resilience were that they were likely to be tolerant, patient and, indeed, more positive and inventive in coping with the demands of work conditions, often by consciously reframing their perceptions of control and engagement with students, colleagues and the general society. Social resilience, which encapsulated tendencies towards extraverted, collaborative, and

self-developmental approaches, was a conduit that enabled academics to effectively transfer their knowledge and skills into culturally-appropriate, high quality practices.

Three unifying threads emerged from the discussion of the three components of resilience. Firstly, there was a positive, synergistic impact on stress responses for academics, who appeared to possess a combination of physical, emotional, and social resilience. Secondly, negative stress responses were reinforced when participants believed that institutions were either unaware of, or undervalued, the demands of offshore academic work. Finally, although aspects of personal resilience, as an enabler of quality offshore academic work, was reported by participants to be a common source of informal discussions between academics about academic performance, typically, it was an undiscussable at the institutional level. It could be speculated that the sensitivities involved in addressing personal characteristics, in addition to contentious organisational and professional implications, in particular, the actual or perceived use of such factors in staff selection, contributed to this phenomenon.

The third personal characteristic, a reflective practice orientation, was evident in the preference of participants who actively engaged in reflection about their experiences in Hong Kong. Participants, who saw themselves as on-going learners, were more likely to display a predisposition towards reflecting on ways to improve their own knowledge and practice, with the intention of further enhancement of their work in all locations. In particular, they singled out the importance of the potential learning and developmental opportunities that could be attained from an awareness of the nuances of communication, and supportive and creative team activities. For some, their reflective dispositions led to their critiquing of typically unchallenged assumptions, for example, the acceptance of the inherent value of team work to student and staff learning, without due consideration of its applicability in different cultural contexts or for specific educational purposes.

This study found that these three groups of personal characteristics were the underpinning enablers that formed the basis for the effective practices necessary for quality offshore academic work. These practices are explored in the next section.

Theme A2 Effective Classroom Teaching Practices

The second Academic Attributes theme which emerged from participants' responses focused on the nature of teaching practices in Hong Kong classrooms. For most participants, the quality of this aspect of their academic work was dependent on the effectiveness of shaping their teaching approaches to better match the characteristics of offshore students and classroom conditions. There was agreement amongst participants that high quality classroom teaching practices were required to transfer content knowledge in ways that made sense to students in their educational, cultural and workplace contexts. Although their approaches varied widely, there were three interrelated groups of skills and behaviours, each of which, if not unique to Hong Kong classrooms were, nonetheless, especially pertinent to quality teaching practices in that context. These groups are explored in the sub-themes: A2.1 Demonstrating Credibility and Expertise, A2.2 Communicating Effectively, and A2.3 Facilitating Classroom Interactions.

Sub-theme A2.1 Demonstrating Credibility and Expertise

A perception shared by at least two thirds of participants was that, stemming from their likely teacher-centred, educational backgrounds, Hong Kong students expected, and respected, that their academics would demonstrate high levels of expertise. It was generally agreed that a reasonable and professional way to address these expectations was by demonstrating academic credibility and expertise. As evidenced in participants' comments, this process contributed to effective teaching practices. For example:

> Managing students' perceptions of our academic credentials and status makes the classroom easier, as they put more value on us, and what we have to offer. So you have to be much more overt in making that obvious to them offshore, than we ever would onshore (E1).

> Getting respect from students by establishing our qualifications, content expertise, teaching style, and business experience, as quickly as possible, definitely helps keep their attention throughout the whole course (L1).

Further, the importance of team members presenting consistent information across classes was also linked to reinforcing the perception that all staff possessed relevant and comparable levels of knowledge and experience. Despite the commonly-held conviction in this study that displaying these characteristics contributed positively to offshore teaching practices, and that it was essential to set the scene during first encounters in classes, opinions varied as to the extent and means of meeting such student expectations.

Some participants emphasised their academic and institutional expertise, while others focused more on external business work experience, and consulting activities. For example, E6, L3 and N1 introduced themselves to students through their qualifications, research, and teaching achievements and experience. C3 and E3 suggested students felt more confident when academics showed they were thoroughly familiar with the course aims, objectives and, especially, assessment tasks. For E1 and E4, explaining the reasoning behind the inclusion and sequence of materials and activities, assisted in grounding the relevance of the content in an understandable framework. These approaches were judged by participants as ways to reassure and instil confidence in students, to show interest in student concerns, and to build a rapport between academics and students that was conducive to a receptive learning and teaching environment.

Others (C2, E2 and L2), incorporated relevant stories from their own work experience and consulting activities, with the intention of appearing knowledgeable about well-known companies and business leaders, especially those from Hong Kong, and other Asian regions. E5 incorporated up-to-date examples, especially from newspapers, to stimulate student interest, show respect for local organisations, and strengthen the impression of business credibility. E2, E3 and L4, incorporated regular references to current, broader, societal issues to show their familiarity with, and embed curriculum content from students' contextual environment. E2 and N1 drew upon their past experiences of living in Asian countries as sources of anecdotes which underlined their cultural awareness and interest in relevant regional issues.

Three participants took a specific adult learning perspective, which focused on sharing expertise, where they explicitly encouraged students to think of themselves as 'experts'. C4 expressed this approach as "building on the value Hong Kong students place on me as an expert, to support them in seeing themselves as becoming experts as well". E6 advocated a similar approach which entailed "asking students planned and specific questions, so they could display their local knowledge, with me giving lots of assistance and feedback, to make links between theories, and their own work and life experiences". E1 suggested encouraging students to realise that their existing knowledge was valuable expertise that could be further enhanced through sharing and critiquing with academics and peers. An important additional benefit was that academics had more opportunities to check for students' understanding through the type of examples, questions and the two-way feedback, which arose in such interactions. However, these participants also identified that the 'student as expert' approach to enhancing their own academic credibility was most effective when students had substantial work experience and higher proficiency in English skills, and there was sufficient time available for detailed role modelling, guidance and reassurance from academics. These conditions were not often available in Hong Kong programs.

Sub-theme A2.2 Communicating Effectively

The frequent references to miscommunications and misinterpretations between academics and students, apparent in participants' interviews, suggested effective communication was fundamental to ensuring quality teaching practices. There were general assumptions that students' English language capabilities, and their educational and cultural heritages would, inevitably, contribute to communication problems, and that good teaching required academics to be competent in culturally-sensitive written, verbal and non-verbal skills. However, participants identified two specific communication nuances that were necessary for clear and meaningful two-way exchanges of information with students, and, indeed, with other offshore stakeholders. Accordingly, this sub-theme was cascaded into two categories. These are: A2.2.1 Effective Communication Skills, and A2.2.2 Using Stories and Metaphors.

Category A2.2.1 Effective Communication Skills

In addition to basic communication skills, the specific skills for communicating effectively in Hong Kong classrooms included: nuanced verbal skills, techniques to elicit feedback and explore cultural norms, and precise written communication.

Ten participants monitored their own and students' voice tone, pitch and speed, to aid in interpreting whether communications were understood as intended. As L4 said: "sometimes words get lost in translation, but the tone of voice will convey a message. I speed up my speaking to spark enthusiasm, and use a deeper tone to emphasise key points". Most participants chose simple words and language to explain complicated concepts or jargon, although some found this conscious effort to be a frustrating and tiresome process (C1, E4, L1). Primarily in reaction to student complaints that academics with pronounced, non-Australian, 'foreign' accents, which were difficult to understand, and arguably, to protect their credibility, non-Western participants reported being acutely aware of slowing their speech, clear articulation and accurate pronunciation. An unanticipated consequence of these concentrated efforts to ensure effective communication, for some participants, was that they needed a few days after their teaching trips to 'regain' their usual vocabulary, and to stop consciously searching for simple words, in their onshore classes.

Feedback from offshore students was valued by participants as an informative gauge of effective communication. Their responses revealed that on-going, informal types of feedback were more highly regarded than formal grades and surveys, as indicators of quality teaching and learning. However, obtaining this feedback in practice was challenging for most participants. For example, in contrast to the prolific use of open-ended questions in onshore class plenaries, and the effective learning outcomes they generated, discussions in offshore programs were more likely to be initiated by a logically structured series of closed questions, which were targeted at small groups, instead of at individual students. Indicative examples of such techniques were:

The best academics at getting feedback in the classroom are those who get students to talk by role modelling, and quite overtly and specifically explaining how to ask questions. They stop to point out good examples or better ways of giving and receiving feedback in a constructive, supportive way. But, the short duration of offshore programs do limit opportunities for this type of practice when there's a lot of content to cover (E1).

I've found more indirect approaches easier, like encouraging anonymous feedback in suggestion boxes or putting post-it notes up on a discussion wall. I've had success with generating collective feedback in small groups, especially by encouraging the students to discuss in their own preferred language first. That was a safer option for the students, and was more productive (C3).

Role playing was another indirect, low confrontation technique used to explore controversial diversity issues, such as notions of culture, religion, gender, age and seniority. Role plays designed to mimic problematic issues in classroom settings were also effective, although, as C2 and E3 experienced, Hong Kong students engaged more willingly if the scenarios were couched in hypothetical rather than realistic situations, and role guidelines were unambiguous. This approach provided a safe place in which to practice acceptable behaviours. E5 regularly turned awkward situations into discussions about managing cultural differences cultural norms for non-verbal behaviours, such as interpersonal proximity and eye contact. E1's scenario was especially memorable:

I realised these issues were vital to good cultural communication many years ago, when a really enthusiastic young lecturer tried to get a class of Asian students to join in a 'group hug'. This resulted in bewildered students and an embarrassed academic ... but, I've never done it again!

While participants' examples largely focused on verbal communication and body language, four participants raised the importance of written communication to quality teaching. E3 described this concern as, "careful written wording on our part is just so vital in assignments and exams, as even an everyday expression like 'illustrate your answer with an example' can end up with a 'drawing', which makes perfect literal sense from a student's points of view". Written feedback, including electronic forms, caused inadvertent confusion or offense when seemingly neutral acts such as marking in red,

capital letters, or using directive language, were taken by students as criticism, rather than constructive feedback.

Finally, while the majority of participants perceived difficult cultural elements of communication as blockages which detracted from effective learning, and had the potential to undermine their credibility in the eyes of students, for others, they were learning opportunities. It is likely, however, that many academics, especially those with less offshore experience, would need expert guidance and support to develop the necessary range of skills to engage with students in unearthing and examining cultural differences in communication.

Category A2.2.2 Using Stories and Metaphors

The second effective communication category involved stories and metaphors to more clearly explain complex concepts, and to help students transfer and situate new learning in their own lives and workplaces. As E2 expressed, "being an effective communicator is about having the ability to assist students to decipher concepts in a way that makes sense in their world, and they can apply in practice". In Hong Kong, participants frequently used verbal examples from their own knowledge and experience to clarify concepts, and to translate the idiosyncratic wordings and colloquialisms in prescribed textbooks and other resource materials, most of which were of Western origin. E4 and E2's examples of two stages of translation underlined the complexity of figurative language:

> The students asked the meaning of 'get your team together for a 'pow-wow', in the textbook. We wouldn't say it in like that in Australia either, so I had to come up with a description of a 'pow-wow', and then think of an image of collaborative teams sitting around that made more sense to me and them. I baulked at getting into 'passing the peace pipe'! (E4).

> Stories are often based on metaphors which can have very localised expressions, so you can end up 'using a metaphor to explain a metaphor' which can become even more convoluted and confusing (E2).

Many insights were shared about how to best use this type of communication. Representative examples were:

> I like to explain idioms and check understanding, so I ask students to give me back a similar example in their own words, just to make sure (C1).

> My advice is to be very careful about the metaphors and stories you choose, especially in case studies and exams. I ask a local staff member to see if it's likely to be culturally, politically and racially acceptable (E5).

Two superficially light-hearted, yet insightful and memorable, examples illustrated the confusion possible when using metaphors. When explaining the limitations of conducting meetings in too small an office, C4 told students that "'you need at least enough room to swing a cat', which caused misunderstanding, curiosity, and some amusement for the class". L4 became aware of the repetitive use of a figure of speech only after receiving feedback from a local staff member, who'd been confided in by a student, that "apparently my class became quite concerned about my 'fear of dying in Hong Kong traffic'. It seems I had a habit of saying something like, 'let's just make sure you're all clear on the assessment requirements, in case I get hit by a bus'. We all laughed about that".

C3, E1, and E4 took a different slant on metaphors and stories in that they used themselves as visual images to model appropriate behaviours, and to convey status. They dressed professionally to emphasise an expert image. N2 described the importance of conveying a strong message about expected professional standards, by physically presenting oneself as punctual in attendance and professional in attire and behaviour. It instilled confidence, and showed self-respect and respect for the students.

E5's vignette emphasised the negative impacts when academics lacked awareness of, or did not pay sufficient attention to, how others would interpret their personal appearance:

> Carefully choosing how you appear works as both a conscious and unconscious message for students about what we value and the effort we put in, but some academics don't get the importance. I've actually seen a lecturer turn up to an offshore class wearing Lycra bike shorts, while the students were all in business clothes. No colleagues or students said anything to their face, but there was a lot of gossip. They weren't asked to teach in Hong Kong again.

The above anecdotes demonstrated that, while participants relied on the use of stories and metaphors, including their own visual appearance, as a powerful communication technique, its effectiveness depended on awareness of cultural specificity and appropriate adaptation to context.

Sub-theme A2.3 Facilitating Classroom Interactions

Participants generally expressed firm opinions as to the best or right ways and styles that academics should teach and students should learn. The majority favoured a more learner-centred, then a teacher-directed approach, and were open to some degree of mutual adaptation in style by themselves and their students. Regardless of their preferences, there was general acceptance that a relaxed, informal, supportive classroom atmosphere, with effective interactions, was fundamental to quality teaching and learning. The two main approaches to encourage verbal engagement were using humour and incorporating structured small group activities into classroom and assessment tasks.

Several participants had received positive responses from students by using humour, as it was a safe and non-threatening way to foster an atmosphere of fun and informality. E3 liked to begin by making jokes about local situations, for example, getting lost or eating really hot food. L3 planned funny role plays to demonstrate culturally uncomfortable situations, such as, giving negative feedback to subordinates, in a face-saving way. E6 and N2 favoured visual images with simple captions, such as YouTube, clips of cartoons and movies, and humorous training films to stimulate interest and discussion, and to reduce language barriers. C2 and E5 encouraged students to make their own audio-visual presentations, as they found students were often adept with technology, and this approach was less confronting than face-to-face presentations in front of the class. It also had the benefits of being easily shared amongst current students, and used as examples to guide future students. Actively enabling an interactive classroom environment in these ways did, however, impact on individual participants in different ways. The self-described extraverts enthused that they were energised by such active engagement with students,

but, by contrast, it proved physically and mentally tiring for others. L4 described this as "each new session can be like cranking up the engine every time, as I have to work at shifting the natural inertia in the large group so as to get more interaction and discussion".

The second approach to encouraging interaction involved the incorporation of small group activities into classroom and assessment tasks. This approach appeared compatible with the teaching style preferences of most participants, as eleven of them explicitly advocated group activity as the optimal form of learning in Hong Kong. There were several positive comments about small group work:

> Small group work matches neatly with students' learning preferences, and their social and cultural norms (E5).

> It's comparable to the emphasis we place on teamwork at home, so there's consistency in that aspect (E4).

> Two way advantages are that group work helps to overcome some language obstacles, as students chat more easily in their first language, and we all get some time-out from concentrating so hard on understanding each other (C1).

Although small group work was accepted as an effective means to augment the quality of teaching and learning for participants and their students, there were, nevertheless, downsides to this approach. For example, as noted in Theme S4, sharing experiences in groups could help students feel more confident, but individuals could also hide in groups, when the more senior ones, who were already more capable, did most of the talking, and those who most needed the practice could avoid speaking (C4). Participants described their conscious efforts to ameliorate the effects of this hierarchy of interaction amongst students. They frequently emphasised the importance of verbal communication skills in the business world, and that all students should practise these skills in the safe environment of the classroom. N1 allocated team membership, rotated roles, and monitored involvement, in order to ensure a range of opportunities for practice. E1 concisely captured the tensions apparent in interview responses:

> I call it the 'paradox of small group work', because, while it's definitely the way to help students be more culturally and socially at ease in class room

interactions, it can also reinforce existing cultural norms between students, which can mean unequal learning opportunities.

A second application for small group activities was in assessment tasks. Learning justifications included: sharing knowledge and information, reinforcing interactive behaviours, confidence-building in supportive conditions, and practising teamwork skills. Despite these intended advantages, reservations were also expressed about the learning value of group assessment tasks. The limited contact time in most offshore programs was identified as a major factor which worked against successful group outcomes, as there were insufficient opportunities to assess and develop team skills, select well-balanced team composition, or provide adequate on-going support for managing team dynamics (C2, E2, E5, L4, N2). In particular, individual student standards could be masked by group assessments, and a cohort's results could be artificially high, depending on the proportion allocated to group assessment (C4, E1, E5, L1). Thus, small group activities, while enhancing classroom interactions, had both learning benefits and deficits.

Finally, deeper concerns about the underlying motivations for utilising group assessment tasks were mentioned by over half the participants. While there was a 'surface legitimisation' of learning advantages, group assessments were sometimes chosen as a means of reducing heavy loads for both staff and students. Five participants disclosed that, although it was not discussed openly, they believed this form of assessment was a type of collusion to manipulate benefits for academics, students and institutions. Their collective comments suggested the following advantages. For students, it assisted with meeting tight timelines, and coping with competing outside work and societal demands. Academics had lower marking loads, which freed up time for administration or research, and institutions saved assessment marking costs. Many participants involved in programs with increasingly large class sizes, but with no accompanying increase in teaching resources, felt that less assessment was a legitimate and, indeed, inevitable reaction. They did, however, emphasise that no one wanted to draw too much attention to this practice. These activities appeared to be examples of organisational undiscussables.

Based on participants' data, it is reasonable to assert that small group work classroom activities and assessment tasks have the potential to be genuinely valuable for student

learning, and can be justified as contributing to effective teaching approaches. They can, however, also compensate for unchallenged, systemic factors in institutions that are likely to have longer term negative quality consequences.

Theme A3: Working in Teams with Colleagues

The third Academic Attributes theme, which emerged from the data analysis, involved team teaching activities. All participants had taken part in shared classes, conducting parallel sessions, or rotating topics across classes with Australian colleagues or local staff. There was no disagreement that effective teamwork had the potential to enhance the quality of individuals' academic work, contribute to students' learning experiences, and, ultimately, improve the overall quality of programs. However, the intensive mode of offshore programs often meant that team members were required to spend concentrated time working together, but not over the extended timeframes generally considered as necessary for the development of high performing teams. From participants' responses, it was possible to construct their conceptions of two types of factors: the first involved the positive learnings derived from team work, effective team characteristics, and the negative quality impacts of poor teamwork. The second factor focused on the institutional support, especially in the form of leadership, needed to foster teamwork.

In general, experienced staff enjoyed role-modelling behaviours and mentoring inexperienced team members, and through the necessary preparation and explanations involved, they refreshed and refined their own skills (E2, E3, E5). Inexperienced staff reported that they developed more skills by mimicking the behaviours of, and seeking feedback from, their highly experienced colleagues (L3, L4). Casual staff found more opportunities to learn about, not only teaching practices, but also about institutional characteristics and career prospects, than they did onshore (C2, C4). Those who described themselves as outgoing personalities were enthusiastic about the social interactions afforded by concentrated engagement with colleagues.

Team experiences evaluated as successful by participants were described as: collaborative, supportive, safe, purposeful, meaningful, and inclusive. Such teams had a range of complimentary team skills, and the provision of developmental opportunities. Learning amongst team members occurred, largely, through the sharing of knowledge, skills and practices. Positive outcomes were facilitated by effective social skills and relationships between academics. A common view held by at least three quarters of the participants, was that the most effective teams were those that were genuine and open in the sharing of content materials, and had members who mutually supported each other with guidance about the cultural appropriateness of teaching and learning concepts and practices. In this manner, the synergy generated in such teams tended to raise the overall quality level of content and context knowledge for individuals and teams.

Not all groups of academics performed well in teams. There were numerous references to ineffective team characteristics and behaviours, and their consequences, mainly regarding four types of issues. (As an indicator of frequency, the number of participants who identified the same issues are shown in the brackets). Leadership issues involved low engagement by coordinators (ten), a lack of communication from coordinators (ten), and unspecified or unclear team goals and roles (eight). Teaching issues centred on insufficient content and context knowledge (eight), and ineffective teaching skills (seven). Team issues arose from an unbalanced and incompatible range of team skills and roles (nine). Lastly, social issues were highly specific to individual team members, but were most often linked to competing demands of other work (five), culturally insensitive behaviours (four), and a preference for working alone (three).

There were four main negative quality consequences. Inadequate leadership by coordinators resulted in gaps in information flow, and a lack of clarity about team goals and team member roles, which caused confusion and anxiety amongst academics and students, and mistakes in administrative tasks. An insufficient basis of knowledge and teaching skills in visiting and local staff meant poorer or inconsistent standards of classroom performance. Teams without a balanced range of skills and role preferences were characterised by misunderstandings in communication and conflict. A lack of collaborative social activities constrained the building of trusting relationships between

colleagues, yet trust amongst team members was acknowledged by many, as a fundamental building block for effective team cohesion and performance.

Several participants identified the need for appropriate institutional support in order to overcome such blockages and develop effective teams. Twelve participants commented that the complexity of offshore teamwork issues was enough justification for institutions to put more care and effort into selecting academics for offshore teams, and providing on-going support for team development. Others identified a contradiction in the emphasis on effective skills for student teams compared to that of staff teams. Examples included:

> Skills in student teams get attention, but when it comes to staff, there's a lot of rhetoric about how important teamwork is, but, in practice, it usually amounts to a few academics randomly thrown together for a short time in high pressure conditions, so we shouldn't be surprised some teams just don't gel, and annoyances can flow-on back home (C2).

> We should practice what we preach to students. We talk to them a lot about teams needing time and supportive resources to become high performing, but we don't do it ourselves (E3).

E6's experiences verified that team members were seldom chosen carefully by institutions to have complementary team and cultural skills, but were often made up of whoever was available. E5 also believed that little thought was put into selecting teams by Australian institutions, and a consequence was less experienced staff, or those out of their comfort zone, relied heavily reliance on more experienced staff. Further complications arose when local staff, whose approaches to learning, teaching and quality standards were not necessarily compatible with those of Australian team members, were part of teams (L2).

These examples also highlighted the perception shared by many participants that there was an absence of systematic institutional approaches to support offshore teams. However, there was little detail in the data as to what would be the ideal nature of such support. General areas mentioned were: planned team composition, pre-departure induction, team member mentoring, post-visit debriefing reviews, and team evaluation

and training. Participants did provide more specific views on one aspect of institutional support, that of team leadership.

Formal team leadership, usually in the form of course coordinators, was an especially powerful influence on quality teamwork. Participants' experiences suggested that team leaders were central to the formation and maintenance of effective offshore teams, indeed, their influence pervaded every aspect of teamwork (E4). They were seen, on the one hand, as the representatives, interpreters, and in some cases, enforcers, of institutional requirements, but, on the other hand, as catalysts and supporters of team member relationships and team culture. When their attitudes and behaviours were ineffective, there were breakdowns in harmonious team relationships, and a lack of task and role clarity. C3 provided an apt summation of offshore team leadership:

> It's a very complex role. They need specialist content and context knowledge; cultural, social and relationship skills; be able to make educational and administrative decisions; and on top of that, have the team skills to get the best out of a disparate group of staff. Institutions need to select them very carefully, not just whoever happens to be free on the timetable, or in favour at the time, and they need on-going support and development in their roles.

Working in offshore teams, therefore, had a range of potential benefits for academics, students and institutions, although team effectiveness could be reduced by issues related to leadership, team skills, teaching style preferences, and social interactions. In addition, the time constraints associated with the intensive mode of offshore programs, and the diversity of team member composition, intensified team deficits. The preceding discussion suggests that more focused and systematic support from institutions would contribute, positively, to effective performance of offshore teams.

Synthesis of Findings on Effective Practices

The effective practices that participants identified as contributing to their conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work were grouped into two themes, that of effective classroom teaching practices, and of working in teams with colleagues. These

practices allowed the enactment of the enabling characteristics examined earlier in this chapter. (As established in Chapter Four, academic work in the Hong Kong context was largely comprised of activities related to teaching). The themes found in the data were interlinked through communication and teamwork. There were also clear indications in the data that effective practices drew upon reflection about practices, and actively adapting and experimenting with approaches to better match the contextual setting.

A common revelation for many participants in their offshore work was that the cultural and educational backgrounds of Hong Kong students meant that they had higher expectations of academics being experts in subject content, business context knowledge, and program and course requirements. As a consequence, they were more reliant on their academics for this type of content than were onshore students. Participants utilised a wide range of techniques to manage students' perceptions. Added pressures on academics included promptly communicating their credibility and expertise, especially in intensive mode programs, and ensuring consistency in delivery in teaching teams.

Quality classroom teaching practices relied on effective communication, which was conceived by most participants as involving a set of fundamental, practical skills which assisted academics in the delivery of content, including obtaining regular feedback from students. However, in the offshore context, in addition to competence in typical communication skills, special attention to specific components of communication was needed. In particular, focus was required on nuances of voice and English language, precision of written communication, and the cultural conventions associated with dress, body language, such as eye contact, and physical proxemics.

These communication skills were supplemented by a common onshore teaching technique, which was that of story-telling and incorporating metaphors to explain, elaborate and ground complex concepts in simpler and more familiar terms for students. This technique was, however, less effective in clearly transferring or, indeed, translating information for the Hong Kong classroom environment. Based on participants' examples, figurative language tended to be Western-based, idiosyncratic in language, dependent for understanding on shared meaning, and abstract rather than literal in nature. Thus, to be

effective, images needed to be adapted and constructed to be applicable to students' characteristics and cultural contexts.

The final aspect of classroom teaching practice was designated as facilitating classroom interactions. Whilst participants varied in the extent to which they altered their teaching techniques to meet student interaction needs and preferences, there were, however, two preferred approaches to promoting supportive classrooms environments, namely, the deliberate employment of humour, and structured small group activities. Humour was a comfortable and relaxed conduit for learning, especially where difficult or controversial topics could be raised in an acceptable manner, and the informal, social interactions lessened the performance pressure on students. Whichever the chosen form, such as technological sources, in class activities, and personal anecdotes, the skilful application of humour required sensitivity to the cultural context. Finally, participants with a personal preference towards extraversion appeared to be more inherently equipped to easily integrate humour into their offshore classroom teaching practices.

A second teaching technique that supported interaction in offshore classrooms entailed learning through small group activities and assessment tasks; indeed, for many participants this was closely aligned with their preferred teaching styles. Teamwork activities enhanced student content knowledge and skill development within a culturally and socially appropriate learning structure. By contrast, there were disadvantages to small group activities. Group assessments could skew overall grade levels, and give unfair advantages to less able students or those who made less effort. In addition to supporting learning, other more covert motivations for group work, such as a means of reducing workload demands for staff and students, and decreasing costs for institutions, were identified. However, these practical 'benefits' may contribute to a circumvention of meaningful attempts to evaluate teamwork as an approach to quality learning and teaching, especially if the efficacy of teamwork remains unquestioned.

The second effective practices theme concerned academics working in offshore teams with colleagues. They had experienced both positive and negative impacts on the quality of their academic work. Effective teamwork enabled a range of learning and

developmental opportunities for different categories of academics: increased offshore contextual knowledge, culturally appropriate teaching techniques, information about institutional quality processes, and role modelling and mentoring. Ineffective teamwork, however, had several negative consequences. These included: a sense of mistrust and suspicion between team members; minimal involvement in collaborative activities; and confusion and uncertainty for students and staff due to misunderstandings and misinformation, from inconsistent, incomplete and inaccurate communications. Such outcomes of poor quality teamwork had an adverse impact on staff and student perceptions of the quality of programs and teaching.

The effectiveness of team performance was highly dependent upon the extent of complementarity of teamwork preferences, skills and behaviours of team members, which was partially determined by institutionally-controlled factors. Shortfalls in formalised approaches to selection of team members and co-ordinators, and in the provision of team development activities, were perceived by participants as a symptom of inadequate recognition, valuing and support for offshore teamwork. The findings in this study also suggested that institutions may assume that their onshore and offshore staff already possess sufficiently developed cultural and team skills which would be transferable and effective in Hong Kong classrooms.

Figure 5.2 summaries the factors, intrinsic to the academic, which participants identified as influencing their conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. These factors were composed of synergistic personal enabling characteristics which, in conjunction with effective skills and practices, facilitated the quality of their offshore academic work.

Contextual Environment Factors:
Components of Academic Work
Notions of Quality

Intrinsic Factors

Academic Attributes:
Enabling Characteristics

Academic Attributes:
Effective Practices

Theme A1 Personal Characteristics

- Sub-theme A1.1 Cultural curiosity
- Sub-theme A1.2 Personal resilience
  - Category A1.2.1 Physical resilience
  - Category A1.2.2 Emotional resilience
  - Category A1.2.3 Social resilience
- Sub-theme A1.3 Reflective practice orientation

Theme A2 Effective Classroom Teaching Practices

- Sub-theme A2.1 Demonstrating credibility and expertise
- Sub-theme A2.2 Communicating effectively
  - Category A2.2.1 Effective communication skills
  - Category A2.2.2 Using stories and metaphors
- Sub-theme A2.3 Facilitating classroom interactions

Theme A3: Working in Teams with Colleagues

Figure 5.2 Intrinsic Factors and Attributes

Conclusion

This chapter conveyed the findings for the intrinsic factors that contributed to participants' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. These factors were initially classified into the two groupings of enabling characteristics and effective practices. When effectively integrated, these characteristics and practices merged to form a synergistic relationship of reflection and action, which was conducive to learning opportunities for academics and students, and potentially, to other stakeholders. Effective communication and teamwork consistently emerged as underpinning these learning opportunities.

In this study, enabling characteristics referred to cultural curiosity, personal resilience and an orientation towards reflective practice. Cultural curiosity was determined by predispositions, influences and developmental actions. While this characteristic assisted

in learning about and facilitating interactions in offshore classrooms and wider communities, there were concerns that institutional guidelines for engagement with students outside the classroom were unclear. The second characteristic, personal resilience, combined physical, emotional, and social resilience. Well balanced, high levels of resilience appeared to better equip participants in understanding and coping with the added rigours of offshore work. There was an acknowledgement, however, that personal resilience was a controversial issue, indeed, it tended to be an organisational undiscussable, given its possible implications for work opportunities. The third characteristic, a reflective practice orientation, set the basis for on-going learning and improvement in skills, through both the identification of opportunities for development, as well as challenging assumptions about aspects of offshore work. These enabling characteristics could be described as providing a platform for effective practices.

The two main types of effective practices that contributed to conceptualisations of quality academic work were clustered around classroom teaching practices that were conducive to mutual learning, and the experiences of working in teams with colleagues. While there was extensive variation in viewpoints, common strands in the data were that high quality teaching and learning in the classroom entailed participants establishing their credibility and expertise, and effectively employing culturally appropriate and nuanced communication skill sets, such as figurative language and sensitive humour, to better convey meaning, and to stimulate student engagement. Small group activities and assessment tasks also encouraged interaction. These techniques had the potential to both benefit and detract from quality work, depending on the personal attributes of academics and their students, and on the support provided by institutions.

The second aspect of effective practices emerged from experiences of working in offshore teams with Australian and local colleagues. High performing teams enabled a range of learning and developmental opportunities, but dysfunctional terms were characterised by miscommunications and mistrust. Effective team selection, development opportunities, and leadership styles were identified as necessary institutional support factors to ensure the complementarity and compatibility of team members' preferences and skills.

This chapter and Chapter Four presented the findings from the data which addressed the four research issues. Overarching patterns and themes were explored through the contextual environment, extrinsic and intrinsic factors, and their associated quality attributes, while the essence of the details was illustrated by personal observations and anecdotes. Chapter Six extends the exploration of the central research question by consolidating the findings and preliminary conclusions for the four research issues, and by drawing on insights from pertinent theoretical concepts, to assist in interpreting and constructing meanings of conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work.

Chapter Six

# Discussion and Conclusions:
A Confluence of Quality Attributes

Introduction

This penultimate chapter consolidates the findings for each research issue from the analysis of the contextual environment, extrinsic, and intrinsic factors in Chapters Four and Five, and has the intention of presenting conclusions that move further towards a more in-depth understanding of the central research problem. In order to achieve this aim, the findings and conclusions are examined with due regard to the key concepts in the background and specific literature reviewed in earlier chapters, which were chosen to enlighten the analysis, synthesis and evaluation of the data, and to clarify conceptual and practical contributions from this study to the existing body of knowledge about offshore quality academic work. In this way, this chapter serves not only to address the individual research issues, but also to act as a precisely constructed scaffold for Chapter Seven, where the overall conclusions regarding the research problem are presented, and, as is pertinent to a professional doctoral study, implications for practice are offered for consideration by stakeholders.

To maintain consistency with both the structure and terminology developed in Chapter Three, and the sequence of the findings from the interview data presented in Chapters Four and Five, the following discussion begins by addressing the research problem in the sequence of the four research issues. Since the overall purpose of this study was to ascertain how academics conceptualised offshore quality academic work, research issues one and two were designed to situate the research by sensitising participants' thinking about the integration of their definitions or understandings of contemporary academic work, and of the ways in which they defined quality in higher education. This process was in preparation for a detailed examination of the third and fourth research issues, which specifically focused on aspects of offshore academic work, using Hong Kong as a

common contextual setting. As a consequence, the first two research issues are discussed, only briefly, in order to anchor subsequent findings and discussion of offshore themes.

The main focus of this chapter, then, is based on the major outcomes for research issues three and four, which were addressed through curriculum, student, institutional and academic attributes. It is concluded from this study, that the quality of each of these attributes, in combination, constituted offshore quality academic work, as perceived by study participants. Furthermore, the quality of learning was at the core of these attributes, and was also a uniting theme between them. Figure 6.1 displays the overarching elements identified in the study, and indicates the interconnectedness between them. This figure also functions as the organising structure for the following exposition of the synthesis of the findings and conclusions for the four research issues.
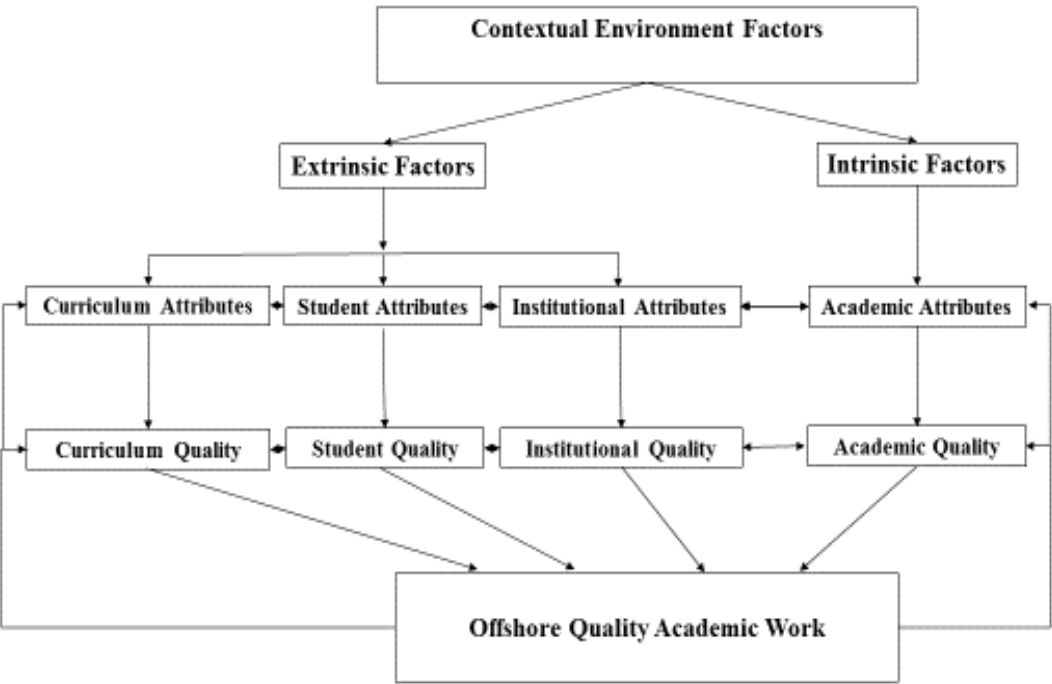
Figure 6.1 Offshore Quality Academic Work

Academic Work – a Contested Environment

Austin (2002) identified eight changing expectations impacting on American higher education; the contemporary relevance of several of these influences was evident in the work of academics in this study. In particular, diminishing financial resources and competition from private educational providers were reflected in cost control, and pressure to engage in revenue-generating entrepreneurial activities and research while, simultaneously, responding to demands for greater accountability and quality assurance. Increased diversity of students' backgrounds, expectations, needs, and motivations, as well the incorporation of new technologies, requires emphasis on learning processes and outcomes, along with new opportunities for learning beyond a face-to-face home campus, as is the case in offshore programs. Meanwhile, the profile of academics has shifted from tenured, full time staff towards casual, part time staff. The emergence of postmodern approaches to knowledge means that academics encounter multiple ways of knowing and understanding, often in the context of interdisciplinary teaching and conducting research. It is within this complex, contested environment that participants in this study conceptualised their academic work.

The first research issue sought to investigate participants' perspectives on the nature of contemporary academic work, including the impact of the internationalisation of higher education. A unifying thread in the data was the tension experienced by participants as they sought to balance the demands, motivations and rewards associated with the various aspects of their work. Overall, participants estimated their work components to be in the ranges of teaching (60-80%), administration (10-30%) and research (10-20%), with only very small amounts of other activities such as consulting, institutional leadership and community-based activities. In the offshore context, the teaching component was higher, administration was reduced, and research was minimal. This profile was not unexpected as participants were purposively selected based on their lecturer level classification or equivalent, and the predominance of their involvement in onshore and offshore teaching.

In the offshore environment, the teaching role required participants to deliver globalised and standardised curriculum content, yet, at the same time, to provide contextual and

localised examples. In the classroom, differences in cultural and educational backgrounds were reflected in the learning preferences and behaviours of students, and in the preferred teaching practices of academics. A related concern was the lack of consensus amongst stakeholders about comparative proficiency levels and standards of spoken and written English language across locations. Another key issue was the pressure on academics to have expertise in information technology for teaching and administrative tasks, and its, seemingly, unbounded utilisation as a means of communication. With regard to quality teaching, participants acknowledged that their institutions rewarded academics with various forms of teaching and learning awards, especially onshore, however, doubts were raised that the institutional metrics used were largely reliant on quantitative surveys of student satisfaction and, thus, could only be narrow, incomplete and episodic snapshots. This study suggested that the satisfaction of academics with their own teaching practice should be included as a factor in determining a more detailed picture of quality teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

Administrative work was generally described as a necessary and unavoidable task, and, for many, it was a source of frustration and demotivation because it competed for time with both research and teaching, yet it received little formal institutional recognition. Research and teaching tended to be considered as the true intellectual components of academic work (Brew 2002), with the routine nature of administrative tasks being a distraction. A related issue was that the division of academic and general administration was an increasingly contested area between academic and support staff. These types of perceptions and experiences were consistent with previous research by Goedegeburre, Coates, van der Lee and Meek (2009), and McInnes (2000). Further, administrative work in the offshore context was made more complex by the larger range of stakeholders, and by the obligation of visiting academics to take on additional representational roles. It would seem, then, that there is scope for institutions to establish clearer guidelines and rewards for the administrative component of academic work and, in particular, to clarify role boundaries and opportunities in the offshore context. For instance, Poole and Ewan (2010) noted that potential exists for academics to add value by combining offshore teaching with other activities such as marketing processes, however preparation and planned strategies would be required to achieve this outcome.

Research activity was perceived to be the main contributing factor for those seeking a career path in academia. Irrespective of the ongoing or casual staff profile, all participants firmly believed that, as a consequence of policies driving Australian higher education (Shah & Jarzabkowski 2013), their institutions valued and rewarded formal research outcomes above all other components of academic work. Furthermore, Dobele, Rundle-Thiele, Kopanidis and Steel (2010) found that male academics had achieved higher support in terms of research grant income. Therefore, an examination of individual academic workloads and research funding policies was recommended, in order to redress imbalances between research active male and female academics.

This study revealed that there were few examples of individual or collective research related to the offshore context. However, Welch (2016) identified that, if the relatively narrow Australian focus on promoting literacy in the Asian region shifted to encompass a wider range of options, then there would be increasing opportunities for regional research collaboration. Indeed, Knight (2013) extended the focus of international collaborative capacity building in higher education to encompass individuals, institutions and their national and regional contexts. Thus, there are potential benefits for institutions to devise more cohesion and consistent approaches to support their academics, including offshore local staff, in individual and collaborative research activities. Indeed, Attia and Edge (2017) supported a developmental approach to research that recognised the role of the researcher's sociocultural environment in facilitating reflexivity and learning. They argued that intellectual, emotional, and social development of researchers was supported by continuous involvement with researcher colleagues and communities of interest. Sociocultural perspectives also suggest that policies, practices and contexts that support and facilitate the learning and motivation of academics, such as through interdisciplinary, team-taught courses, will ultimately improve the quality of research, as well as teaching (Lattuca 2002).

As was borne out in interview responses, contemporary academic work was multifaceted and existed within a complex and changing environment of competing values, demands and expectations that were intensified by increased onshore and offshore student

numbers, reduced government funding, and changing staffing profiles. These findings are consistent with Lyons and Ingersoll's (2010) conclusions that academics were dissatisfied with reduced time for research activities due to increases in time spent in teaching, generating materials, marking assignments and communicating electronically with students, along with the pressures of more demanding students, and greater levels of administration and bureaucracy. Furthermore, the study revealed that there were several contentious issues in the offshore context and that the uncertainty surrounding them, if not ameliorated, was likely to negatively impact on the quality of academic work. Accordingly, a more holistic and comprehensive approach to stakeholder involvement could enable a clearer understanding of the collective components of academic work in the contested higher education environment. As Coaldrake and Stedman (1999; 2016) stated, institutional policies need to address the changing roles of academics in order to face the challenges from key stakeholders.

Quality - Learning: An Integrating Theme in a Spectrum of Viewpoints

The notion of quality was an underpinning concept of the primary purpose of this study, so this section more fully explicates participants' perspectives of quality in higher education. The intention of this second research issue was to elicit conceptualisations of quality in higher education, as constructed by participants. Despite the broad range of viewpoints apparent in this study, the nature and approach to student learning was a strong uniting theme amongst participants. In addition, quality was seen almost exclusively in relation to teaching activities with only very few references to administration and research. Administrative tasks were described in functional terms, such as efficiently and effectively meeting the needs of students and supporting the work of academics, and research was generally linked to scholarship such as refining content materials and improving teaching practices. Finally, it was found that informal, formative feedback between academics and students was more valued, and had a more profound impact on the performance of academics and, potentially, of students, than did formal, quantitative metrics generated by institutions.

With due consideration to this central theme of learning, and in order to further illuminate general notions of quality prior to examining the offshore context in detail in research issues three and four, a brief discussion follows regarding the main perspectives on quality, and their relationships to learning. As Harvey and Green (1993) ascertained, there are many different descriptors and definitions of quality in higher education. In this study, most concepts of quality could be aligned with three interdependent, well recognised perspectives. The groupings were categorised as: fitness for purpose, change processes from inputs to outcomes, and the competing values and expectations of multiple stakeholders. These quality approaches were identified in Chapter One.

Quality as fitness for purpose was discussed, most frequently, in terms of enabling students to make connections between course content and their worlds of work. The main intention of this transfer of learning was that, as well as achieving academic outcomes, students needed to be work ready and be able to meet relevant industry standards. It is probable that this emphasis on employability was influenced by the business backgrounds and experiences of many participants. This perspective implied that quality is, paradoxically, both a goal, and a measure, of learning. In particular, although employability was said to be a critical quality outcome, there was no specific indication of how this was to be evaluated. This begs the question of who should be involved in the determination of the meaning of both 'fitness' and 'purpose'. Furthermore, this complexity was compounded in the offshore context in two ways: there was an increased number of stakeholders, each with their own preferences and expectations, and learning content and processes required translation into forms applicable to the cultural characteristics of students, institutions, businesses and societies.

Therefore, this study found that a fit-for-purpose perspective was limited, primarily, to achieving existing course-related learning goals and outcomes, rather than also examining their origins, or their place in the overall strategic direction of programs and institutions. This is suggestive of Argyris and Schön's (1978) description of a single loop learning approach, and Senge's (1990) similar perspective, which was that, where goals, values, frameworks and strategies are taken for granted, opportunities for change and

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improvement tend to be constrained. Thus, a quality suggestion from this study would be to broaden a fitness-for-purpose perspective to include double loop and triple loop learning, beginning with an examination of underlying norms, policies and objectives.

As established in Chapter One, the history of quality is strongly associated with the manufacturing industry, and its appropriateness to service industries, including higher education has been challenged, especially in terms of conflicting purposes and values (Amaral & Rosa 2010; Faber & Huisman 2003; Morley 2003; Newton 2010; Sakthivel & Raju 2006; Worthington & Hodgson 2005). Given the pervasiveness of this quality perspective, it was not unexpected that the second viewpoint on quality, reminiscent of a production process, would be found in the data, and, indeed, participants used terminology such as inputs of resources, delivery techniques and procedures, and measurement of outputs. For example, curriculum content, and students' prior knowledge and expectations at entry level, were likened to the raw materials or inputs to learning. The descriptions of the delivery phase centred on teaching practices that entailed a linear progression of students towards learning outcomes which could be objectively measured and directly linked to initial objectives. Finally, the role of institutions tended to be perceived as support processes that revolved around physical and human resources, especially infrastructure, information technology, administrative assistance, and professional development opportunities. The ways in which the added complexities of the offshore context impacted on these resources, are elaborated upon throughout the following sections of this chapter.

A disconnect or anomaly was also discernible in the data, as, on the one hand, most participants espoused firm educational values about learning, yet, simultaneously, the language used by some of them indicated an ingrained, perhaps unconscious, acceptance of the efficiency or economic rationalist view of quality which is one that is typically attributed to institutions and quality agencies. As established in Chapters One and Two, this clash of values is well documented in the literature, however, the findings were extended in this study to include the potential for conflicting intra-personal values between learning and productivity.

The third notion of quality focused on taking into account the perceptions and expectations of stakeholders about what constitutes relevant student learning. The major Australian groups mentioned in this study, in order of frequency, were students, academics, administrators, institutional policymakers, course designers, and training and development personnel, and accreditation agencies. When considering the offshore context, they were Australian staff, students, local administrative staff, and local academic staff. In both contexts, there were only infrequent mentions of employers, family, government, and society.

From this perspective, the offshore context meant an increased number of stakeholders, but the responsibility for determining aspects of quality appeared to reside chiefly with the Australian stakeholders, with offshore ones being, essentially, the recipients. The extensive research on stakeholder analysis and management noted in earlier chapters, recognised that, inevitably, there will be unequal degrees of power and influence, ideally, however, all relevant parties need to be identified, classified, and their views on quality taken into account. Secondly, particularly in offshore contexts, academics were often at the centre of tension between stakeholders, as they were required to interpret or arbitrate quality issues *in situ*. Thus, any definition of quality is likely to be contested, given the inherent, contradictory elements between quality perspectives. The strong employability emphasis of the fitness-for-purpose perspective, for example, was at odds with the relative lack of input or influence of employers in determining the meaning of such employability. This study indicated that the identification of stakeholders, and the acquisition of a more in-depth understanding of their different perspectives, would be a basis to foster the development of productive engagement between them, which, ultimately, could contribute to more effectively incorporating and meeting expectations of quality.

A further issue was that there was minimal detailed discussion of 'big Q' quality aspects such as specific institutional policies, procedures or processes, and comments on quality metrics were mostly confined to post-course summative results and formal feedback surveys from students. Constructive feedback, both on-going formative, and summative, is a cornerstone of continuous learning and improvement of quality in education, and the satisfaction of the customer or client, or in this case, the student, is a key focus. However,

participants judged summative feedback to be of limited value as surveys were frequently thought to be flawed in design In addition, offshore program modes of delivery were truncated versions of onshore programs, and many participants were only involved at irregular intervals. Consequently, the information provided by summative feedback approaches was untimely and inadequate for effective learning and improvement. By contrast, 'little q' quality approaches such as qualitative forms of feedback from students, including the degree of classroom interaction and informal unsolicited feedback, were more highly regarded as indicators of the actual quality of student learning and teaching effectiveness.

Finally, taking into account many participants' apparently limited specific awareness, coupled with their conscious devaluing of institutional level quality assurance, it is reasonable to assume that their preferred style of informal, classroom-focused student feedback made the most significant contribution to the formation of their concepts of quality academic work. Moreover, although participants consistently associated effective feedback as synonymous with the quality of their work, the perspective of continuous improvement was implicit, rather than explicit, in their responses. It is possible to speculate that the intention of continuous improvement about learning and teaching was an embedded norm of quality for participants in this study, although, its enactment was restricted by policies, processes and program conditions. Further clarification could be assisted by examining both institutional policies and academic preferences at an explicit level.

In the context of transnational higher education, Smith K (2010) and Ziguras (2008), for example, argued that, if this form of education was to have more than financial purposes, collaborating partners needed to have more equal involvement in the way quality assurance documents are written, in order to avoid dominant messages underpinning exporter-country controlled quality documents being expressions of cultural hegemony. Smith K (2010) drew upon the notion of contact zones from post-colonial studies, that is, social spaces where disparate cultures interplay, as a basis for the recommendation that, as a means to contribute to quality assurance, academics from home and host countries

work together to design hybrid courses which combine globalised curricula with local relevance.

In addition, despite the recognition of the significance of the three major components of academic work to the careers of academics, the teaching aspect was the main determiner of quality, and a consideration of the quality of research activities and, indeed, of administration, was conspicuously absent from the data. This study, then, identified the opportunity for a more in-depth and inclusive exploration of the potential alignment of quality perspectives with each of the three major components of academic work.

Quality Curriculum, Student, Institutional and Academic Attributes

The third and fourth research issues focused on the ways in which participants conceptualised offshore quality academic work, based on their experiences of teaching in Hong Kong business programs. The following four discussion sections have the intention of providing an integrated picture of the findings about the curriculum, student, institution and academic attributes that shaped conceptualisations of offshore quality academic. As well as conclusions, potential implications and recommendations are signposted for further explication in Chapter Seven. The discussion, which is enlightened by both theoretical concepts and empirical evidence, represents the progressive building of theory in this study.

Curriculum as Transfer of Learning: Blending Standardisation of Content by Institutions with Contextualisation by Academics

The term, curriculum, was used by participants in this study to refer primarily to subject content materials, however, there are many more detailed and comprehensive definitions that assist in understanding conceptualisations of quality curriculum. Jay (1997), in

discussion of the 'cultural wars' between 1960s-type social movement reformers and 1980s-type critical theory reformers, in the teaching of American literature, described choices of content as value judgements with political and societal dimensions. Shor (1992) identified numerous, often conflicting shifts in curriculum emphasis, such as equality, career education, excellence and high standards, accountability, competence, technology, core curriculum, quality and ethics.

Insko (2003) argued that classrooms are often the principal sites of knowledge canon production, and educators can influence debates about what canons are relevant, and what ends should be pursued in contemporary higher education, but, pragmatically, what matters is a shared core of knowledge and values. However, education is itself an international circulating commodity (Ohmann 2003), increasingly characterised by challenges to professional autonomy from influences such as market forces, commercialisation of research, privatisation, corporatisation, tenure issues, distance education, technology and internationalisation. Higher education institutions, then, should be responsive to social needs including cultural, economic and technological changes, and the interests of students, academics and other stakeholders, as well as being subject to demands for accountability and quality control (Lattuca & Stark 2011).

Indeed, Levine (1993) contended that curricula do not exist apart from the culture in which they develop; Lattuca and Stark (2011) argued that curricula reflect both societal needs and shape them; and Graff (1992) viewed curriculum as a microcosm of what a culture deems to be important, which may, in turn, alter interpretations that are conveyed to students. Moreover, conflicts should be included in what is taught, and disciplines should not be isolated. Leask and Bridge (2013), for example, situated knowledge in and across disciplines as the centre of internationalisation of the curriculum. Their framework, which engaged academic staff in the exploration and explication of the meaning of curriculum internationalisation in their programmes, was concerned with curriculum design, and the layers of context that influence academic decision making, including assessment of student learning, systematic development, and aspects of international, local, national, regional and global contexts.

For Agger (2014), when curricula challenge mainstream culture, for example, while deconstructing dominant discourses in traditional curricula and modes of evaluation, it offered opportunities for alternative voices and versions, such as those of different culture, class, race and gender. The rise in entrepreneurial education, for instance, has been proffered as a means for individuals to overcome the barriers and obstacles associated with such characteristics (Jack & Anderson 1999). Considering international, global and intercultural dimensions can prompt questioning of the dominant model of education within a disciplinary context. Breit, Obijiofor and Fitzgerald (2013) suggested a role for internationalisation in the 'critical de-Westernization' of the curriculum, which they defined as, not a means of replacing Western with non-Western ideas, practices and values, but as a way to develop awareness of diverse approaches and understandings, scrutinising the what, the how, and the attitudes that people bring to learning. Such critiques can be transformative in nature. The above consideration of some of the characteristics of curriculum, demonstrated that, as Agger (2014) claimed, and was found in this study, the nature of quality curriculum is a contested terrain.

As identified in Chapter Four, participants' notions of quality curricula, which were primarily related to subject content, in Hong Kong programs were clustered around their contributions to supplementing materials through contextualisation activities. While they were responsible for the delivery of specific courses, they were often distanced from conception and design aspects of curricula for their own courses or programs as a whole. Four key interrelated issues, evident within participants' responses, involved: the suitability of standardised curricula for the offshore context, the nature of informal contextualisation activities, the impacts of institutional stakeholders and situational constraints, and the perceived value of professional expertise, practice and autonomy.

A commonly accepted view is that an offshore curriculum should be of an equivalent or comparable standard to that delivered in the home country (Ziguras 2007). While the basis of this position is consistent with a 'standardisation' perspective of quality, and appears at face value to be clear-cut in principle, as UNESCO and OECD (2005) guidelines indicated, determining the extent of similarity across multiple locations is problematic and complex in practice. These observations are consistent with findings in this study, in

that Australian institutions typically standardised curricula across locations by prescribing formal packages, which were usually composed of Australian and general international content and included some regional Asian content, but had few specific local examples. In response to perceived inadequacies in this form of curriculum, and to further assist students in the transfer of learning to the Hong Kong cultural setting, all participants augmented these standardised materials by engaging in some type of contextualisation. It can be concluded from the frequency and extent of contextualisation activities that the standardised materials provided by institutions were not fully compatible with the academics' views of a fit-for-purpose, culturally-transferable curriculum.

The contextualisation of curriculum can be considered against background literature which indicates that Western higher educational curriculum content should not be assumed to be directly transferable or translatable to other countries with different cultural and social milieus (Dauber, Fink & Yolles 2012; Kedia, Harveston & Bhagat 2001; Van den Bossche, Gijselaers & Milter 2011; Watkins 2000). To enable students to effectively apply new information and behaviours to their personal and working lives, they should, ideally, find curricula to be culturally harmonious and sufficiently compatible, rather than dissonant, with their local values. There were numerous examples of informal contextualisation as a means of situating the content for greater relevance to student learning.

It was noticeable that, while some exchange of information did occur between individuals and small groups during teaching visits, contextualisation was heavily influenced by the knowledge, interest and enthusiasm of individual academics and, it can be inferred, was grounded in their own implicit assumptions about the most relevant content and ways to support learning. There was, though, no evidence that these underpinning assumptions had been explicitly articulated or subjected to scrutiny by others, which implies that their appropriateness as a basis for the effective transfer of learning to offshore contexts was open to question. For example, unconscious, systemic, often Western biases may influence the selection of curriculum content. Therefore, unearthing and examining assumptions held by all stakeholders may lead towards a clearer, shared understanding of effective curriculum to facilitate learning. According to Guillory (1993), the process of

evaluation of curriculum is grounded in the consensus of values of members of particular interpretive communities.

This study also demonstrated that apart from contributions to contextualisation, offshore curriculum work was largely out of the professional control of those academics teaching it. They were often omitted from the overall design process and, indeed, to a significant degree, from the official development of course materials. Both of these activities were carried out by others, such as onshore co-ordinators and educational technologists, who were seldom directly employed in offshore classroom teaching, yet Catherwood and Taylor (2005), Dunn and Wallace (2013), Leask (2013) and Leask and Bridge (2013) identified the importance of staff responsible for the development of curriculum being in close contact with those who were involved in its delivery.

Notwithstanding the apparently well-established use of contextualisation in offshore curriculum, its effectiveness was inconclusive in this study. For example, its informal, individualised content and approach meant an inevitable lack of consistency characterised by *ad hoc*, one-off applications. This was exacerbated by the lack of formal mechanisms for recording and consolidation, or for on-going development, of these contextualised materials, especially as the quality metrics used by institutions typically focused on evaluating formal standardised curricula. A further restriction arose from the intensive mode design of most Hong Kong programs, as the brief duration of visits meant time was chiefly taken up by teaching and extra administration and student support roles, leaving reduced opportunities for planned curriculum development. In addition, two categories of academics, casual staff and non-Western Australian staff, felt their knowledge and skills were being under-utilised, despite being specifically relevant to the offshore context

The combination of these factors meant that, although curriculum is a fundamental building block in learning and teaching, participants had limited opportunities to input their expertise to the overall determination of the appropriateness and standards of materials, or to contribute to planned, continuous improvement of the quality of curricula. It could be inferred from these findings that more formalised institutional support for contextualisation activities would be welcomed by academics. This study, however, also

identified an apprehension that excessive institutional interference in contextualisation of curriculum could impinge on academic autonomy in the classroom, perhaps reflecting the sociocultural pressures experienced by contemporary academics. Given the relatively low levels of engagement in curriculum activities, and the limited points-of-view about the purposes and types of curriculum, reported by participants in this study, a more comprehensive range of perspectives may offer relevant, broader insights to assist in formulating curriculum improvement suggestions.

Sawir (2013) provided a helpful summary of simple and complex themes in internationalisation of curriculum. Definitions included: the effort of designing a curriculum to accommodate international students' needs; gearing teaching towards explicit assistance of students to cope with language, writing and assessment; and institutional self-awareness of global citizenship and motivation to enable all students, irrespective of characteristics such as, nationality, ethnicity, culture, social class or gender identities, to engage in a culture of communication and work. Clifford's (2009) definition was where curricula, pedagogies and assessments foster: understanding of the intersection of global, local and the personal perspectives; intercultural capabilities for active engagement with other cultures; and responsible citizenship which addresses different value systems and actions. Manniona, Biestaa, Priestleya and Ross (2011) included a global dimension and education for global citizenship.

Global citizenship requires global citizen learning, a transformative learning process that Lilley, Barker and Harris (2015) conceptualised through three components: facilitators of change, the global mind-set, and manifestations of change. Respectively, these components entailed: out of the comfort zone experiences, interpersonal encounters, interpersonal relationships, and cosmopolitan role models; imagining and considering different contexts, perspectives and possibilities, thinking critically and reflexively, engaging with emotions, feelings, assumptions and beliefs, and changing frames of reference and self-identity; and demonstrating broadened perspectives, accelerated maturity, cosmopolitan hospitality, and widened horizons.

Furthermore, internationalisation of curriculum involved students' cognitive, attitudinal and affective experiences, based on values such as openness, tolerance and culturally inclusive behaviour, which were developed through careful planning by academics of what and how to teach, and the resources required to achieve international awareness, competence, and expertise. The teacher responsibility was to ensure an international classroom and intercultural learning created by exploring and integrating cultural diversity, for example, in groupwork, although challenges included helping teachers to understand the concept of internationalisation, become more engaged in the process, and to adjust teaching practices, particularly as disciplinary differences could also affect academic staff understandings of, and attitudes towards, the internationalisation of the curriculum (Clifford 2009; Leask 2013).

As Phan, Tran and Blackmore (2019) found, students, themselves, can be key actors in curriculum internationalisation, although the degree of engagement depends on individual agency, and the study context. In their comparison of Vietnamese-based and Australian-based Vietnamese transnational students, for example, the former engaged meaningfully to contextualise imported curriculum into their home context, while those studying offshore, were exposed to the development of global outlooks through internationalised learning opportunities and internationalisation as part of curriculum goals, rather than stimulated by their personal agency.

Insights for curriculum planning and implementation can also be gained from two detailed models: Lattuca and Stark (2011) devised a model for an academic plan within a sociocultural context, and Van den Akker (2003) centred curriculum on questions about student learning. Lattuca and Stark (2011) drew attention to the range of influences acting in the sociocultural environment for education, and proposed an 'academic plan' approach applicable for conceptualising all levels of curriculum. A set of eight elements, namely: purposes, content, sequence, learners, instructional processes, instructional resources, evaluation, and adjustment, were embedded within explicit external, institutional and unit level factors, all of which influenced the development of academic plans.

Van den Akker (2003) defined curriculum, in essence, as a plan for student learning, consisting of ten interrelated components asking ten specific questions about student learning. In brief, rationale is concerned with the 'why' of learning. Aims and objectives address learning goals. Content identifies what is to be learnt. Learning activities describe the 'How' of learning. The teacher role describes 'How' the teacher is facilitating learning. Materials and Resources are to support learning. Grouping considers co-learners. Location and time establishes the 'where' and 'when', respectively. Assessment determines the progression of learning. This approach to curriculum improvement is consistent with the pervasive theme of learning emerging from this study. While the participants tended to comment on curriculum as content or the 'what' of student learning, many of the other components are evident in discussion of the student, institutional and academic attributes in following sections.

Therefore, the findings of this current study indicated that in order to ensure a quality curriculum, Australian academics and, where applicable, their offshore counterparts should be actively encouraged to provide input based on their relevant expertise, not only to contextualisation, but to all aspects of the conceptualisation, design and continuous refinement of offshore curricula. Indeed, a stakeholder approach to assuring the quality of curriculum would advocate the integration of inputs and feedback from a broad range of pertinent stakeholders with the intention of gaining a more holistic picture of contextual applicability and transferability, rather than a simplistic, one-way transaction from home providers to largely passive student recipients of learning. Campbell and van der Wende (2000) proposed that effective transnational higher education curriculum, and teaching and learning development should promote collaborative staff involvement and sharing in all activities. As Lattuca and Stark (2011) argued, ideally, curriculum change is a continuous and collaborative learning process, involving faculty members and administrators in learning what works and why, as they unearth underlying assumptions that can interfere with shared understandings of curricular goals.

Concluding Comments on Curriculum Quality

With regard to the preceding discussion, this study supports earlier research conclusions (Bates 2001; Kelly & Ha 1998; Zigurus 1999) that Australian institutions should be cognisant that curricula offered in offshore programs need to be directly relevant to local, cultural contexts. Therefore, in addition to offering standardised materials in international programs, contextualisation of content through localised examples is essential to increase the likelihood of effective student learning and, indeed, to the development of offshore expertise in academics. Given the frequent disconnect between academics and the designers of formal curriculum packages, coupled with the mainly informal and individualistic nature of much of the contextualisation activities, institutions did not appear to fully integrate inputs and values that best matched the personal and professional expertise of stakeholders to the stages of curriculum work. In essence, this would entail engaging the relevant parties in a quality cycle of continuous improvement, rather than only the delivery of standardised packages supplemented by the informal contextual modifications of individual academics.

The achievement of quality curriculum was conceptualised by participants as being dependent on the blending of curriculum content standardised by institutions with contextual inputs from Australian academics and other stakeholders, while being mindful of the sensitivities of the professional autonomy of academics. Further consideration of the extensive field of curriculum knowledge, an introduction to which has been presented in preceding paragraphs, could stimulate more complex, in depth insights into curriculum quality improvement.

Students as Learners: Identifying Student Learning Dispositions and Developing Learning Skills

Numerous studies have been made of the personal accounts of experiences of international students studying abroad, but this study sought to extend this type of research in two ways: firstly, by exploring the perceptions of academics about their

students, and secondly, by focusing on the offshore context of Hong Kong. Four student attributes emerged as significant factors that influenced notions of learning and teaching: commitment to study, English language proficiency, cultural and social characteristics, and learning and teaching styles. A consideration of these four factors contributes to a further understanding of the complex phenomenon of human learning which, as Lattuca and Stark (2011) argued, entails not only intellectual development and thinking, but also how personal characteristics, such as academic preparation, interests, and cultural background can influence what is learned by students as they interact with course content, peers, and academics.

This study demonstrated that participants regarded successful student learning as a central, and for many, the most important reflection of the quality of their offshore teaching work. Irrespective of institutional quality metrics, such as student grades and survey results, the major indicator of effectiveness that participants relied on was the nature of classroom interactions. They regarded effective interaction as the essential basis of student learning opportunities, and, inevitably, it affected the efficacy of the ways in which participants were able to undertake their teaching practices. Therefore, they were concerned about identifying the learning dispositions, and further developing learning skills, of students in order to better enable interactions in the classroom. It can be said, then, that these dispositions and skills acted as a platform for both relevant student learning outcomes and for effective teaching practices.

When combining studies with their personal and working lives, all students encounter competing demands which impact on their commitment and motivation to study. In the Hong Kong context, students had a complex range of motivations related to work, family, and social obligations, as well as the impetus to gain qualifications for career advancement. This finding aligned with Dasari's (2009) assertion that, from a Confucian perspective, the context of learning is an important determinant of motivation and learning, and that Chinese students were pragmatic learners who considered factors such as personal ambition, family values, peer support, material reward, and other interests. Participants in this study believed that for many students, these outside influences were stronger than learning for its own sake, which resulted in a reduced commitment to study.

They drew this conclusion from direct comments from students, and, indirectly, from observations of poor or irregular attendance, and from the extent of readiness to interact in learning activities. A key consequence was less effective learning opportunities for the whole class group.

Two further compounding factors were involved; firstly, English skills, where those with less proficiency avoided taking speaking roles in class activities, and found comprehension, reading and writing tasks, including assessment, more challenging and time-consuming. Drawing upon Barker's (2002) proposal that irrespective of English language entry scores, international students should undertake an English language test after enrolment, a first step towards addressing language skill standards could involve academics in offshore programs collaborating with design experts to develop discipline-relevant spoken and written language tests. However, ongoing commitment of institutional resources would be required to support and develop identified skill needs. Secondly, complex, cultural-social dynamics, especially hierarchical status and gender behaviours in groups, shaped interactive behaviours in the classroom. These factors favoured those students who already had the most experience and skills, rather than those, who, arguably, needed more development. In summary, the key learning implication of the nature of English language skill levels and social cultural dynamics was that if not identified and effectively managed, they could create barriers to student equity in the uptake of opportunities in learning activities.

Preferred learning and teaching styles was the most frequently discussed issue in interviews. This was consistent with the amount of attention given to styles in international education literature (Dasari 2009). It might be noted here that the existence of learning styles is contested, for example, Reiner and Willingham (2010). However, this debate was outside the scope of this study, which focused only on academics' conceptualisations. In this respect, most participants believed that Hong Kong students had preferred learning and teaching styles associated with Confucian cultural and educational backgrounds. Regardless of the degree of understanding of what such an approach to learning might actually entail, there was a common perception amongst them, at least initially, that students had a narrower range of learning style preferences and

expectations of academics' teaching styles than was typical of Australian classrooms. Their reasons or evidence for holding this perception had, in most instances, been gleaned from discussions with colleagues, or discussed in institutional developmental activities. The typical descriptors used, such as rote and surface learning, low levels of interaction, and descriptive rather than analytical skills, indicated some familiarity with issues in the learning style discourse, although there was little evidence of a comprehensive, broad-ranging understanding. In addition, some participants gave examples of deeper learning, analysis and creativity, if not originality, which suggested that there was no one uniform style shared by all students.

Further evidence that students' learning and teaching style preferences were not fixed, was that of the higher level of classroom interaction displayed by four categories of students. Those studying specific subject specialisations of a human resources or marketing orientation had a greater predisposition for extraversion. Students at more advanced stages of their programs were generally more confident and socialised in interactive activities, as were students who had had previously encountered the same academic. The fourth group, which was becoming more numerous, were those with previous exposure to Western education or work experiences. These observations lent support to the proposition that there was no one preferred learning or teaching style for Hong Kong students, and that context and experience were moderating factors. As examined in Chapter Two, there is much debate in the literature as to the existence, impact and changing nature of preferred Confucian learning and teaching styles and, while the findings in this study were also inconclusive, a consideration of this attribute in combination with the other three themes provided a fuller picture of participants' perceptions of student attributes.

With regard to teaching styles, the types of interactions in the larger classroom and in smaller groups provided many pertinent cases-in-point to demonstrate the complex intertwining of participants' perceptions of the attributes of their Hong Kong students with their own concepts of quality work. Interactive classroom environments were undoubtedly preferred by participants as they were more familiar with them, and they were more closely aligned with their educational preferences, and usual teaching

practices. However, when there was an inadequate level of interaction, three major negative impacts on quality processes and outcomes for students and academics resulted. Overall, there were fewer verbal learning opportunities for students. Secondly, the exchange of feedback challenged the communication skills of many participants, both in giving on-going, informal, formative feedback in a culturally sensitive manner to students, as well as eliciting feedback from them to ascertain their understanding. Finally, most participants had modified their approaches in response to their perceptions of offshore student characteristics, but there was no clear agreement or consistency as to the appropriate extent of such adjustments. It could be inferred, then, that despite previous research which contended that a match between teachers' teaching styles and students' learning styles could augment student learning outcomes (Zhang 2008; Zhu 2013), this study also suggested that a piecemeal approach to examining and responding to perceived student attributes could compromise quality standards.

Deeper engagement with international students has also been recommended. Baxter (2019) proposed that universities have a responsibility to engage with international students by foregrounding the influences on them of political, historical, national and socioeconomic factors and contexts, and practices of diverse stakeholders, which shape their learning and life experiences. Particularly for students from developing countries, transnational study may be both a prestigious privilege and a burden. Understandings of student experiences can inform university staff in partnering with international students in internationalisation efforts. Suggestions for partnering include: produce new understandings of how international education is experienced by diverse student populations, through collaboration with underrepresented international students; engage students in reflective exercises and deep conversations to address social and personal issues, with the intention of developing more effective services; and foster agency among underrepresented domestic and international students by bringing them together to discuss challenges and strategies. Many of these suggestions could be adapted to offshore students based in their home environment and, therefore, are relevant to this study.

Concluding Comments on Student Quality

It can be concluded that the contributions of student attributes to ideas about the quality of academic work were, unquestionably, more complex than typical institutional measures of entry level subject knowledge, based on past educational qualifications, and of student grades. Or, indeed, of feedback from student surveys about their courses and academics. A key implication was that if such a limited range of measures are utilised by institutions, then there could only be an incomplete and simplistic picture of the characteristics and approaches to learning of Hong Kong students, and to the flow on to the quality of teaching practice. In the context of continuing growth of internationalisation in higher education, a more in-depth understanding of student attributes would be a quality advantage to all stakeholders. As these perceptions of student attributes were chiefly formed from informal and anecdotal sources, a more comprehensive range of in-depth information about Hong Kong students could provide a basis to assist academics, students and institutions unearth assumptions and move towards greater shared understanding and on-going learning.

Institutions as Supporters of Learning: Adding Value for Continuous Improvement

As noted in earlier chapters, the context of reduced funding for higher education over recent decades has led to policies and strategies in higher education institutions intended to increase competitiveness in the global marketplace. In this respect, participants generally accepted that Hong Kong programs were necessary, and increasingly important components of Australian higher education. Moreover, they believed that to remain viable amidst the emerging educational contenders in the Asian region, their institutions' programs needed to be recognised for their high quality. From their perspectives as academics, quality depended upon constant improvements to content and delivery to better enable students' learning, which, in turn, required a range of institutional supports.

A parallel concern was that the nature and extent of such support was dependent on the dominant values held by institutions. This was borne out in the notion frequently conveyed in interview responses that if institutions genuinely valued the contributions of academics to offshore programs, then appropriate, on-going institutional support would be provided to effectively facilitate this work. The following discussion is grouped around three institutional support areas, as identified in Chapter Four, which were of particular relevance to the improvement of the quality of academic work in Hong Kong programs. They are: preparation and review, situational and human resources, and leadership of programs and courses.

From the many detailed examples offered, it was clear that participants saw deficits in institutional support which they believed hampered effective offshore performance of academics. All participants had taken part in some forms of voluntary offshore induction-style activities provided by their institutions, such as seminars, specialist presentations, and online, self-paced materials. There is a comprehensive body of literature available to inform the design, development and implementation of pre-departure and induction programs (Dixon & Scott 2004; Dunn & Wallace 2006; Gribble & Ziguras 2003). A common theme within this literature is that such activities should be tailored to match the needs of the audience, the nature of the program, and the characteristics of the specific context.

In this study, developmental opportunities offered by institutions were evaluated as only partially helpful for supporting offshore work. There were three main reasons: their content was usually generic rather than specific to Hong Kong programs; they were not designed to address individual needs; and the face-to-face activities were episodic, and not timely in relation to teaching visits. Rather than rely on these activities, participants preferred to improve their work by learning through interaction with colleagues. Whether this choice was a personal preference, a reaction to institutional offerings, or a combination of both would require further investigation. However, it was clear that the quality of such learning was often inconsistent and discontinuous due to two main contributing factors: it was directly dependent on the characteristics of individuals, especially their relevant expertise, communication skills, and predispositions to engage

in shared learning with colleagues, and, secondly, few structured approaches to amalgamating, reviewing and evaluating individual innovations, as a basis for making adjustments to future courses, were in place.

The lack of formalised or, indeed, informal post-trip reviews and debriefings, or in planned feedback and evaluation discussions with colleagues, were noticeable institutional 'gaps' in support that hindered ongoing improvement. Student assessment grades and student evaluation scores from post-course surveys of courses and teaching were often the only forms of formal feedback. Thus, it would seem that institutions favoured summative rather than formative information about staff, despite the importance of the latter being well-established in the discourses of reflective practice and learning perspectives, especially in humanistic and constructivist approaches, and of quality assurance, as demonstrated in earlier chapters (Billet & Newton 2010; Brookfield 1995; Kolb 1984; Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick 2006; O'Neill 2015; Sadler 2010; 2013; Schön 1983).

In addition, as feedback was largely generated from students, the continuous improvement requirement of broad stakeholder participation was not optimised. A further insight was revealed through the differences in responses between experienced participants and those who were inexperienced or casuals. This was that the extent of institutional activities which supported academics in preparation and review of their offshore work, had been reduced over time. It could be inferred that institutions assumed present-day academics already possessed the necessary competence about content and context to accomplish quality offshore work, therefore they needed minimal formal preparation or review. The reported concerns of participants in this study would suggest, though, that this assumption should be revisited by institutions, and a re-evaluation be made of the impacts of existing pre-departure and review processes.

Although preparation and review stages are well-recognised as essential steps in continuous improvement in quality, it is necessary to also have appropriate situational and human resources to support both the maintenance of existing work standards, and of innovations. There were three situational resource aspects, namely, travel and

accommodation, competing demands between offshore and onshore work, and the nature of offshore teaching facilities. For the first aspect, comfortable travel arrangements, adequate business hotel facilities, and proximity to teaching venues were expected, and were, in general, found to be of an acceptable standard. Two main concerns were raised, both of which were construed by participants as indicative of the value placed on offshore work by institutions.

The first concern centred on the imposed nature of travel and accommodation arrangements where academics had little, if any, choice in these processes. There was minimal allowance for preparation or recuperation time around teaching schedules. Consequences included tiredness and anxiety from delays in flights, which had negative impacts on both offshore work, and also on return to onshore duties. Experienced participants compared these arrangements unfavourably to more generous previous ones. They believed that these conditions were the result of the financial imperatives driving institutional actions to reduce costs. The second concern was the treatment and behaviour of management and administrative staff on offshore visits compared to teaching staff. Most participants interpreted the higher standards of travel, relatively more relaxed schedules and, in particular, behaviours of some of these staff, as implying apparent assumptions by management that offshore work was a form of junket or holiday. Participants felt such attitudes devalued the offshore aspect of academic work. It would appear, then, that opportunities for different categories of staff to learn more about the actual work and support needs of others had not been effectively utilised, even when staff were present at the same time in Hong Kong. Consequently, it is suggested that more structured interactions could be scheduled to promote greater understanding between staff about work roles, underlying values and resource needs.

The second situational resource need was insufficient formal institutional recognition and support to effectively manage concurrent and competing demands of offshore work, onshore work and home life responsibilities during teaching visits. While all of these issues needed to be balanced with work in both contexts, females reported more instances of home life demands that caused additional stress. When offshore work clashed with onshore commitments, a frequent practice was to adopt interim, unofficial approaches to

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cope with onshore work. These included setting self-directed tasks for students or arranging with colleagues, often casuals, to unofficially cover classes. There was also a heavy reliance on using information technology tools to virtually manage communication, although some questioned the efficacy for student learning, and the advantages in facilitating contact were offset by the extra time taken in increased interactions and in the updating of technical skills. It is possible that such actions to balance demands had negative impacts on the quality of concurrent activities, onshore, although this was only indirectly implied, rather than directly articulated, by participants, and was beyond the scope of this study.

While participants identified the distractions caused by competing demands, and felt their institutions should show more recognition and support, there was no specificity or commonality as to what such support should actually entail, especially in terms of non-workplace demands. Indeed, there was a tension between the strongly expressed beliefs that offshore work was undervalued by institutions and non-academic staff, yet academics' on-going involvement in such work suggested that, to them, benefits outweighed disadvantages. It can be concluded then that offshore work was underpinned by conflicted values and motivations, but it was important to academics that institutions acknowledged the complexities arising from competing demands. It is suggested, therefore, that institutions, non-academic staff, and academics work together to uncover and clarify their underlying perceptions and motivations about the value of offshore work, in order to acknowledge competing demands and identify ways in which to provide recognition and resource support. In the light of contributions of social learning approaches, including communities of practice, to collaborative learning and enhancement of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Keay *et al* 2014; Naude & Bezuidenhout 2015; Stoll *et al.* 2006; Westerheijden, Stensaker & Rosa 2007), it is probable that such joint actions would, in turn, assist in a deeper shared understanding of the perspectives of others, and assist in the continuous improvement of the quality of work in all locations.

The third type of situational resource support involved the nature of facilities. As Debowski (2003) identified, academics required tangible support to manage the added complexities brought to their academic work by offshore activities, and this was found to

be the case in the Hong Kong context where there was considerable variation in teaching venues, which ranged from specialist educational facilities to offices or hotels. While experienced participants had encountered many more temporary venues with inadequate facilities, all participants had some recent examples of what they considered to be sub-standard amenities. In practice, classroom activities were necessarily restricted by the type of venue and the services available, however, complex symbolic considerations also emerged in interview responses, the essence of which was that when standards varied, academics apportioned greater value to higher quality teaching venues. This resulted in competition for more desirable locations, and examples of favouritism in allocation decisions. Participants believed that students held similar perceptions about classes in different locations. It can be concluded that there were two levels of influence on the quality of academics' work as, not only were appropriate physical resources required to carry out quality work, but the type and standard of venues and facilities were interpreted as indicators of the values placed on offshore work by stakeholders.

As well as situational resources, the nature of human resources, particularly the offshore 'staffing mix' of Australian fulltime and casual academics and local staff, was problematic in two main ways: there were limited opportunities for interaction between Australian and local staff during teaching visits, and there was a large variation in the level of qualifications and teaching experience of local staff. In home institutions, staff 'mixes' generally had sufficient opportunities to develop working relationships over several weeks, or in some cases, years. In the Hong Kong environment, Australian team members were not always well-known to each other, especially when casual staff were included, and the contextual conditions of time constraints, teaching at different venues, and changing composition of staff teams over different cohorts, meant that Australian and local staff had only cursory contact.

In addition, the available pool of suitably qualified offshore staff created further complications. For example, when offshore institutions had the responsibility of recommending local staff for Australian institutional approval, sensitivity was essential especially if those suggested staff were not evaluated as acceptable for roles. This situation was further complicated when offshore administrators, rather than academics,

were responsible for sourcing staff, and when few, if any, induction, development or review activities were available for local staff. It is likely that the inclusion of suitable local academics in the staff mix could enhance the quality of learning and teaching through specific contextual knowledge and experience, but the effectiveness of this approach is dependent upon appropriate staff selection processes, and, as highlighted by Hicks, Kohler and King (2005), support and development for local staff.

Adverse effects caused by these human resource issues involved confusion about content, teaching and assessment, largely due to unclear or conflicting perspectives. Australian staff had little input into staff selection, and there was insufficient time available to ascertain the local staff members' knowledge and teaching skills, or to reach agreement and clarity about course expectations, especially assessment. Frequently mentioned impacts on quality included: variation in the depth and breadth of knowledge, inconsistent delivery styles, and disparate standards of grading, the outcomes of which often resulted in extensive time spent by Australian academics resolving moderation issues, and student and institutional complaints. In turn, these factors contributed to a non-conducive environment for team collegiality, manifestations of which were, reduced sharing of resources, fewer team teaching activities, and minimal social activities.

The third impact was that participants' confidence in their work was undermined by their interpretations of the attitudes and behaviours of some students to different types of academic staff. Most notable examples were students trying to change to classes conducted by visiting academics, the double-checking of information with the most senior Australian staff, and the perceived rating of academics on quality surveys in relation to their status rather than their teaching. Participants interpreted these actions as meaning that students believed that being taught by Caucasian fulltime staff from Australian institutions was more prestigious, and presumably of higher quality, than by other categories of academics. It was noticeable that concerns were expressed quite freely within the confidentiality of the interviews, but were said to be avoided in public discussion due to their sensitive nature; for example, some non-Western Australian participants thought student behaviours had undertones of racism, and casual staff were apprehensive about future work opportunities.

Similarly to their perceptions about situational resource support issues, participants believed that the quality of their academic work would be improved through more institutional support for effective management of human resources. This study indicated that human resource support could be improved in four main ways: ensuring adequate involvement of academics in selection of staff; planning and formalising induction and on-going development of local academics; providing opportunities to explore and clarify student perception of academic status, and their structural and cultural underpinnings; and engaging staff in structured facilitation of team work to improve the number and effectiveness of collaborative teaching activities.

The third type of support for quality improvement, institutional leadership, featured prominently in participants' interview responses. It was regarded as highly influential in shaping the nature of academic work, especially during teaching visits. The scope of institutional leadership in this study was restricted to 'co-ordinators' of courses and programs, as this was the level of interaction most often encountered by participants. Co-ordinators were seen as representatives of their institutions, who were in positions to play powerful roles in offshore work. They juggled multiple roles that included: team leadership, staff mentoring and development; dealing with cultural issues and quality assurance; giving advice, making decisions, and liaising between academics, students, and administrators; and promoting institutions and programs in public relations activities.

Of particular relevance to this study was the position of coordinators as interpreters and enactors of institutional quality policies, procedures and processes, which meant that in this regard, their attitudes and behaviours had direct and tangible impacts on the quality of work of other academics. Bendermacher, oude Egbrink, Wolfhagen and Dolmans (2017) identified leadership and communication as being key factors in uniting the structural/managerial and cultural/psychological elements of a quality culture, which is characterised by staff commitment, staff and student satisfaction and learning, shared ownership, empowerment, and knowledge. Leaders are the central drivers of development when they influence resource allocation, clarify roles and responsibilities, create partnerships, and optimise people and process management. Effective

communication by leaders allows dissemination of quality strategies and policies, the evaluation of outcomes, and the ascertainment of staff values and beliefs.

It was found that, in addition to the range of roles and responsibilities assigned to coordinators, their personal attitudes and behaviours, especially leadership style, largely determined the extent of their impacts on others' work. For example, participants expected professional academic autonomy in relation to determining the standards of their classroom teaching activities, but this was challenged when co-ordinators tightly specified or standardised the content of materials, classroom activities and assessment tasks. In general, more participative, collaborative leadership approaches, which focused on involving and supporting staff, especially in teams, were preferred to, and believed to be more effective than, overly directive, micromanaging styles.

The multiplicity of responsibilities of offshore co-ordinators, coupled with an absence of formal criteria or training for the position, indicated the need for reviewing relevant selection criteria for offshore leadership positions, supported by the provision for specifically targeted training and development. Effective selection and training of co-ordinators could, for example, lead to benefits for new academic staff, such as: career advice, explicit feedback, alignment of required skills and abilities to deliver subject content, suitable communication skills for interacting with diverse constituencies, and greater understanding of ethical responsibilities and learning environments (Austin 2002).

In addition, the insights about the nature of the involvement of local offshore staff drawn from this study, indicated the clear potential for further consideration of a balance between Australian-based quality control of work, and the likely value for more devolvement of control to offshore institutions and academics. As Ling, Mazzolini, and Giridharan (2014) argued, the probable benefits of such an approach include: increased commitment and greater career opportunities for local academics; richer educational experiences for their students; and more opportunities for home campus academics to demonstrate understanding of transnational curriculum design and implementation, as well as providing more opportunities for other career development.

Concluding Comments on Institutional Quality

In view of this assessment of institutional attributes, the contributions to concepts of quality of offshore academic work can be framed from the perspective of resource support for continuous improvement. Key elements were preparation and review, situational and human resources, and leadership by coordinators. Beyond the identified practical contributions of these resources to effective work, they were also perceived as indicative of the value that institutions placed on offshore work and staff. Furthermore, the reduced emphasis on, and somewhat formulaic approach to, staff preparation and review, as well as the staffing and leadership issues raised, were indicative of a possible complacency by institutions and some staff that on-going refinement of staff selection processes and development were not current quality imperatives. A corollary of this is the probable belief that all staff members were already appropriately equipped to operate competently in offshore programs. This study would suggest, however, that such assumptions should be re-evaluated by institutions, and reflected upon by academics, in order to promote optimum selection, application and development of situational and human resources to support the continuous improvement in offshore academic work.

Academics as Reflective and Active Conduits for Learning: Identifying Enabling Characteristics and Developing Effective Practices

It is reasonable to predict that academics in offshore programs would benefit from particular attributes that would assist them to successfully undertake high quality work, and, as the empirical evidence from participants clearly demonstrated, a range of enabling characteristics and effective practices were discovered in this study. As a consequence, this final discussion section focuses on the academic attributes that contributed to concepts of quality offshore academic work. Furthermore, it links, and provides greater depth to, the understanding of several themes identified in the three attributes related to curriculum, students and institutions. A major conclusion derived from the patterns in the

perceptions and behaviours in this study, is that participants viewed themselves, primarily, as facilitators of their students' learning processes and outcomes, and, in order to do so, they required an ongoing and active engagement with their own learning and development. Therefore, such academics could be described as reflective practitioners who were, simultaneously, active conduits for their own and others' learning.

As discussed in the preceding examination of curriculum, student and institutional attributes, developmental opportunities offered by institutions to academics for offshore work were often viewed as limited in effectiveness. They were evaluated as somewhat simplistic in cultural content, generic and superficial with regard to teaching and learning concepts and skills, and not well matched or timed to meet individual needs and programs. Further, the findings indicated that, whilst largely concurring with the literature, this study also revealed that the shortfalls in such institutional activities were ameliorated in individuals with specific characteristics which, when well-honed, enabled them to more effectively immerse themselves within offshore contexts. Three personal elements were pinpointed: enabling characteristics, effective classroom teaching practices, and the ability to work in teams with colleagues. The following discussion assesses the synergistic contribution of these themes to constructions of quality academic work.

In this study, the collective term 'enabling characteristics', was used to encapsulate the three categories of cultural curiosity, personal resilience and reflective practice orientation. The label for each characteristic was specifically composed to vividly reflect the essence of the meanings attributed to them by participants. When considering what could constitute cultural curiosity, Liddicoat's (2003) argument that intercultural competency depended on the ability to critically reflect on one's own identity, and also to negotiate cultural differences, was in line with participants' descriptions. However, this study elaborated on these concepts to encompass a combination of individual predispositions, influences and actions, which was termed 'cultural curiosity'. Key factors were: an inherent interest and respect for other cultural perspectives; proactive actions to become immersed in other cultural settings; and a willingness to learn from, and with, colleagues and students. While interaction with others, in particular, was pivotal to cultural curiosity, it also served to highlight the tensions inherent in determining

appropriate levels of contact. A telling example was that social relationships with students, especially beyond the classroom, had the positive outcome of fostering rapport, but was also a potential source of cultural misunderstandings and miscommunications in relation to issues such as power-distance (Hofstede 2010), perceived favouritism, and implied obligation between academics and students.

From the reported concerns about such dilemmas, coupled with the typical cultural development activities offered by institutions, such as generic online guides and seminars, rather than in-depth training, such as intensive face-to-face pre-departure or review programs, a problem emerged. It would seem that an underlying assumption held by institutions, and, arguably, by many staff, was that contemporary Australian academics were already sufficiently 'internationalised' and 'acculturated' as to be culturally competent and, indeed, have interchangeable competency across all locations. However, as shown in this study, the need for assistance in self-identification and development of relevant cultural characteristics, such as guidance in gauging the appropriate nature and extent of interactions with students and local staff, would suggest a re-examination of this assumption is merited. Moreover, in the interests of mutual responsibility for learning, and in order to better support the quality of academics' offshore work, institutions could re-examine their existing offshore cultural development activities in the context of actual, rather than perceived, staff competencies and learning needs. In turn, academics could proactively seek out or, ideally, contribute to, the design of more specific and targeted learning opportunities.

In combination with cultural curiosity, participants with high levels of personal resilience appeared to more effectively manage the balance of demands between work and life in different contexts. Resilience is generally situated in the discourse of 'teaching as emotional practice', which is a socially constructed concept that is developmental in nature (Gu & Day 2007). Personal characteristics linked to resilience, such as cognitive, emotional and social intelligence competencies, are likely to impact on effective performance (Boyatzis 2011). This study builds on these concepts to include physical, emotional and social elements specific to offshore settings. Practical physical dimensions which required resilience were mainly associated with travel and accommodation, health

issues, limited resource support, intensive mode of delivery, playing multiple roles, and the strain of coping with cultural and language differences. Social resilience was useful across many dimensions including the transfer of knowledge and skills to students, collaboration with Australian and offshore colleagues, as well as interactions within the general Hong Kong society. Effective social skills, which were in themselves linked to tendencies towards extraversion, collaboration and self-development, were identified as essential for the effective facilitation of this range of activities. Despite the fact that participants' examples demonstrated that competence in these skills was lacking in some academics, there was scant evidence of formal recognition, feedback mechanisms or developmental activities to address or intervene in these issues. It is possible to surmise that institutions and other stakeholders, such as coordinators, made assumptions that all academics would possess adequate physical, emotional and social skills.

There were three other major insights relating personal resilience to conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. Firstly, emotional resilience, based on a strong sense of self efficacy, and of control over professional and personal identities, was displayed through tolerance, positivity and creativity in coping with limitations in offshore work settings. It also provided the internal underpinning for effective physical and social behaviours. Secondly, academics believed that, as there was a failure to recognise and rectify the greater demands and poorer work conditions associated with Hong Kong programs compared to onshore, then institutions must place less value on offshore work. Lastly, aspects of personal resilience were discussed extensively amongst academics, suggesting that they recognised it as an enabling or precluding component of high quality offshore work, but participants emphasised that it was usually restricted to private conversations, including the confidential interviews in this study. One graphic example was related to unspoken offshore staffing criteria, that is, selection was based, informally, on favourable relationships between staff, and on snapshot perceptions and judgements of suitability from one-off survey data, rather than on longer term, more comprehensive evaluation of individual competence. Thus, it would seem that elements of resilience entailed both personal sensitivities, and, potentially contentious institutional considerations, which could act against open and formal discussion.

Such issues have been described as 'undiscussables' (Argyris 1990; 2013). Undiscussables are typically associated with: the avoidance of information that is potentially threatening or embarrassing, feelings of the need for self-protection, fears of the unknown, uncertainty and ambiguity, and a concern with appearing to lack competence. Baker (2004) asserted that conflict arising from unquestioned assumptions and differences are central to such undiscussables, and that learning how to talk constructively about controversial issues can reveal deeply embedded assumptions about, for example, management practice, performance of colleagues, unwelcome news, managing conflicts, and personal problems (Samier & Milley 2018).

In summary, these findings and conclusions supported the proposition that academics should be encouraged and resourced by their institutions to carefully consider their own personal resilience from a perspective of enlightened awareness of characteristics that are associated with, and would, perhaps, assist in predicting the quality of work in offshore contexts. This approach has the potential to help both academics and institutions in making informed choices about suitability for offshore work, and for devising personalised, needs-focused developmental activities aimed at supporting high performance in staff, together with effectiveness and sustainability in offshore programs. However, the probable benefits to institutions and individuals ensuing from a more overt acknowledgement and examination of personal resilience, would need to be assessed in the light of the sensitive nature of exploring personal characteristics, and the possible consequences.

Reflective practice has long been recognised as a means of augmenting teaching quality (Brookfield 1995; Dunn & Wallace 2008; Leask 2004; Ramsden 2003; Schön 1983). The third personal characteristic, reflective practice orientation, was categorised within the personal characteristics theme as it served to enable and support participants in carrying out effective teaching practices. It was also found that this characteristic was tightly bound to a strong self-perception of being both teacher and learner. The openness to reflection led to several forms of self-initiated learning and reflective practice approaches. These included seeking feedback from others, learning from exposure to the practices of expert colleagues, self-reflection on behaviours, and systematically planning and trialling

new techniques. It can be concluded from the nature of these examples, that the reflective preferences of participants emphasised a learning-in-action approach rather than learning-about-action. This highlighted the incongruity between the tendency of institutional offerings to focus more on information about offshore work, rather than incorporating the experiential, action-focused and learner-centred preferences that were valued by many academic practitioners in this study.

Taking into account this apparent gap between institutional approaches to fostering reflective practice and the identified needs of participants, it is possible to further develop the linkages between reflection and learning preferences through the lens of Rogers and Freiberg's (1994) concept of co-learning between teacher and student. This concept is pertinent and timely to contemporary offshore classroom teaching, as there are concentrated opportunities for the two-way exchange of cultural learning between academics and students. In addition, further value can be added to an orientation to reflective practice when it is considered as part of a detailed and planned approach, such as action learning, a prerequisite for which is to begin with the needs and experiences of learners (Revans 1980). Accordingly, preferred learning activities identified in Chapter Four, such as pre- and post-debriefing sessions with experienced colleagues, peer reviews of classroom teaching, and planned and structured mentor relationships, could be built upon to more accurately match academics' personal learning and reflection needs. The benefits of such an approach would also address concerns raised by Gribble and Ziguras (2003) who found that, while informal mentoring and information sharing was common amongst sojourning academics, there was a danger of promulgating erroneous information and reinforcing inaccurate stereotypes. Thus, in the offshore context, a notion of co-learning that encompasses a mutual and shared responsibility for learning and reflection amongst the relevant range of stakeholders can be further explored in order to formulate a fuller understanding of concepts of quality academic work.

The enabling personal characteristics of cultural curiosity, personal resilience and reflective practice orientation provided academics with a platform for quality behaviours, which were enacted in effective classroom teaching practices, and when working in teams with colleagues. A consistent element throughout the data indicated that a sophisticated

range of skill sets, especially effective communication that facilitated interactions between academics with students and fellow staff members, was a critical linkage between enabling characteristics and effective behaviours. Further levels of complexity were added by cultural issues and time constraints in offshore program design.

As identified in Chapter Five, the foundation step for effective classroom teaching practices involved addressing the expectations and responses of students as to the credibility and expertise of academics. In order to create a rapport and sense of trust within the limited time constraints of offshore programs, a culturally sensitive manner of communication, which conveyed a delicate balance of clarity, authority and humility, was found to be a crucial contributing factor. Building upon these early impressions, management encounters between students and participants relied on well-recognised communication skills, such as active listening, questioning, impactful presentation, and giving and eliciting feedback. This study also revealed evidence that high quality academic work was more likely to occur when these basic skills were enhanced with sound elucidation techniques, carefully nuanced verbal and body language, precise written skills, and with the culturally accurate use and interpretation of specific types of nonverbal communication. These latter points, in particular, involved proxemics, chronemics, pauses and silences. The following overview of the salient communication skills found to be relevant to the specific educational and cultural contexts of Hong Kong programs, is also offered as a discussion stimulus for comparison with other types of programs and locations.

One favourite practice that the majority of participants incorporated in their teaching was the use of metaphors, analogies and story-telling to explain, elaborate and ground complex concepts, with the intention of enhancing students' learning experiences and outcomes. Participants' examples resonated strongly with Wormeli's (2009) assertion that metaphors and analogies were highly influential in clarifying unfamiliar concepts in education. However, this approach was found to be less effective in transferring or, indeed, translating, information for the Hong Kong classroom environment, than it was onshore. A probable, at least partial, explanation is that, not unexpectedly, the types of preferred imagery were generally Western-based, idiosyncratic in language, and tended

to be abstract, rather than literal in nature. This combination of such features indicated the unlikelihood that a shared meaning would underpin this form of communication, therefore, mutual investigation is suggested.

Further insights into using imagery can be gained from Littlemore (2001), Pajares (1992), and Pittman and O'Neill (2001), who described analogies and metaphors as the expression of beliefs and concepts, and other knowledge. These communication devices were central to the means by which individuals recognised, conceived and filtered new information, and, when used properly, metaphors and analogies acted as 'shortcuts' to help define abstract and intangible concepts (Garner 2005). Nonetheless, despite these advantages, their effectiveness was necessarily constrained by the understanding and perceptions of the learners. This study builds on these perspectives by suggesting that a mutual opportunity and responsibility exists for academics and students to explore the meanings contained within their figurative language differences, with the intention of the construction of contextually applicable imagery based on local culture, educational traditions, organisational practices, and societal norms. Finally, this study suggests that a consideration of the effectiveness of symbolic language in different contexts need not be restricted to informal examples in the classroom, as curriculum materials and textbooks provided by institutions also require similar scrutiny.

Effective communication further assisted the quality of learning and teaching approaches by assisting participants in facilitating classroom environments that were conducive to student interaction in classroom discussion, and in-class learning activities and assessment tasks. The predispositions and skills of Hong Kong students to engage in these types of activities were evaluated as being, in general, less well developed than in onshore students. In response, participants extensively role-modelled desirable communication behaviours by consciously demonstrating supportive and constructive active listening and questioning, and verbal and non-verbal feedback skills. In addition, this study highlighted two specific practices. Firstly, the deliberate use of humour was considered a powerful technique, which, when employed confidently and sensitively, contributed to a classroom atmosphere that stimulated student interaction. Secondly, small group work was prevalent across several learning and assessment activities.

There is an extensive body of research on the use of humour in classroom teaching from the student perspective. However, as Nasiri and Mafakheri (2015) identified, less has been written from the perspective of the teacher. This study extended the exploration of humour as a teaching practice to the perspective of the academic within higher education offshore classrooms. While typical techniques included incorporating existing humorous materials into activities, and telling personal anecdotes and stories, the full potential of this practice appeared to be limited by academics' personality characteristics and preferences, and by a lack of confidence, real or perceived, in this aspect of cross cultural communication skills. As humour tends to be developed through observation and feedback, and as offshore teaching is often undertaken in teams, learning through team teaching with skilled colleagues presents a means for further learning in action about this teaching technique.

The second favoured teaching approach to facilitating interactive classrooms involved small group work. The benefits of team work are well-documented (Baker, Andriessen & Järvelä 2013; Belbin 2000; Katzenback & Smith 2003; Senge 1990), and were, indeed, a staple in the teaching repertoire of most participants. Encouraging interaction through small group activities appeared on the surface to be a relatively unproblematic proposition, but, in practice, there were quality concerns. The frequent application of this approach to teaching in Hong Kong indicated that it was generally assumed to align with a perceived Asian collectivist preference for engaging as a group rather than as individuals (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2000). For example, it was often intended to acknowledge students' comfort zones by providing them with opportunities to converse in their first language, and to take a shared responsibility for reporting on classroom activities. This study demonstrated, however, that as well as likely benefits, specific cultural factors gave rise to two barriers that caused deficits in the quality of student learning and the effectiveness of teaching practice.

The first barrier resulted from roles in groups and participation in class activities that appeared to be governed by a hierarchy based on a web of seniority, experience and gender. The ensuing group dynamics were unhelpful to individual and team learning,

when students with higher group status consistently undertook more prominent roles, and, therefore, reinforced and improved their skills, while others were overlooked or able to 'hide' in group learning activities and assessment tasks. Many participants felt they did not have the cultural knowledge or skills to openly address these complex and unfamiliar group dynamics, especially within the truncated nature of program contact time. It is possible that choosing to ignore these classroom dynamics was preferable to exposing a perceived or actual lack of competence to deal with these matters.

The second barrier raised controversial issues concerning the contradictions between espoused values and enacted behaviours of some academics and institutions. Group work was believed by some participants to have doubtful educational value for either individual or team learning in offshore programs. Rather, it was primarily used by academics as a means to simplify and condense assessment tasks in response to time constraints of intensive mode program structure and competing demands. According to participants, this went unchallenged by institutions, presumably, as it was a means of reducing costs. It could be speculated that, regardless of its actual value to quality learning experiences, group work persisted, as it preserved various practical advantages for academics, institutions, and students. Thus, rather than remaining as entrenched 'undiscussables', the inherent value of group work to learning, the underlying intent of its inclusion in classroom and assessment activities, and the skills of academics in its effective facilitation, all warrant consideration as to possible immediate and longer term impacts on the quality of student learning and effective teaching practices.

The final academic attributes' theme arose from a feature of many Hong Kong programs, which was that academics often worked together in some form of team activities. As noted earlier, the potential for synergistic learning outcomes for students working in groups is widely accepted in theory and practice; there is, however, little research which specifically examines academic teams in offshore programs. This study found that when teamwork was effective, it enabled a range of positive individual and collective learning and developmental opportunities between different categories of academics. For example, co-learning occurred when inexperienced staff had concentrated exposure to the knowledge and skills of experienced staff, who, simultaneously, refined their skills by

explaining and demonstrating their techniques. Specific types of contributions to quality work included increased offshore contextual knowledge, refinement of culturally appropriate teaching techniques, greater awareness of the uses of institutional quality metrics, and *in situ* role modelling and mentoring. These benefits to learning were more highly valued than information provided in institutional seminars or reading materials. By contrast, ineffective teamwork was reflected in diminished collaboration between members, misunderstandings in communication, inconsistent messages causing confusion and uncertainty for students and staff, and overall perceptions of poor program quality by students, academics and other institutional staff.

Fundamentally, team success seemed to be heavily reliant on the willingness of individuals to learn from others through sharing content, context, and praxis information. This also pointed towards an underpinning need for trust and commitment amongst team members. Furthermore, as discussed by Belbin (2000) and Margerison & McCann (1990), collaborative work depended, not only on interpersonal relationship skills, but, specifically, on a well-balanced mix of teamwork role preferences, skills and behaviours. The examination of experiences of participants in this study indicated, however, that effective teamwork tended to be serendipitous or opportunistic rather than the outcome of carefully planned selection and support for team development. Patterns in the data suggested four types of institutionally-controlled factors which, in combination with the characteristics of individuals, reinforced and exacerbated negative aspects of teamwork processes and outcomes. They were: the inappropriate mix of characteristics and skills of Australian and offshore team members and team co-ordinators; inconsistencies in course team membership over time; the lack of team skills training and development activities; and few formalised opportunities for team reflection and development during offshore teaching sessions.

In summary, the comprehensive and long history of research on teams strongly supports the assertion that effective teamwork affords a wide range of learning opportunities, but they were not fully exploited in offshore work. Taking into consideration the reported negative outcomes and the deficiencies in approaches to team selection processes and developmental activities, a key inference from this study was that institutions held largely

uncontested assumptions that all academics already possessed adequate team characteristics and skills, including team leadership, which could be seamlessly transferrable across all contexts. Therefore, a closer examination of assumptions about the nature of working with colleagues in offshore teaching teams, by both onshore and offshore institutions, and, indeed, by academics themselves, would provide a solid basis for further reassessment of this largely unchallenged component of academic work.

Concluding Comments on Academic Quality

Two foci were used to assist in understanding the ways in which academic attributes influenced conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. They were: personal enabling characteristics and effective practices. Notions of learning acted as both a broad lens, and a central uniting concept, which, in conjunction with contextual insights, assisted in both distilling the essence of each perspective, and in constructing a clearer understanding of their blended collective contributions to the fourth research issue, and to addressing the central research question in its entirety.

When examining the three enabling characteristics' themes, it was evident that learning opportunities were prevalent, but their uptake by academics was partially bounded by tensions, deficiencies and sensitivities. The characteristic of cultural curiosity, for example, provided a springboard for further learning, as there was a general willingness to actively engage with the Hong Kong context, yet skill levels for effectively doing so showed a wide variation. Further, the composite factors of physical, emotional and social resilience acted as sources of energy, and also as buffers for coping with the rigours of offshore work for individual academics. However, their significance to effective work was perceived by academics as going largely unrecognised or undervalued by institutions. Thirdly, reflective practice orientation was strongly linked to academics' images of themselves as being, simultaneously, teachers and learners, with preferences for learning-in-action, especially through co-learning with others. These forms of learning activities appeared to lack consistency in structure or planning, therefore, it was difficult to ascertain their effectiveness or potential as a basis for on-going academic development in

the offshore context. A final consideration was the identification of sensitive issues associated with these enabling characteristics, for example, when they appeared to be an undiscussed component of offshore staff selection criteria. As Argyris (1990) and Senge (1990) contended, organisational undiscussables, if left unaddressed, could eventually hamper individual and organisational learning, which, in the specific context of this study, would mean impeding the quality of offshore academic work.

The enabling characteristics identified in the study were enacted through effective classroom teaching practices. These practices aimed to: demonstrate the expertise and credibility of academics; create rapid rapport with students; convey and clarify written and verbal meanings; and encourage a classroom climate conducive to learning through interaction. This study indicated that the achievement of these classroom teaching outcomes was perceived to be directly linked to the effective application of a complex set of communication skills. Basic listening, feedback and questioning techniques were used to deliver information, and to role model and reinforce the development of communication and interaction skills in students. In addition, highly successful offshore teaching practices were described as requiring non-verbal communication, story-telling, figurative language, and humour. Despite the acknowledged positive quality impacts of these forms of communication skills onshore, it was evident that, often, they did not readily transfer, with the same impact, to the culturally complex offshore context. Thus, this study indicated that there was a consistency in responses about the fundamental importance of effective communication to learning, facilitated through quality teaching practices, but the applicability and transferability for offshore academic work required further investigation.

While effective communication skills were, undisputedly, a basis for all aspects of offshore academic work, small group activity was also a teaching practice that specifically contributed to interactive classroom environments that supported student learning. In addition to culturally-governed learning limitations on team dynamics, this study also exposed tensions between the widely-accepted view that student team work would, undoubtedly, have beneficial learning effects for individuals and teams as a whole, and the elucidation of the often unspoken, hidden agendas behind its implementation. The

underlying drivers of team work activities provided another example of organisational undiscussables. It is possible to speculate that tacit or unconscious agreement existed between staff, students and institutions to accept the surface learning advantages of team work in classroom and assessment activities, and to avoid too close a scrutiny of other agendas, such as reduced workloads for these stakeholders.

Finally, the essentially unchallenged acceptance of the value of teamwork to learning was extended in this study to a consideration of academics working in teams with colleagues. Similarly to student teams, the composition of academic teams was unlikely to be based on a conscious, consistent, or planned selection of members with a balance of appropriate team skills. Accordingly, this study both confirmed the potential for positive contributions of team work to the quality of learning and teaching for students and academics, but also identified the challenges and deficiencies in its execution in offshore programs. A further insight was that a well-rounded evaluation of team work was obscured, at least partially, by unexamined motivations about the purposes of team work, and implicit assumptions that both students and academics already possessed sufficiently developed team skills to function effectively in offshore teams. The deficit of evidence of institutional support for the identification and on-going development of such team skills reinforced these suppositions. These findings suggested that a reconsideration of such assumptions about teamwork would assist in examining the complex mosaic of quality academic work in the Hong Kong context.

Figure 6.2 depicts a provisional framework developed from the contextual environment, extrinsic and intrinsic factors, and their associated attributes and qualities that this study established had contributed to participants' conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. The components of this framework represent the overarching patterns and meanings which were cyclically derived and constructed from the description, analysis, synthesis and interpretation of the data. In addition, the research indicated that learning concepts and approaches not only underpinned the nature of individual components, but also facilitated the interconnectedness between them.
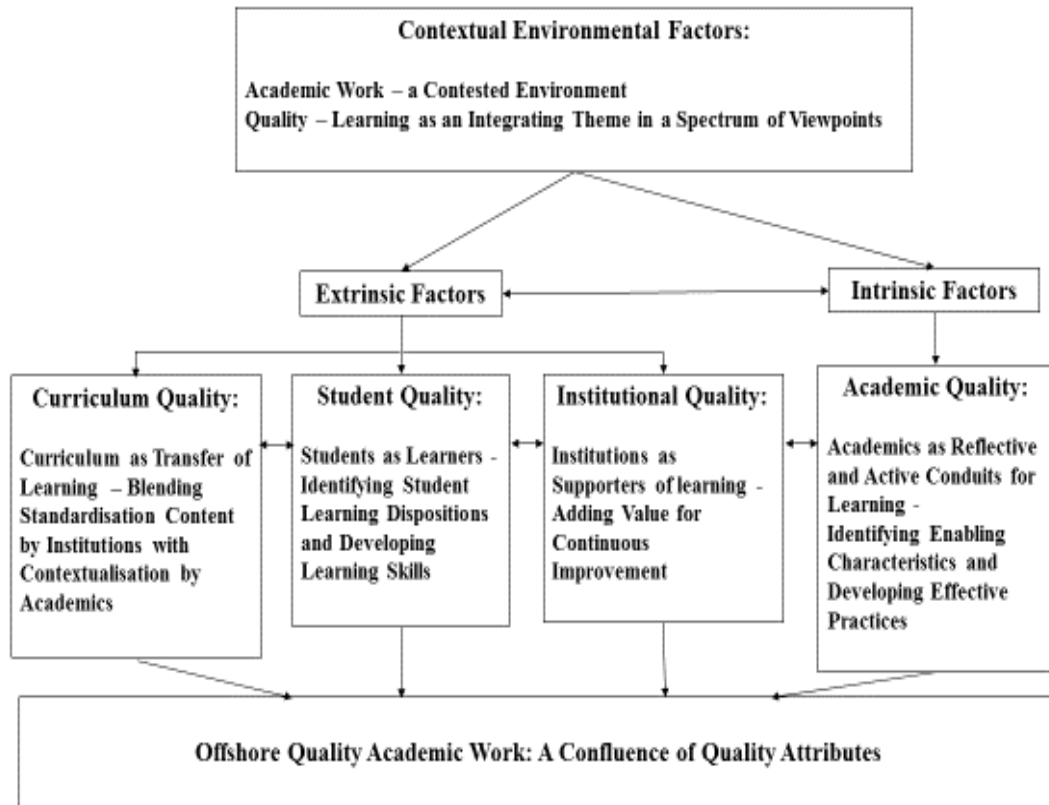
Figure 6.2 A Confluence of Quality Factors and Attributes

Conclusion

This chapter described and integrated the findings and conclusions for the four research issues which, together, were the means of addressing the central research problem. The contextual environment, extrinsic and intrinsic factors that contributed to conceptualisations of quality academic work in the offshore context were identified and examined. The combination of the two contextual environment factors, namely the nature of academic work and notions of quality, provided a basis for the analysis and interpretation of the curriculum, student, institutional and academic attributes which shaped conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. This analysis suggests that the overall quality of this type of work was dependent upon the effective confluence of the quality contributions of each of the four attributes. Furthermore, synergistic

interconnections between them were enhanced by specific dispositions, opportunities and support to explore different learning perspectives in the interests of promoting mutual learning. It could be said, then, that learning is pivotal to the achievement of offshore quality academic work. However, as the data also revealed, there are numerous potential blockages to the successful merging of factors and attributes. Chapter Seven concludes this study by reviewing the outcomes of the research process in terms of the central research question. It offers for discussion by interested parties, the final version of the framework for offshore quality academic work, which was constructed progressively throughout this study, as well as suggestions for practice and future research.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations
of the Study

Introduction

This study investigated how academics in Australian universities conceptualised the quality of their academic work in offshore programs. It aimed to contribute to the body of knowledge on this aspect of international education by offering detailed accounts of the factors that influenced this type of work. The intention was to collect qualitative data from a small group of lecturer level academics, who had taught in Hong Kong business degree programs, in order to gain a deep understanding of the ways in which they made sense of their experiences.

In this chapter, the key conclusions, and their accompanying implications and recommendations for practice, represent the final consolidation and extension of the thematic analysis of data, the identification of patterns of themes, and the interpretive constructions undertaken throughout the research process. The preceding chapter detailed the findings and conclusions which were constructed from the empirical data, theoretical concepts and researcher insights. It also emphasised where the identified themes confirmed, contrasted or extended the existing fields of knowledge which informed this research. This final chapter expands the focus to a review and reflection on the process and outcomes of the study in its entirety.

To achieve this end, the chapter revisits the contemporary higher education context in which the study was situated, and it recaps the main findings and conclusions in terms of the quality attributes and overarching themes embedded within the three groups of factors that, in combination, addressed the central research question. As this research is positioned within the setting of a professional doctorate, implications for practice are germane to the outcomes, therefore such implications are identified for each of the key

factors. Where appropriate, the significance of findings of the study are further demonstrated through recommendations that point to opportunities for improvements, which may better enable and support practitioners and other stakeholders in attaining and sustaining high quality academic work in offshore programs. Suggestions for future research and concluding comments are offered for consideration by interested stakeholders.

The complex and changing landscape of Australian higher education in recent decades has been affected, in particular, by four intertwining and interdependent factors: the necessity for institutions to seek new forms of financial resourcing to compensate for reductions in government funding; an increased emphasis on globalisation and internationalisation, including offshore or transnational programs; formalisation of quality policies, procedures, processes and measures; and trends within the academic profession which have challenged traditional notions of professional identity and autonomy, and professional practice.

Academic research and governmental reviews, as well as wider general media, have given much attention to these influences on contemporary higher education. Although research in recent years indicated their increasing importance to Australian institutions, and to the changing nature of academic work (Leask 2009; Mazzolini *et al.* 2012), there has been less focus on the subcategory of offshore programs, especially from the viewpoint of academic practitioners who teach within them. As these environmental trends are likely to continue, the findings and implications of this study need to be viewed against the constraints of this dynamic background. By taking account of the ways in which academics, themselves, conceptualised offshore quality academic work, it is likely that insights can be gained to better support this component of work for existing and future academics and, potentially, for some contribution to be made to the more effective overall performance of institutions, and to the higher education sector as a whole.

The impetus for this study commenced with the supposition that academics with working experience in offshore programs would hold notions of quality academic work which would be influenced by that particular context. The central research question was

developed in the light of background literature regarding trends and impacts of internationalisation, and of quality, on academic work in higher education. It is expressed as:

> *How is quality academic work conceptualised by academic practitioners in higher education offshore programs?*

In order to investigate this question in sufficient depth, specific sensitising concepts were drawn from literature relating to what this study designated as contextual environment factors (the nature of contemporary academic work and concepts of quality), and, as adapted from Schwab's (1973) commonplaces of education, factors extrinsic to the academic (curriculum, student and institution), and the intrinsic factors of academics. Four research issues and their accompanying research sub-questions, designed to address the research central question, were constructed.

A constructivist methodological approach was chosen as the most appropriate means of building a comprehensive and multifaceted picture of the conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work, as held by 16 higher education academic practitioners, from three Australian universities. After careful consideration, the extent of lecturing experience in Hong Kong courses and their matching Australian courses was determined as the primary requirement of participant selection. The intent was to enable a more targeted focus on one offshore contextual setting, which, it was anticipated, would increase the likelihood of both comparing participants' similar experiences, as well as revealing finer levels of difference. As Ryan (2006) advised, higher levels of analysis depend on the researcher reading for detail and looking for nuance, in order to unearth significant patterns of consistency or shared features, as well as differences and variations, within and across, participant responses. The parameters of this study were mindful of this advice.

In accord with the methodological perspective, the main findings of the research issues, derived from individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews, were presented as collective thematic (re)constructions of data, which were supported and evidenced, liberally, by direct quotations and anecdotes. Thus, the voices of the participants were predominant in the reporting of findings in Chapters Four and Five. The approach was innovative in

design in that the collective essences of their stories were woven in a narrative fashion throughout the discussion. This closely mimicked their telling in the interviews and, therefore, remained true to the data. In Chapter Six, the analysis and sense making of the contextual environment, extrinsic, and intrinsic factors were further developed through relevant theoretical concepts, and my experience of the research context. Insights from these sources allowed, simultaneously, immersion in the subtleties of the detail in the data, while being cognisant of broader patterns and themes constructed from the data. In this way, contributions that this study has made to the extant body of knowledge were also identified and illustrated.

The conclusions from the extensive, systematic investigation undertaken, suggested that there is a complex confluence of influences and attributes that shaped conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work, with accompanying implications for the practice of academics, and, in all likelihood, for other stakeholders. In summary: contemporary academic work was enacted in a dynamic, turbulent and contested international environment; there was a spectrum of notions of quality linked by a shared concern for learning; transferable curriculum merged standardised subject content with localised contextualisation; the quality of student learning was underpinned by their dispositions and skills; targeted institutional support was required for continuous improvement; and academics, with personal enabling characteristics that underpinned their culturally-sensitive practices, tended to be reflective and active conduits for their own learning and the learning of others. The process of determination of each of these broad themes was unveiled in Chapter Six.

Learning underpinned and linked the above themes. Learning perspectives were explored in depth in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. This component of the fields of knowledge that contributed to this study was critical to the analysis, interpretation and construction of concepts, in four main ways: aspects of learning were identified as recurring and persistent themes early in the sorting of data for all participants; the concepts, terminology and approaches associated with each perspective, provided a language both to interpret and to represent participants' learning perspectives; the restrictions on participants effectively enacting their preferred classroom learning styles

and approaches revealed tensions in teaching in offshore contexts; and perspectives on learning, for example, social learning, informed recommendations derived from the study.

Figure 7.1 visually depicts this confluence. The key themes and conclusions that emerged from the synthesis of the data, and the implications and recommendations for each of the three groups of factors, are presented in the following paragraphs.
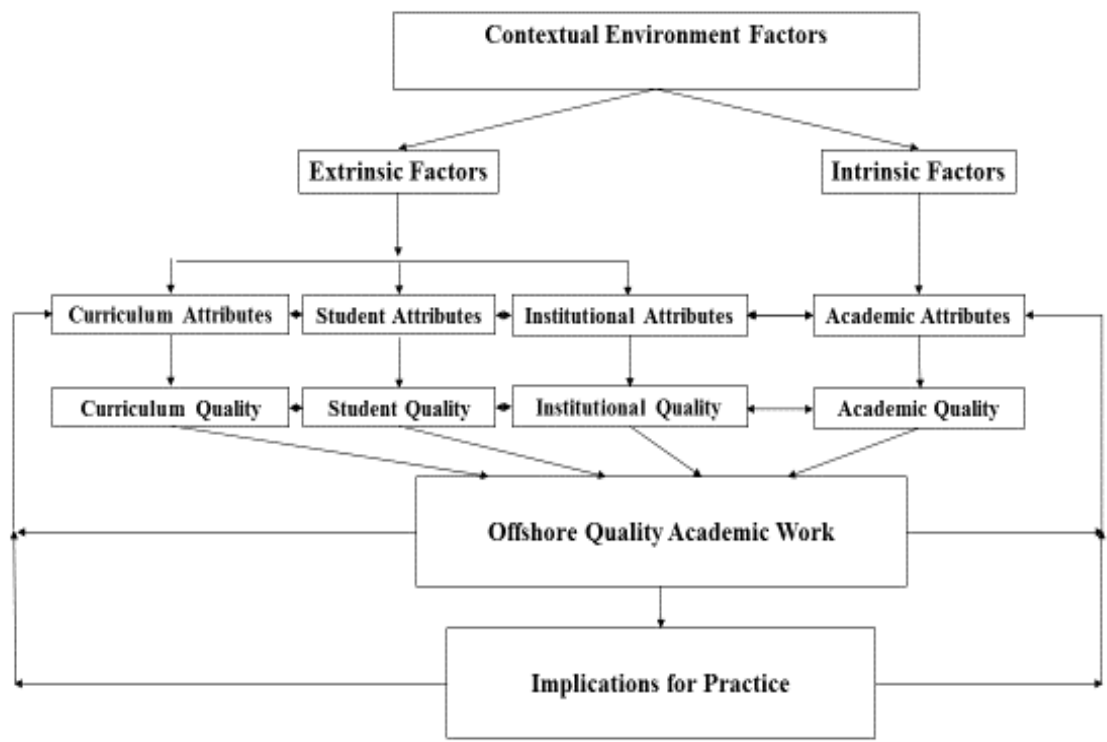
Figure 7.1: Offshore Quality Academic Work – a framework for theory and practice

Key Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations of the Study

Contextual Environment Factors

The two themes of contemporary academic work, and quality, in higher education were intended, primarily, as broad sensitising concepts to provide a background for the more specific exploration of extrinsic and intrinsic factors. However, valuable insights, which

arose directly from these themes themselves, prompted suggestions for improving practice. Contemporary academic work for participants was experienced as a contested environment characterised by multiple and competing demands between teaching, research and administration. A recurring concern was the tension resulting from efforts to balance the demands, motivations and rewards associated with these aspects of academic work, especially as participants' workloads were heavily skewed towards teaching, with little time for formal research. Administration was complicated, in particular, by the unclear boundaries between general and academic activities. Research was believed to be the most important component of academic work for institutional recognition and career advancement. In terms of the offshore context, academic work was made up, almost entirely, of teaching, along with some administration and representational duties. Academics were required to engage with a wider range of types of stakeholders offshore, than onshore.

Recommendations for Balancing Teaching, Research and Administration

The following broad suggestions and recommendations in relation to the offshore context may aid in simplifying the competing demands of overall academic work. For example, collaborative research opportunities between Australian academics and their offshore academic counterparts could be facilitated by an institutionally-devised, structured, cohesive and consistent approach. There is also scope for institutions to establish clearer role guidelines and boundaries in administrative roles between Australian and local institutions. Finally, in addition to reacting to student satisfaction surveys, more information could be sought directly from academics, themselves, about the impacts of different cultural contexts on their teaching practices.

Recommendations for Unearthing and Sharing Quality Perspectives

Exploration of the second contextual environment concept revealed that, although there was a spectrum of notions of quality, improving their learning and teaching practices,

especially in the interests of facilitating tangible improvements in student learning, was a main quality focus of participants. There were also strong indications that they believed that other key stakeholders, especially their institutions, had a different, more financially oriented perspective of quality. This was evidenced by the feelings of dissociation, disaffection and scepticism, in regard to institutional policies and procedures, expressed by participants, as well as any detailed knowledge or concern with global trends in quality was noticeable by its absence from the data. Therefore, it is recommended that taking a stakeholder approach to quality, aimed at gaining a more in-depth understanding of different perspectives and expectations, in particular, the re-evaluation of the spectrum of institutional norms, policies and directives, could foster more productive progress towards a shared understanding of notions and approaches to quality. Insights from double and triple loop learning, the learning organisation, and the benefits of developing shared social capital may assist in addressing this recommendation.

Finally, teaching was the main component of academic work discussed as a determiner of quality in this study. This was expected given the workload profile in the study. The quality of all three major components of academic work are, however, significant to the careers of academics, therefore a quality focus that incorporates the entirety of academic work, within local and other cultural contexts, is also a recommendation of this study.

Extrinsic Factors

Recommendations for Improving Offshore Curriculum Quality

The three extrinsic aspects of offshore quality academic work pertained to curriculum, student, and institution attributes. For curriculum quality, it can be concluded from the findings that it was viewed by participants in this study, essentially, as the effective transfer of content into context, through the synergistic blending of standardised institutional materials with contextual contributions from academics and other stakeholders, in order to better support student learning. Yet, as was identified in earlier chapters, there are wide ranging views on aspects of curriculum, including purposes,

definitions, approaches, and roles, as well as the impacts of internationalisation if higher education.

The viewpoints expressed by participants represented a narrow range of perspectives. They did, however, express frustration that, as practising academics, there were generally disconnected and distanced from the designers of the formal curriculum packages. This situation was exacerbated by the largely informal and individualistic contextualisation activities they undertook, which, in general, were not retained as a formal data base of improvements. A failure to capitalise on the potential inputs to design and contextualisation through the relevant expertise of Australian academics and, where applicable, of their offshore academic counterparts, and other stakeholders were likely hindrances to the continuous improvement to offshore curricula.

The discussion of literature about the numerous concepts of curriculum in Chapters Two and Six would suggest that quality of curriculum would be enhanced by a collaborative approach, and processes for capturing improvements in knowledge. Collaboration involving a range of key stakeholders has the potential to build upon the theoretical and practical body of subject knowledge, and to enhance understanding and bridge gaps between different perspectives.

It is recommended, therefore, that institutions provide opportunities to actively encourage more incorporation of the personal and professional curriculum expertise of an extensive range of stakeholders, including academics, designers, business professionals, and past students, to all stages of curriculum work, while remaining mindful that curriculum development is neither totally rational nor context free. As Lattuca and Stark (2011) recognised, it results from a complicated process embedded in a set of contexts that are large, complex, and somewhat unpredictable, and it requires adequate time and resources (Schwab 1973). For such a recommendation to be effective, a fundamental step would be to collaboratively examine and reconcile differences in values, assumptions, and perceptions of: what constitutes a quality curriculum in international higher education; what are appropriate learning perspectives for specific contexts; and what are the most effective ways to approach curriculum development.

While it would be unrealistic to assume this would resolve all the problems surrounding curriculum quality, it can assist by revealing a more holistic picture of the positions held by stakeholders. A caveat to these suggestions, however, is that, while this study indicated that more formalised institutional support for contextualisation and other curriculum activities would be beneficial, it also identified that, if not appropriately and sensitively implemented, such support could be perceived as interventions or threats to academic autonomy. Furthermore, this study raised issues that the typically transient and intensive mode of offshore work, as well as the inconsistencies and uncertainties in staff selection, and team membership and leadership hindered collaborative approaches and ongoing improvement.

Recommendations for Improving Offshore Student Quality

The second extrinsic factor encompassed attributes of student quality. This study suggested that, if more was known about the learning dispositions of students, and their learning skills were developed, the overall learning experience was likely to be enriched for students, and result in mutual learning for academics. Indeed, student learning was generally considered to be a significant reflection of the effectiveness of teaching quality.

A recurrent issue raised in this study was the strong preference of academics for interactive classroom environments; to them, this was both a familiar means of teaching, and a gauge of the quality of their students' learning. Three groups of student characteristics, namely, proficiency of English language, cultural and social characteristics, and learning and teaching styles preferences were identified as impacting on classroom interactions.

This study revealed that many of the perceptions about offshore student characteristics were based on informal and anecdotal discussions with colleagues and students, and through observations of student classroom involvement, especially in comparison to Australian classroom experiences. By comparison, the preferred institutional measures

related to student quality emphasised summative and quantitative information such as standardised entry level educational qualifications, analysis of results, and feedback obtained from student surveys. It appears, therefore, that a schism may exist between academics, institutions, and presumably, students, as to their preferred approaches to determining student quality attributes. This gap in perspectives was, inevitably, intensified by the inherent cultural and educational complexity in the offshore context. When different, and, potentially, conflicting perspectives remain unexplored, each party is likely to act upon their own partial views and interpretations of this component of quality.

It is recommended that, in order to obtain a more balanced view of student quality, existing institutional measures be more effectively merged with the less formalised insights gleaned from the experiences of academics, and direct input from students. Such a combination of approaches would provide more comprehensive, detailed and coherent information about the learning characteristics, preferences and behaviours of Hong Kong students. This type of information could be utilised to better assist academics in the clarification of offshore student characteristics, and their own positions on the modification of teaching approaches to promote mutual learning, while institutions could enhance the value of support to their staff and their students, based on a broader, but more integrated, range of perspectives. The offshore environment does, however, present particular challenges to achieving these purposes, for example, the specialised expertise required for understanding the influences of the local cultural and educational context of the students, and establishing effective forms of two-way feedback, given the typical relatively low level of individual staff engagement in offshore programs.

Recommendations for Improving Offshore Institutional Quality

The final extrinsic factor explored the institutional contributions to conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. In comparison to the other extrinsic factors, the extent, variety and emotive characteristics of examples and anecdotes offered in the interviews, clearly pointed towards the multilayered nature of this quality component. The notion of

quality as a supportive cycle of continuous learning and improvement was employed in this research to assist in categorising the extensive data into the stages of preparation and review, situational and human resources, and leadership of programs and courses. This approach was effective in the identification and grouping of tangible manifestations of effective and ineffective institutional support. However, less tangible, but, arguably, more profound insights were discerned from further close scrutiny of, and immersion in, anecdotal details. This approach revealed that academics not only relied on practical institutional support to enable and add value to their offshore work, but, perhaps more importantly to individual academics, they also appeared to perceive the quality of this support as an indicator or reflection of the value that their institutions placed on them and on this aspect of their work. As Wright (2005) discovered, alignment of individuals' values and perceptions of their work environments are associated with increased job satisfaction, lower attrition, better job performance, and a strengthened commitment to institutions. Academics who perceive themselves as not aligned with their institution's culture reported higher levels of job-related stress, and less overall work satisfaction.

It would seem, then, that academics would more favourably perceive institutional support that was designed with the intention of both adding practical value to the stages in the cycle of offshore work, and to overtly acknowledging the contributions of staff within the particular contextual demands and constraints of offshore work. Further, the incorporation of institutional supports, which more directly and specifically aligned with the existing practices, as well as the diverse expectations and learning needs of individual academics, would accord more closely with preferences expressed in this study.

It is recommended, therefore, that regular review of offshore conditions and resources, and support for professional on-going learning and development activities, be implemented. Activities characterised by consistent, regular and cyclical interactions with trusted peers, such as structured mentoring, leadership development, and team teaching opportunities, along with encouragement for communities of practice, would garner greater acceptance from academics, and would, consequently, facilitate more high quality individual and institutional performance improvement outcomes. These social learning activities accord with research, for example, by Keevers and Bell *et al.* (2014), and

Wright's (2005) suggestions that opportunities to interact with academic and institutional colleagues, including informal conversations, shared engagement in curricular work, authentic interdepartmental team teaching, and peer review are means to develop congruence between institutions and their academics that is conducive to work enhancement, academic satisfaction, and effective work environments.

Further, as the programs in which participants conducted their offshore work exhibited many of the features of Ling, Mazzolini and Giridharan's (2014) home campus control model, with its shades of colonialism, an institutional shift towards more distributed or transnational control models, which come closer to being post-colonial in their balance of power and control, has the potential to open up greater opportunities for knowledge and learning about quality academic work as a whole, by institutions and their staff.

The above exploration and assessment of the three extrinsic factors highlighted the key influences on conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work from the perspectives of academics in this study; this enabled specific insights to be gained about positive contributions and deficiencies to aspects of this work. In addition, the preferences, values and expectations of academics, as exemplified in this study, provided an informed platform for prioritising opportunities for quality improvements, and their associated recommendations. The merit of these recommendations was strengthened by the fact that they were derived from a considered selection of conceptual and empirical sources, however, they also need to be evaluated within the competing demands and constraints of the complex higher education environment. Thus, a suggested starting point for consideration of recommendations would be for institutions, academics and other relevant stakeholders to adopt a collaborative approach to the identification, comparison and re-evaluation of the spectrum of values, assumptions and expectations that underpin quality offshore academic work; the ideal aim being to achieve the optimal utilisation of institutional support for the continuous improvement of offshore work, while satisfying the differing needs of all stakeholders.

Intrinsic Factors

If the quality attributes of the contextual environment factors and extrinsic factors in this study were visualised as elements of an orchestra positioning itself on stage in anticipation of playing their individual parts, then the academic role was akin to a section leader or conductor whose pivotal role was to create harmony between these, potentially, discordant parts for a nuanced performance. This image suggests that content knowledge and practical skills that fosters coordination of the inputs of others players, may be fundamental to achieving more effective collective outcomes. This study suggested that there are likely to be characteristics and practices intrinsic to academics which would allow them to effectively merge the contributions of the external and extrinsic factors in ways that heighten the quality of their own, and others', offshore work performance.

It was found that those academics, who were both reflective and active conduits for their own learning, and for the learning of others, did, indeed, display particular enabling characteristics and effective practices; the identification and development of which, it is proposed, here, could have a positive synergistic impact not only on the quality of work in the offshore context, but in their teaching locations. The following discussion of the fourth research issue, including its implications and recommendations for practice, completes this study's answer to the central research question.

Given that the fourth research issue focused on academics themselves, it was not unexpected that the data offered in interviews were voluminous and wide-ranging in nature. In order to meet the challenging task of constructing patterns from this data, without losing the fineness of its detail, the analysis of the data was initially guided by two broad groupings, namely, academic characteristics and practices. Further levels of analysis pinpointed cultural curiosity, personal resilience, and reflective practice orientation as key enabling characteristics that were especially relevant to the offshore context, while effective offshore practices centred on the broad themes of effective classroom teaching practices, and working in teams with colleagues. As these elements were found to be both intra-linked and interlinked by concepts of, and approaches to, learning, the following discussion of implications and recommendations for practice

places emphasis on aspects of learning, and it highlights sensitivities and constraints associated with improving academy quality.

Recommendations to Identify and Develop Enabling Characteristics

The study established that enabling characteristics contributed to academic quality through their role in supporting effective practices. Thus, these characteristics can be thought of as supplying the potential for action. Three types of characteristics were identified: cultural curiosity, personal resilience, and reflective practice orientation. While most academics showed an inclination for engagement with the offshore cultural context in a general and informal way, academics with high levels of cultural curiosity displayed structured approaches to interaction, and to the acquisition of specific cultural knowledge and skills. Personal resilience encompassed physical, emotional and social resilience characteristics. It is well beyond the scope and intention of this study to speculate on sources which may have shaped personal resilience, but it was evident that this characteristic did contribute to academic quality by assisting individual academics in better managing specific stresses associated with their offshore work. Emmerling and Boyatzis (2014) contended that cultural relativism would suggest that competencies, such as emotional and social intelligence, may take slightly different forms within specific cultures, yet, previous studies have tended to focus on Western cultures. Thus, this current study hopes to expand this evolving area of research into an Asian context. While important to academics, personal resilience of staff in relation to their offshore activities, did not appear to be overtly recognised or valued by their institutions. The third characteristic, reflective practice orientation, centred on a predisposition for reflecting on ways to improve practice. Academics with this orientation tended to see themselves not only as teachers, but also as ongoing learners, and, in particular, they were open to learning from their own experiences and through co-learning with others.

The above discussion can only hint at the vast complexity of enabling characteristics as a component of academic quality, and, therefore, the following suggestions for improvement are only general in nature. Recommendations are: the provision of more

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structured opportunities for academics to learn about the local cultural context, and to develop skills to more successfully interact within it; targeted resourcing which acknowledges and alleviates the stress caused by the competing demands associated with offshore work; and the structuring of planned learning activities to support the development of reflective practice about offshore work. This last suggestion could be considered in conjunction with a communities' of practice approach where learning spaces are provided for staff to individually and collaboratively reflect, review and reinvigorate their teaching and learning practices. The success of such activities as vehicles for learning would be, however, dependent on the extent to which these opportunities are taken up, and their outcomes are incorporated into practices, by academics.

Recommendations to Identify and Develop Effective Practices

There was a high level of agreement in this study that quality classroom teaching practices led to interactive classroom climates which were, in turn, conducive to mutual learning for students and staff. The effectiveness of creating and maintaining such a learning environment was directly dependent on the application by academics of a complex array of communication skills. In addition to basic forms of communication skills, successful teaching practices featured an adept use of figurative language, humour and non-verbal communication. However, the possession of such skills, alone, did not appear to ensure successful transferability across cultural settings. Similarly, activities in small groups, used as a means of stimulating classroom interactions in onshore work, although helpful, were less productive vehicles for learning in the offshore context. Therefore, a recommendation is that the re-evaluation of communication skills in terms of specific cultural contexts would be a learning opportunity for improved academic practice, and an exploration of cultural influences on team dynamics would have potential benefits for both academics and students. Seeking the cultural expertise of local teaching staff, and Australian staff with similar cultural origins, would add value to this process.

The second effective practices theme focused on academics working in teams with colleagues. The prevalence of teamwork activities in higher education programs can be interpreted as a general acceptance, at least at a surface level, that teamwork is a valuable means of learning for academics, as well as for students. However, this study highlighted a number of deficiencies in teamwork in the offshore context that impaired this aspect of academic quality, and hindered the uptake of learning opportunities for better teamwork outcomes.

Prompted by insights from the data, and in conjunction with theoretical concepts, five recommendations for examining teamwork at a deeper level may assist practice. These are: identify the motivations of stakeholders for the use of teams; challenge apparent assumptions by institutions that all academics possess effective team skills; compose teams with a balance of suitable and complimentary team skills; offer diverse institutional opportunities for learning and developing team skills; and design evaluations of teamwork processes and outcomes that can contribute to an on-going cycle of improvements in practice. While these proposed activities are primarily targeted at understanding more about academics working in teams, they are likely to also be relevant to student teamwork. Although being beneficial in intent, it can be surmised, that such probing of the underpinnings of teamwork may also reveal tacit agreements that benefit stakeholders to the extent that, despite opportunities for learning, some would resist changes.

A final issue for deliberation, which arose from the close scrutiny of personal characteristics, skills and practices of academics in this study, is that factors that make a positive contribution to quality offshore work can be identified and developed, but, at the same time, a spotlight is also thrown on those factors that have negative impacts. While these negative factors may raise controversial and sensitive issues, if left undiscussed and unexamined, their impact would eventually further inhibit the quality of individual and organisational learning and performance. Thus, it is recommended that the challenging task of surfacing and addressing organisational undiscussables that negatively impact on offshore work, such as: informal ways of managing competing demands; degree of

personal resilience; staffing issues, and the purposes and value of teamwork, discovered in this study, is a joint responsibility for all higher education stakeholders.

Significance of the Study

An important aspect of this research has been to broaden the ways of understanding offshore quality academic work. Furthermore, this study sought to crystallise these conceptualisations from the perspectives of practising academics. With reference to this intention, this study integrated a range of contextual and theoretical perspectives. In Chapter One, the scene for this research was captured in the following statement: 'contemporary higher education is characterised by competing and diverse paradigms and agendas which, inevitably, are manifested in opportunities and tensions in the work of academics'. For example, the inclusion of the macro trends of internationalisation, and of quality policies and procedures in higher education, allowed the study to demonstrate how quality academic work was influenced by institutional responses to these environment contextual factors. Yet, the study was also able to show that academics made sense of their offshore work by constructing understanding from their personal characteristics and experiences, in particular, as they engaged with the curricula, students, colleagues, and institutional factors that they encountered. This is evidenced by the numerous themes that emerged from the data analysis, and is reflected in the conclusions. Thus, different higher education stakeholders are likely to perceive and experience quality academic work from diverse and competing perspectives. This study adds the voices of lecturers working in offshore Hong Kong programs to the existing body of knowledge. Their experiences and constructions of meaning may be of interest to others working in this area of international higher education, or conducting research, especially with smaller qualitative studies.

As less attention has been given in discourses on internationalisation to offshore contexts, and to the experiences and practices of academics working within them, this study sought to contribute to these relatively neglected aspects by interviewing academics about their experiences in the specific contextual setting of Hong Kong. The constructivist methodology and the small scale of the study facilitated the collection of extensive and

rich data. The semi-structured interviews that were employed, encouraged participants to provide full and detailed accounts from their perspectives as practising academics. The application of a learning lens and a cultural lens, in particular, informed the data analysis so as to more clearly elucidate the underlying values, assumptions and perceptions inherent in different learning and cultural perspectives, and the manner in which they are manifested in learning and teaching activities. This multi-faceted approach enabled a higher level of analysis and interpretation, and, therefore, the opportunity to present more layered and nuanced conclusions and implications for educational practice.

In these ways, this empirically-based and theoretically-informed study has added new knowledge to both broaden and deepen the awareness and understanding of the specific influences on academics that shape their perspectives about the quality of their offshore academic work. As demonstrated through the extensive discussion of findings and conclusions throughout the progressive stages of reporting, these influences were primarily contextual environment, extrinsic and intrinsic factors. When underpinned and interlinked, in particular, by a shared focus on culturally informed learning, these factors merge to form a more comprehensive picture of academic work. A purpose of this qualitative constructivist study was to build theory. The frameworks presented progressively throughout this thesis, which depict the stages of theory building, also contribute to the body of knowledge. The outcomes of this study, therefore, offer both conceptual and practical perspectives on answering the research question

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The scope of this qualitative study was designed to enable a thorough exploration of the central research problem and the associated research issues. In order to effectively achieve this purpose, the research was undertaken within specific parameters that aimed at facilitating an in-depth approach. Participant selection was restricted to lecturer level academics from three Australian higher, who taught general business management courses. The contextual setting was in higher education programs in Hong Kong. The data was qualitative and collected through semi-structured, in-depth, individual face-to-

face interviews. The methodological approach was taken from a constructivist perspective. Findings were presented as thematic patterns constructed from, and supported by, the detail of the data. The systematic collection and analysis of the data, the explicit and logical linkages between findings and conclusions, and the quality offshore academic work framework presented in this study served to emphasis the focus on authenticity, trustworthiness and rigour during the research process. Thus, it could be reasonably argued that the parameters applied in this study were effective for the purpose of addressing its research problem. A consideration of the possible limitations of these parameters, in conjunction with the key findings and conclusions, prompted the identification of possible future research opportunities.

This study offers the potential of extending the research into other offshore contexts for cultural comparisons and the evaluation of transferability of findings. As offshore education exists in varying formats other than subject-centred degree programs, the experiences of academics engaged in, for example, study tours, speciality workshops or education consultancies would offer opportunities to extend understanding of perspectives on quality academic work. Potential also exists to compare the perspectives of other categories of academics; differences could include academic levels, discipline areas, cultural origins, gender, and employment status. Given the close intertwining of the extrinsic influences shown in this study, comparisons with the views of non-teaching stakeholders, such as administrators or employers, of what, to them, constitutes quality academic work, may surface valuable insights about differences in assumptions and expectations. From a qualitative methodological standpoint, further triangulation could be achieved through larger sample sizes and focus groups. This study could form the basis of a mixed methods approach by adding quantitative techniques such as surveys, to examine the possible generalisability of findings. Finally, the framework developed in this study represented the concentrated essence of extensive data from this one specific study; it may also provide a useful scaffold for, or be further developed by, future research about quality offshore academic work.

Concluding Comments

Offshore programs have continued to be an important growth area in the Australian higher education marketplace, yet they have received relatively little attention in the internationalisation literature. This study was further focused by the inclusion of the theme of quality, and taking the perspective of Australian academics with experience in Hong Kong programs.

The overarching aims of this study were to make worthwhile contributions to this gap in conceptual knowledge, as well as to identify implications and recommendations for practice. In the pursuit of this aim, it was discovered that there were, indeed, particular factors associated with offshore contexts which did impact on the ways in which higher education academics conceived their notions of quality academic work. Furthermore, it was found that contextual environment, extrinsic and intrinsic factors interacted in dynamic and complex relationships which both shaped, and were shaped by, conceptualisations of offshore quality academic work. The quality of each of these multifaceted factors, and the effective synergy between them highlighted the connective thread of learning. These factors and their interlinkages are depicted in Figure 7.1, which is located earlier in this chapter. This framework for quality offshore academic work was constructed with insights from both empirical data and theoretical concepts during this research journey. It does not claim to provide a generalisable definition of offshore quality academic work, but is offered as both a representation of the lived experiences and perceptions of the academics in this study, and as an impetus for discussion amongst interested stakeholders.

This study provided an opportunity for academics working in an international context to reflect upon their experiences and learning, in order to make a contribution to the research into the quality of offshore programs. The majority of the workload of the academics in this study was in offshore classroom teaching, and their involvement was, typically, in infrequent, short term, intensive mode delivery of courses. These parameters may have contributed to a narrow range of viewpoints articulated about the broader contextual issues of international higher education, however, their perspectives on aspects of

learning and teaching were particularly rich and nuanced in nature. Thus, both the difficulties and the positives associated with offshore work were able to be expressed, and the messages for fellow academics and institutions may be useful for enhancement of the quality of content and delivery of similar programs, and for designing professional development opportunities for staff.

Essentially, it was concluded that offshore higher education programs are conducted in a turbulent international environment which is characterised by a web of competing perspectives. Therefore, academics who take part in them encounter a varied range of factors that impact on the quality of their work. As this study showed, the conditions of the offshore context experienced by participants heightened both tensions and opportunities in their work. This study identified key concepts and actions that were perceived as assisting learning, and higher quality performance, although these desirable features were not always encountered in practice by participants.

In particular, quality offshore academic work was conceptualised as being enhanced by opportunities that involved learning and teaching activities and environments that emphasised learner-centredness for both students and academics, such as: reflective practice, effective intercultural communication, collaborative teamwork, comprehensive and constructive feedback, adequate and targeted institutional resource support, and valuing and incorporating the multiple perspectives and contributions of stakeholders. The constructivist learning perspective is linked with several of these approaches, as are models of management and decision making in transnational education which exhibit more balanced sharing between home institutions and their transnational counterparts. Irrespective of these characteristics, individual academics will experience and conceptualise their offshore work within their own unique set of personal, classroom, institutional, and societal contexts, therefore, it is important for their own development, and for the future of quality international higher education, that their voices are prominent in offshore education research, as they are in this study.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Key Interview Guide Questions

1. What are academics' conceptualisations of their academic work?

   How do you describe the components that make up your academic work?

   Has the nature of your academic work changed in recent years and, if so, in what ways?

   In what ways, if any, has internationalisation of higher education changed the nature of your academic work?

2. What are academics' conceptualisations of quality in higher education?

   How do you define 'quality' in higher education?

   What has contributed to your definition of quality in higher education?

   How do you define 'quality academic work'?

   How do you determine the quality of your academic work at the classroom level?

3. How might extrinsic factors contribute to academics' conceptualisations of quality academic work in the offshore context?

   Are there any differences in the nature of the curricula in courses in Hong Kong compared to Australia?

   When you first worked in Hong Kong, did the way students learn confirm what you expected?

   What are the key institutional factors that impact, either positively or negatively, on the quality of your academic work in Hong Kong programs?

4. How might intrinsic factors contribute to academics' conceptualisations of quality academic work in the offshore context?

   In what ways, if any, is the teaching experience in Hong Kong different to Australia?

Figure 3.2: Key Interview Guide Questions