



FACULTAD DE LENGUAS

Dialogue in ELT Group-Based Thesis
Supervision: An Exploratory Case Study

A Thesis submitted to the Department of
Languages

For the Degree of:

MAESTRÍA EN LA ENSEÑANZA DEL INGLÉS

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DIALOGUE IN ELT GROUP-BASED THESIS SUPERVISION: AN EXPLORATORY
CASE STUDY

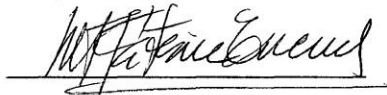
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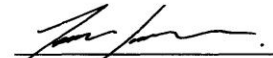
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Puebla, Puebla

November, 2017

Abstract

This thesis reports an exploratory case study of the use of dialogues in a group-based thesis supervision process in an English language teaching master's programme in a public Mexican university. The main purpose of this study was to investigate how these dialogical interactions occurred and how they influenced participants' perspectives on this experience. The data were collected via observations, interviews, and a focus group. Observations were carried out throughout the 2016 autumn semester and focused on a 7-student group under thesis supervision. A focus group and individual interviews were done to further understand dialogue occurrences and influence on participants' perceptions.

The research found that dialogue –in this case- was triggered and centred by artefacts. Artefacts served as twofold mediators; they mediated participants' understanding of their projects and participants' project explanation to others. Using a framework based on both Bereiter and Scardamalia's (2007) and Innes' (2007) categorisations, findings revealed that although different types of dialogue were used in the research group supervision, the use of each particular type of dialogue depended largely on the stage of the thesis process. In addition, participants reported that group-based thesis supervision provided a meaningful experience that modified their perception on thesis supervision and collaborative work. Finally, group-based thesis supervision seems to offer an alternative to individual thesis supervision that could benefit participants. It encouraged students not only to further improve their projects but also provided a source of motivation, modelling, and a sense of community in the complex process of thesis writing.

Acknowledgements

As it is well known, the success of any project depends largely on the encouragement and guidance of many others. That is why I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the people who were instrumental in the completion of this thesis.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my advisor Professor Fátima Encinas Prudencio for her support, wisdom, and tireless assistance which were determinant for the completion of this research project. My sincere thanks also go to Professor Roberto Criollo Avendaño, Professor Moisés Escudero Perales and Professor Verónica Sánchez Hernández. I am extremely grateful for their valuable and constructive suggestions that enriched this thesis. It was a real pleasure to have worked with them throughout the development of this research project at its different stages.

Finally, I would like to thank to the participants of this study. I feel so blessed to have shared this journey with them and witnessed every milestone of their work. I am so thankful for the opportunity that they gave me; I did not only observe their development but also learned from them, with them, and through them. This thesis is the result of a beautiful collaboration, creativity, and inspiration. Thank you to everyone involved in all levels.

This thesis is dedicated to my family. To my mum whose role in my life has been an inspiration and a model full of strength and courage to never give up. To Camila, Fernando, Valeria, and Mateo who give a lovely meaning to life. To Joe whose thoughtful conversations and questioning help me understand life; words alone would not express how thankful I am. To all my friends -especially Lupita and Marisol whose help was fundamental to embark on this master's journey- for letting me experience life with them. And finally, to all the people that I have met along the road for tempting me to become a better version of myself.

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Chapter I. Introduction

Creating and disseminating knowledge are two of the main purposes of universities (Boyd & Grant, 2017; Drenan & Clarke, 2009). These objectives are achieved when academics research and share such activity with other specialists and the community. In Mexico, such aims are reflected on the policies of different institutions of higher education. In a nutshell, universities promote the development of professionals and researchers with the objective of bringing benefits to the communities where these institutions are located. In addition, these research practices are often strengthened by scholars working along with students (BUAP, 2017; UNAM, 2017; UQROO, 2017). These statements have a stronger meaning when they are applied to graduate and postgraduate education since it is at these levels that most of the research is done (Boyd & Grant, 2017; Drenan & Clarke, 2009).

The English Language Teaching (ELT) field is no exception. As reported by Ramirez-Romero and Dzul-Escamilla (2013), in Mexico most ELT research comes from public universities – especially from undergraduate and graduate thesis projects as part of an initial stage of researchers’ careers (Ramírez-Romero & Pamplón, 2012). Therefore, it is relevant to explore how academics and students share a joint practice when writing a thesis – the thesis supervision process.

Research supervision aims to develop both students’ research skills and a standard quality achievement of the thesis. This entails experienced academics guiding students to apply and utilise research in their professional practice (Drenan & Clarke, 2009). Research supervision, then, is considered an essential component in any thesis project. Nonetheless, although the goal of research supervision is clear, the course of action taken by research supervisors and students varies as a result of different factors (Lee, 2008). In general, many academics consider supervision as an individual endeavour; in other words, a practice that

involves a one-to-one interaction (Dysthe, Samara & Westrheim, 2006). Despite this traditional view, alternative strategies are emerging and moving from a prescriptive to a collaborative model that emphasises dialogical interactions within group-based thesis supervision, which is the main focus of this study.

After this overview, this chapter is structured as follows: first, it presents a link between language, dialogue, and research supervision and the concept of dialogue in the knowledge-building process. Next, the research questions are stated and supported by a brief description on the research context which reports studies on research supervision and dialogue. Following this, the purposes of this study as well as its significance are presented. In the next section, the methodology is briefly described. Finally, some potential ethical issues concerning the participants of this project are explained.

1.1 A Link between Language, Dialogue and Research Supervision

Language is an essential component of any human activity. Through speaking, writing, reading or even thinking, individuals use the language resources they possess to achieve their objectives. The International Bureau of Education (2017) acknowledges the fundamental role of language not only as a means of communication but also in teamwork, critical thinking, and problem-solving processes. These processes are achieved through dialogue, which is a type of language use that allows individuals to analyse and evaluate any issue through its deep-understanding, achieving, and resolution attributes. Therefore, dialogue is claimed to be an essential part of communication.

People use the word dialogue in various senses and in all contexts of life. Concisely, it refers to the interaction among individuals to come to an agreement. It is also the means to peacefully communicate with others (Wegerif, 2017; Vitanova, 2013). Hence, the term is used to denominate all the practices through which individuals work with each other to

achieve common objectives. This notion permeates academic contexts in which there is an increasing call for collaborative work through dialogue. However, although the conceptions of dialogue seem common knowledge, there is still not sufficient clarity as to what the word dialogue exactly means in an academic context.

Wegerif (2017) observes that the idea of dialogue is widely used under a range of different cognates: dialogic inquiry, dialogic instruction, dialogic learning, and dialogic pedagogy. This notion has influenced education for a long time and has triggered different investigations. For instance, Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007) propose a classification of five levels of dialogue depending on the way the interaction occurs; Innes (2007) suggests a typology of problem-solving dialogue in regards of different purposes. Because each type of dialogue aims to reach different objectives, there is a need to understand how such dialogues are used in different education processes. Research supervision has been proposed as a dialogic interaction, therefore it seems appropriate to utilise Bereiter and Scardamalia's index to describe it. Consequently, this study focused on exploring how different levels of dialogue occur in the thesis supervision process as well as the impact that dialogic interactions may have on participants.

1.2 Significance of the study

There is an increasing interest in education research. A number of researchers (among others, Borg 2007; Burns, 2014; Ramírez-Romero & Pamplón, 2012) claim that education practitioners should engage with research due to its beneficial effects on teaching and learning. There is, then, an increasing research movement not only in general education but also in English Language teaching (Burns, 2014). This movement might have been the result of conceiving research as a means to explore particular situations and make informed

decisions. That is why this engagement with and in research is often believed to have the potential to enhance and improve the quality of education.

Besides its quality-enhancing characteristic, research helps to picture what is happening in the ELT context. Ramírez-Romero and Pamplón (2012) point out that most of the ELT research done in Mexico comes from individual theses. Theses aim students to put into practice a set of skills developed through different courses. They also entail supervisors and students working together to carry out such task. Because supervision of students' research and writing processes is an important aspect of teaching and learning at universities, it should be understood in lights of theories of knowledge and learning as well as theories of communication and text (Dysthe & Westrheim, 2003).

The importance of working with others when researching has been acknowledged by different academics (Burns, 2009; Griffée, 2012; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2008; Drenan & Clarke, 2009; Boyd & Grant, 2017). However, despite this recognition, it is still unclear how research supervision interactions actually occur as most studies approach either supervisors (Lee, 2008) or students' perspectives (Drenan & Clarke, 2009; Boyd & Grant, 2017) or even the implementation of new research supervision strategies as group supervision (Dysthe, Samara, & Westrheim, 2006). On the other hand, studies that aimed to describe actual interactions in the classroom took place at undergraduate programmes and focused on problem-solving dialogue in task based activities (Innes, 2007), and identifying different levels of dialogue used in an English language class (Morfinéz-Cortés, 2013). Because there is a niche regarding how actual interactions occur in research group supervision, this study aims to achieve the purposes described in the next section.

1.3 Purposes

Since research has been considered as a means to improve practices in education, I believe that it is worthwhile to carry out studies on how research is done with others –especially in group-based thesis supervision. Although there exists a massive amount of literature on how to do research –approaches, research designs, ways to start, relevance of working with others, and research supervision; there is still the gap in the depiction of actual interactions during the research supervision process. As claimed by Dysthe and Westrheim (2003), research supervision needs to be understood in light of knowledge and learning theories as well as theories of communication and text.

From this perspective, the description of how thesis students work with others might provide new insights about research supervision. Additionally, the idea of collaborative work in research supervision might prove helpful in the development of thesis projects held by students as a requirement to graduate. Although there is increasing work on the use of dialogue as a means of in-depth communication and knowledge building, its use in the research supervision is still unclear. Therefore, as a student of a master's programme required writing a thesis for graduation purposes, I am interested in understanding the process of collaborative work, especially dialogue, in the group-based thesis supervision process that master's students go through. That is why the purposes of this study are:

To provide an overview of the features and relevance of using dialogue in a group-based thesis supervision as well as the implications it may have on the individuals taking part in them.

To explore how dialogical processes occur between a supervisor and students when working on thesis supervision.

To provide insights that may change pedagogical practices in research supervision.

In order to accomplish these goals, a set of questions needs to be stated. These questions will focus the enquiry of this research and guide the research methodology for this project. The aim of the next section is to provide information about them.

1.4 Research Questions

Taking into consideration that interactions in group-based thesis supervision have not been studied, this investigation aims to answer three questions focused on the use of dialogue in a Master in ELT group-based thesis supervision.

RQ1: How does dialogue occur in a community of thesis students and their supervisor?

RQ1.1: What kinds of dialogue do thesis students, their peers, and their supervisor have throughout the research supervision process?

RQ2: How do these students perceive the use of dialogue in the development of their research projects?

This study aimed to explore how dialogue occurs during a semester of group-based thesis supervision process. It also attempted to understand how dialogue is triggered as well as to identify the different types of dialogue used by students and their supervisor during their thesis writing processes. The research methodology of this study is explained in the next section.

1.5 Research Methodology

Since the aim of this study is to explore how dialogical interactions occur among thesis students and their supervisor, a qualitative approach will be used. This exploration will allow further understanding how dialogue occurs among participants in the thesis

supervision and picturing not only the settings where dialogue occurs but also its effects on participants. The research questions will be answered through a case study design in which the strategies of data collection will be: observations, a focus group, and interviews with the participants. Analyses will be based on typifying the interactions identified according to Bereiter and Scardamalia's and Innes's categories; analysing MA students' opinions about the preliminary results through a focus group; and examining participants' insights through content analysis. All these components will be further described in chapter III.

1.6 Potential Ethical Issues

As in any research project, ethical issues might arise during the development of this study. Due to its nature, Creswell (2012) observes that there are particular issues concerning case studies. First, the way a researcher gains access to the people and sites to be studied is one of the biggest concerns. It is important to bear in mind that in a case study which uses ethnographic data collection strategies directly with and from the participants, the researcher needs to assure that participants are aware of the data collection. Furthermore, since researchers observe interactions in its natural context, they need to be respectful to all the people participating as well as the sites in which observation is carried out. In the same way, the researcher needs to obtain permission to record and use data preserving participants' dignity and privacy. All these issues were taken into consideration when developing the project as research supervision is considered by most as a very private matter.

1.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the relevance of research supervision was pointed out as well as the need to understand how dialogic interactions occur in it. As discussed previously, there are still gaps to be covered. Nevertheless, this research focuses only on dialogue as a fundamental

feature of research supervision and tries to cover that gap: the exploration not only of perceptions but also of dialogic interactions occurring within a group-based thesis supervision context. Thus, this study may provide findings for the use of dialogue in the group-based thesis supervision in ELT.

In this thesis, I shall approach the use of dialogue in a community of practice involved in research supervision. The first chapter provides background information to support the research questions and purposes of this investigation. Chapter two offers the theoretical foundation on which this study is based: socio-cultural and socio-cognitive theories. It also approaches literature regarding three concepts: knowledge building, communities of practice, and dialogue. Chapter three describes the design and the approach of this research, on the one hand; on the other, it describes the data collection strategies as well as the way data were analysed. Chapter four presents the results obtained from the analysis. Finally, chapter five discusses the findings regarding the literature presented in chapter II and its possible pedagogical implications.

Chapter II Literature Review

Research can be considered as a dialogue with other experts. The reason to claim this is that research is based on what other academics have done to build new perspectives and knowledge. Therefore, voices of the past help to construct new versions of knowledge in the present. The integration of different voices is seen in literature reviews, for instance; they represent and show the different theories on which studies are constructed. However, research does not take into consideration only voices of the past; it also regards the voices of the people who work together –such as thesis supervisors and their supervisees during the research process. This study is not the exception and considers three main concepts to support its theoretical foundation. First, it approaches the notion of knowledge building; then, it addresses its nature from two different perspectives – socio-cultural and the Social Cognitive Theory- regarding four features: scaffolding and vicarious learning, and artefacts and symbolising capability. Finally, it discusses the main concept of this work: dialogue and its five levels.

2.1 Knowledge Building

The notion of knowledge building has been a relevant issue in current education since it entails the use of available knowledge resources in the construction of new and meaningful knowledge. Its conception is the result of understanding a variety of practices and has undergone different shifts. Scardamalia and Bereiter (2003) observe that the term knowledge building is barely defined and, consequently, its uses are not very consistent. That is why for some it is conceived as another way of naming learning; whereas for others it represents a complex process in which students use their available resources to create new versions of knowledge. In other words, the former conception refers to a synonym of

learning; while the latter approaches the idea of knowledge-building as a sophisticated way of producing knowledge. Stahl (2000) offers an inclusive definition of knowledge building, stating that it should be understood as a social process with multiple phases. This social process does not only have an impact on personal but also on social knowledge-building levels. This view allows understanding the process as an eventual and not as one-single-occasion development. Gan and Zhu (2007) hold the view that knowledge-building is the process concerning both: how to help learners to acquire a specific set of knowledge and skills, and also helping them to use such knowledge and skills to be creative and contribute to the creation of new knowledge. However, although these attributions offer a conception about knowledge building, it is important to characterise its processes.

There are various processes underlying knowledge building. Stahl (2000) categorises them in two main groups: social knowledge building and personal understanding. The author suggests that in both categories there exist transformative processes and products of such processes connected through a dialogical constitution of the social and the personal. Although I could explain each of these processes in great detail, I consider that for the purposes of this study it is more relevant to approach the personal and social elements of knowledge building from two theories that have had a big impact on current practices: socio-cultural and socio-cognitive theories. However, it is not my intention to address all the components of each theory; rather, I shall approach the nature of knowledge, the social factor of learning, and the productive elements as they are seen from both lenses.

2.1.1 Knowledge Building from socio-cultural and socio-cognitive perspectives

Human development has been studied from different perspectives; nonetheless, there exist two that seem to dominate current tendencies: socio-cultural and socio-cognitive

approaches (Schunk, 2012; Ferrari, Robinson & Yasnitsky, 2010; Vielma & Salas, 2000). Socio-cultural theories – belonging to the constructivism trend - consider that development is influenced by cultural and historical elements. In other words, much of what individuals construct as their knowledge is based on social processes which become a sort of private speech (Schunk, 2012). These notions are constructed on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978), which claims that higher mental functions are the result of social interactions.

An interpretation of this conception is offered by Johnson and Golombek (2011). These authors report that Vygotskian socio-cultural perspectives support the idea that human cognition is fundamentally built through social interaction. From this perspective, cognition emerges from external social participation and becomes, little by little, internalised as psychological tools for thinking. Hence, this transformation is initially mediated by other people or cultural artefacts that facilitate the regulation of learners' psychological tools and, at the same time, foster learners' independent regulation of such activities. In this transformation, language, as a social and psychological product, contributes and mediates mental development through social interactions and learners are viewed as constructors (Van Compernelle, 2015). This transformation entails learners putting into practice different competencies to adjust emergent knowledge with others. In this sense, competencies are not located only inside one's brain; they can be verbalised and co-constructed through social interaction and artefacts. Another relevant feature is that contexts shape and are shaped by social interaction, which reflects the influence of cultural factors on acts of socialisation. That is why, in the words of Schunk (2012), learning is situated in personal, cultural, and environmental contexts.

Like socio-cultural theory, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) aims to explain how people go through developmental changes within a social environment. As any other theory

that regards this development, the SCT has its own perceptions on what human nature is and on how it is shaped by basic features like motivation and behaviour. It was proposed by Bandura (1989) and conceives development as a life-long process. This theory takes into consideration psychological, biological, and experiential conditions as enhancers and sustainers of human capabilities.

According to Bandura (1989), the model of causation explains developmental changes. This model has three different components: behaviour, personal factors, and environmental influences. These three determinants operate together and influence each other. However, the fact that they operate together does not mean that they influence each other in the same way since they are not of equal strength. Furthermore, their influence does not occur all simultaneously. As the author suggests, causal factors take time to first influence other factors and then to trigger reciprocal influences. Although these two theories are very profound and complex, I shall consider four features from them: scaffolding and vicarious learning, and artefacts and symbolising capability.

2.1.1.1 Scaffolding and Vicarious Learning

The ways through which knowledge is constructed vary according to each paradigm. For socio-cultural theories, scaffolding is an important element that is done through social interaction and represents support and guidance in learning (Bruner, 1984). The idea of scaffolding means that more knowledgeable adults or peers guide the learning of less experienced peers. In education, this idea entails the adequate support that teachers give to their students so that they learn successfully (Verenikina, 2008). Accordingly, van Compernelle (2015) observes that the idea of scaffolding is based on one of the main tenets of the socio-cultural theory: learning is first interpersonal and, through mediation, it is eventually internalised to have an intrapersonal function. This last notion emphasises the

idea that learning occurs as a result of the interaction between more experienced people and those who are moving from a lower to a higher state of knowledge.

For the SCT, learning is a process that implies both the social and the cognitive elements to move to higher levels. From this view, language plays an important role since it “becomes not only a means of communication but also shapes the form of thought” (Bandura, 1989, p 14). This theory conceives the process as either vicarious or enactive learning through modelling. Vicarious learning (Bandura, 1989) refers to the ability to learn from others’ experiences. It allows the processes of cognitive and social development to be quicker and guarantees the learning of experiences that do not occur in immediate environments. In contrast, enactive learning requires learners to have actual experiences. According to Schunk (2012), enactive learning implies learning from the consequences of one’s actions. As the author also suggests, when learners are to develop complex skills a combination of vicarious and enactive learning is desired since it provides a rich source of modelling.

In the process of learning, modelling plays an important role since it allows learning through observation. Observation fosters the acquisition of knowledge, rules, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes (Schunk, 2012). Through observation, learners perceive information about the usefulness and appropriateness of behaviours and their consequences; modelling can also promote knowledge in a wide number of people who do not need to have actual experiences to learn but learn through symbolic experiences (Bandura, 1989). Hence, symbolic environments become powerful in present-day human lives. Symbolic environments do not only provide with modelled patterns of thought and behaviour, but also with patterns that go beyond people’s immediate environments. In sum, modelling has a strong influence on how people develop. Modelling can encourage the acquisition of

competencies, cognitive skills, and behaviour patterns, motivate by inhibiting or disinhibiting, and arising emotions (Bandura, 1989).

Although these processes belong to different theories, I believe that they share features and explain the same development through different lenses. For instance, they both agree on the idea that there needs to be two kinds of participants –more experienced and less experienced ones. However, they see the processes from different perspectives; on the one hand, the socio-cultural theory emphasises the role of the more experienced person scaffolding the less experienced one, in other words, the relevance of social interaction to mediate learning. On the other hand, the SCT emphasises the ability of the individual to learn from others modelling. Even when they take different stances, I think that they complement each other; neither the guidance nor the vicarious capability on their own guarantees knowledge building; there must be an active work from both sides to succeed in the learning process.

2.1.1.2 Artefacts and Symbolising Capability

Artefacts and symbols are the outcomes of social interaction and modelling. These outcomes can be considered the result of cognitive processes through social mediation. The socio-cultural theory holds the view that artefacts are cultural mediational means (van Compernelle, 2015). They are called mediational means due to its meaning-making attribution. In words of Vygotsky (1986), cognitive change results from using cultural tools in social interactions and from internalising and mentally transforming these interactions. In addition, in Vygotsky's (1978) notion of mediation, such artefacts are central to humans' abilities to modulate their own behaviour, cognition, and emotion. From a Vygotskian perspective, it is through this process of 'heuristic development' that humans achieve a deep control over their own behaviour and thus some degree of agency. For these reasons,

people use artefacts to develop the figured aspects of their identities and thus manage their own feelings, thoughts, behaviour, and actions on a broad scale.

From a SCT perspective, symbols may be in some way the equivalent to artefacts. According to Bandura (1989), symbols enable humans to understand their environment since they –humans- cannot take everything as they see it. Symbols are mediation tools and affect cognitive structures and the way people behave (Bandura, 1989). In turn, cognitive structures determine the environment that people will observe, the meaning that they will give to it, how long its effects will last, the emotion and motivation it will cause, and how the information got from it will be organised. Symbols are used to represent passing experiences through verbalisation and imagination. These representations serve as guides to judge and act; they also serve as means of thought. Experiences provide the substance for thought; whereas thought influences how one views experiences. That is how one understands causal relationships and constructs knowledge. Schunk (1999) observes that learning is transforming information from the social environment to self-regulate one's actions; in other words, learning is the internalisation of social variables to self-influence one's behaviour.

Knowledge and thinking are essential tools to solve problems through cognition (Bandura, 1989). However, mere thinking cannot on its own be the source of any mediation. That is why I believe that artefacts or symbols are important in the construction of one's version of the world. Symbolisation gives foundation to other human characteristics; artefact creation expresses the views of the emerging knowledge.

As I discussed in this section, knowledge building is a process that requires many other processes. It is not possible to deny that it entails both social and cognitive elements. That is why I consider that it is fundamental to take into consideration socio-cultural and

socio-cognitive theories. It was not my intention to present them as opposite but as complimentary theories. Both will allow explaining how different practices –especially dialogue- occur. In the next section I shall approach the construct of communities of practice and how they are also connected to these theories.

2.2 Community of Practice

Current notions on learning have aimed to change different habits in the classroom. It is well known that learning was conceived as an individual matter. This conception led to the practice of teaching and learning in individualistic ways. However, these notions have evolved and given room to a more social conception of learning. That is how communities of practice started to permeate practices in education.

The idea of community of practice has its roots in the attempts of anthropology and social theories to explain the nature of human learning. Wenger (2010) states that in a nutshell, a community of practice is a simple social system. The author further explains that this notion cannot be conceived on its own but as an element of a broader social framework of learning. Hildreth and Kimble (2000) define communities of practice as a group of professionals who are aware of their connection to one another. This connection is the result of the exposure to a shared kind of situations, the pursuit to understanding them, and acquiring such knowledge. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) hold a similar view and declare that communities of practice refer to groups of people sharing a concern and deepening and understanding it through interaction on an ongoing basis.

Authors differ in ideas when stating what the theory underlying communities of practice is. On one hand, Wenger (2010) claims that communities of practice were born from anthropology and social theories. In this case, social theories seem to have a strong influence on communities of practice. Singh and Richards (2006) observe that a course

room, for instance, has social participation structures that enhance or inhibit learning opportunities and that are tied to artefacts, identities, and the cultural space in which it occurs. Considering these features, the authors conceive the course room as a community of practice with socio-cultural roots. On the other hand, Couros (2003) reports that initial ideas of social learning theory are attributed to a more socio-cognitive perspective. From this view, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory emphasises the relevance of observational and modelling behaviours, and attitudes and emotional reactions to others. Unlike socio-cultural theories of learning, this theory viewed the same development as a behaviourist and cognitive process resulting from the continuous reciprocal interaction between behaviour, cognition, and environmental influences. For these reasons, Couros (2003) affirms that Bandura's theory complements both ideas from behaviourist and socio-constructivist movements.

Learning in a community of practice implies a dual process of meaning making. As Wenger (2010) states, personal participation is a key element since social life allows engaging in activities, conversations and reflections. As a result of this social life, participants have their own outcomes and learning can be considered as meaningful. That is why meaningful learning in social contexts requires participation and "reification" (Wenger, 2010) which means making it into an object. According to the author, participation and reification allow negotiating and renegotiating meaning; in other words, both processes create a link between the cognitive and the social, the individual and the collective.

The notion of community of practice can be used in different contexts. Singh and Richards (2006) characterise its use in the language teacher education course room. Although their assumptions about communities of practice in the course room can be true

for different contexts, the characterisation of the LTE course room as well as their participants allow applying the abstract into real situations. The authors suggest four features that involve all the elements previously mentioned: identity, discourse, artefacts, and practices.

2.2.1 Identity

According to Couros (2003), identity is a fundamental element in an individual's participation in social processes. Although this author conceives identity as the result of changing who an individual is and creating a story within the community, Singh and Richards (2006) acknowledge that identities exist even before the learning experience occurs. As these authors declare, learners bring powerful ideologies, discourses and practices into the course room which makes a group heterogeneous. Wenger (2010) seems to share this view when stating that the focus of social learning is not the displacement of the person. In other words, each individual has unique experiences that will influence the dynamics of the social interaction.

However, all these authors agree on the idea that identity is not something that is set in stone; learning means becoming. In words of Wenger (2010), learning does not mean acquiring skills and information, it is "becoming a certain person, a knower in a context where things are negotiated" (p.2). Singh and Richards (2006) hold the same view when claiming that identities can be "woven through ideologies to find meaning in becoming" (p.4). For these reasons, identities should be considered as endless ideology-construction depending on previous ways of thinking and present social interactions as key factors that shape them.

2.2.2 Discourse and Practices

Social interaction needs to regard specific objectives in order to be profound and constructive. For these reasons there are social participation structures that strengthen or inhibit learning opportunities. As Singh and Richards (2006) declare, these participation structures entail both discourse and activities that shape the life of the course room and the way meaning and knowledge are built. These activities might require specific cultural practices that are the result of a longitudinal experience of negotiation, contribution, knowledge enhancement, understanding, and reflection. Practices and discourse will be further developed in the third section that considers dialogue in this chapter.

2.2.3 Artefacts

Artefacts are tools that mediate thinking. This concept is taken from Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and understood as the result of both social and cognitive processes. Couros (2003) declares that artefacts are ways of talking about a changing ability to experience life and world in a meaningful way. Hence, the production of any sort of knowledge in relation to the system can be considered as an artefact. As a result of collective and individual learning, artefacts strengthen emerging knowledge. That is why Singh and Richards (2006) point out that learning is tied to artefacts since they empower the different practices learners have in the course room.

2.3 Dialogue

The notion of dialogue is one that involves different features regarding the particularities of the situation in which it occurs. Its multifaceted nature allows studying it from a wide variety of perspectives going from simple information exchanges up to policy making practices. Due to this characteristic, Carbaugh (2013) suggests that the specific arena in which dialogue is to be investigated does not matter, it will surely offer insights into the

multiple scenes in which it is practised. In order to approach this concept, I shall first offer a view about the different conceptions that have been given to dialogue. Then, I will try to focus on the particular sense that dialogue will have in this study. Finally, I will address some characteristics that – I believe- are essential to the practice of dialogue.

There are different ideas about dialogue; however, I will start by offering a basic definition which considers the word itself and its roots. In essence, the word dialogue is formed by two roots coming from the Greek words *dia* and *logos*. Burbules (1993) reports that *dia* means through, whereas *logos* can be translated to word or meaning. From these roots, it is understood that dialogue is a flow of meaning. In addition, the author observes that there exists another meaning for the word *logos*. As he points out, in the most ancient meaning of the word, *logos* meant to gather together. This more in-depth meaning suggests an intimate relation among things in the natural world. Therefore –and considering the latter meaning of the word *logos*- dialogue might be better understood as the flow of meaning through a relationship. This definition is only one among many others which I shall introduce next.

Current research on dialogue often views this idea from a Bakhtinian stance (Wegerif, 2017). For Bakhtin (1984), dialogue is not only a verbal rejoinder between speakers or writers; yet, it is a way of perceiving the world and human beings' positions in the world. This perception of the world gives a special role to language through considering it a real-life speech phenomenon. That is why Bakhtin states that “in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time what he is” (p. 252). Bakhtin further develops this idea by saying that consciousness can only be experienced through dialogue. The author writes “I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another” (p. 287).

This statement suggests that there exists a relationship between one's cognition and that of the other through a social interaction carried out by means of language. Johnson (2004) considers these views to point out that from the Bakhtinian perspective "higher mental functioning is not only inner speech in a Vygotskian sense but it is inner dialogue" (p. 127). Although these assumptions have not been acknowledged until recent times (Wegerif, 2017; Vitanova, 2013), it can be helpful to understand the fundamental notions underlying other conceptions of dialogue depending on the different contexts in which it develops.

Since communication allows human beings to live and survive, they can be defined through their communicative practices. It is this idea that underlies different conceptions of dialogue. Vitanova (2013) observes that people often think of dialogue as something positive and synonym to humans' good will. As she points out, dialogue is a practice that takes place in our daily lives; for instance, we dialogue when we talk to friends or colleagues. In addition, the author explains that in this common use of the word, dialogue implies the interaction of, at least, two interlocutors. Another general definition of dialogue is offered by the Institute of Dialogue Studies (2013). In this definition, dialogue is thought as a meaningful exchange interaction that occurs among people. In doing so, people from different social, cultural, political, religious, and professional backgrounds would increase their understanding. This all-inclusive feature has led to the idea that dialogue is a powerful term and form of action in academic, linguistic, and cultural communities (Carbaugh, 2013). Furthermore, Carbaugh (2013) acknowledges that dialogue often activates local and cultural expectations and motives which might modify the conception of dialogue in different contexts.

Although most research concerning dialogue shows it as a purely beneficial process, some academics question its nature. In addressing the meaningful nature of dialogue, Elsdon-Baker (2013) observes that it is important not to presuppose the outcomes of any process or to deny the possibility of other mechanisms of action. This academic argues that the word meaningful is, by itself, an idea that suggests that all dialogue is meaningful, desirable, and positive. Moreover, as he points out, it seems that this definition of dialogue leaves no room for wondering whether dialogue can have negative impacts or if there are other mechanisms rather than engaging people in dialogue. One more observation is made by Shirkhani, Jamali-Nesari and Feilinezhad (2015). These authors claim that all kinds of speech might be considered dialogic since they imply exchange of information containing others' voices. Therefore, too much dialogue might create paralysis of action, relativism or even cynicism. One last asseveration is offered by Innes (2007). The author acknowledges that although most people might advocate for the use of dialogue, dialogic discourse is very difficult to achieve. Hence, it is in very few occasions that it occurs successfully. For that reason, it is important to define the context in which dialogue takes place. For the purpose of this study, I will approach the notion of dialogue in educational contexts.

Dialogue is a fundamental characteristic of pedagogy. Different academics agree on this idea and have addressed it through different lenses (Wegerif, 2017; Burbules, 1993; Isaacs, 1999; Miranda, 2011; Singh & Richards, 2006; Vella, 1995). A common idea among these authors is that dialogue is something that one does with others. Burbules (1993) suggests that dialogue is a symbiotic communicative relationship that requires not only cognitive but also emotional compromise. In this sense, one depends on the other in a meaningful interaction that entails cognition and emotion from both sides. A similar view is offered by Vella (1995). The author explains that dialogue assumes two human beings as

subjects of their own learning which would be the result of sharing data, experiences, and questions to transform the knowledge they are examining. Considering this argument, it can be assumed that one of the results of dialogue is transformation, which has been addressed by different scholars under the name of reflection.

Dialogue is also considered as a way of thinking together. Isaacs (1999) states that through thinking together people can enquire and come to deeper understandings. As a result of this comprehension, participants may also become aware of their realities and change them through a reflective talking and listening process (Miranda, 2011). However, dialogue does not only allow thinking together but also a way to reaffirm or reshape previous knowledge. As Singh and Richards (2006) explain, learners can validate their own knowledge and beliefs through dialogic interaction. In addition, these academics claim that dialogue does not always involve spoken interaction but it can also entail interaction through journals or online communication. This last notion seems to reinforce Bakhtin's belief that language is a social, interactive, and evaluative event since it is formed and reformed through social interaction.

Dialogue involves both the social and cognitive nature of human beings. As Shirkhani, Jamali-Nesari and Feilinezhad (2015) report, dialogue is a process of communication to change meaning. In other words, new versions of meaning are born only when one listens to different opinions and adds one's voice to produce a new meaning. Innes (2007) shares this idea and claims that dialogic discourse is the specific mechanism for construction of useful ideas. Nonetheless, dialogue is not all about agreement. Jamali-Nesari (2015) claims that although dialogue is a means to listen to different voices, it evokes room for argumentation. The author further explains that even when people tend to resist and confront, it is also possible to make meaning out of argumentation. The

acknowledgement of personality within social groups is an important aspect, among others, that features dialogue.

For the purpose of this study, I will consider dialogue as a goal driven, oral or written interaction requiring social and cognitive effort among individuals to create new knowledge, understand through questioning others' views in depth or strengthen previous knowledge. In the next section, I shall present the aspects that are fundamental for dialogue to take place.

2.3.1 Features of Dialogue

Dialogue entails more than what we can imagine. Although we might think that this practice assures a common agreement, it should be also considered that the same notion leaves room for opinions that differ from what one believes. So, it is important to mention that there are elements that define dialogue as an open-to-all-opinions process. This vision does not aim to propose dialogue as a sappy agreement among individuals; rather as a critical interaction in which participants make use of their different sources to understand in depth and co-build new meaning. According to Burbules (1993) there are different practices that underlay dialogue and, at the same time, define human beings as human beings. These practices are language, reasoning, morality, and social organisation, which I shall briefly depict next.

Language is a tool that entails social and cognitive processes simultaneously. Regarding its social aspect, Bakhtin (1981) points out that the nature of language is dialogical. This means that language is used and created when we talk with others, but at the same time it is something that brings previous meanings with it to create a new one. As the author states, due to language one can meet past and present speakers. In considering the cognitive aspect, Mercer (2000) claims that although the relationship between thought

and language has been greatly acknowledged, there also exists a strong relationship between language and what the author defines as “thinking-together”. In other words, people use language to make sense of their different experiences and share this information across generations. Burbules (1993) shares this view when saying that language is not only the means to have dialogue but also its outcome which does not only include our voice but also the voices of many others.

Reasoning is closely related to the aptitude to solve problems, reach a conclusion, contrast different views, and take different paths. Burbules (1993) holds the view that there exist different environments that depend on multiple factors: social circumstances, how people think and behave, and how people react to what others do. That is why individuals need to be open, flexible, and sensitive. This feature allows people to be innovative and adaptable to create, share, and consider new ideas that eventually will bring new collective reflections on different actions (Mercer, 2000).

Morality is an essential feature of dialogue. It allows to define whether any behaviour is acceptable or not during the process of interacting with others to build new meaning. Burbules (1993) observes that communication is linked to values since it requires compromise, respect, and care from both locator and interlocutors. In addition, the author suggests that people taking part in dialogue aim to promote equality and willingness to consider others’ points of view. These components seem to allow people to have an effective interaction due to different reasons. Since participants are willing to consider others’ perspectives, the endeavour of dialogue becomes a more intimate relationship in which one respects and cares about the other.

Social organisation might be considered as the outcome of communication and politics. Democracy comes to play a fundamental role in this conception since social

organisation is not believed to be sustained by the act of voting but by conceiving it as an environment of equality, respect, and public discourse. Dewey (1916) considers that a social organisation is a democracy in which small groups collaborate with each other to reach shared objectives. At a micro level, Mercer (2000) holds the view that a social organisation might be a community of enquiry and practice where members work together to achieve greater goals than what they could achieve on their own. These four characteristics seem to influence dialogue and might differ according to the type of dialogue created in every particular situation.

2.3.3 Levels of Dialogue

As stated earlier, learning in education might be the result of different types of interaction that occur through language. Innes (2007) observes that these interactions are influenced by a variety of knowledge conceptions. Thus, if professors believe that knowledge is transmitted to learners, they will use different kinds of interaction from those used by teachers believing that knowledge is built in an active and collaborative process. These notions might be the ideas underlying practices like lecturing or face-to-face dialogue. Although the conception of knowledge strongly influences the kind of interaction in the classroom, Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007) offer an alternative explanation considering Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. According to these authors, the shift from individual to community ways of work relies on the Vygotskian ideology that a child's development appears twice: at a social level and at a cognitive level. This might explain the presence of both types of interaction and at the same time gives room for the typology of dialogue that they offer: recitation, teacher-mediated dialogue, teacher-managed debate, independent small group discussion, and authentic problem-solving discourse.

2.3.3.1 Recitation

Reciting means to cite again, to repeat, and to tell over and over. In the classroom, this type of interaction follows an initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) pattern (Mehan, 1979). Gutierrez (1993) explains that this discourse pattern is characterised by the teacher's selection of the student-speaker who should provide the right answer. In addition, the author declares that there is no acknowledgement for students' attempts to introduce sub-topics, expand or elaborate their answers. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007), this traditional communication occurs between teacher and students and consists of an oral examination done by the teacher. It has been considered one of the most prevalent practices in classrooms and its value is still questioned by different academics (Zhang-Waring, 2009).

Recitation is a way to elicit specific information from students. As Nystrand (1997) observes, when teachers carry out this examination, they have a strong tendency to avoid controversial topics. That is why complex information is simplified into small bite-sized pieces that students can easily recall. The author further explains that since recitation usually entails people recalling what others have said, students show little enthusiasm for this pattern of interaction because it is superficial, mindless and, consequently, quickly forgotten.

2.3.3.2 Teacher-Mediated Dialogue

Teacher-mediated dialogue can be considered an expansion of the IRE pattern; nonetheless, it has different features. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007) suggest that this type of discourse, unlike recitation, has a logical, purposeful, and constructive sequence of units. In this sense, the teacher is still in charge of calling on students to participate and guiding them through

questions. Since questioning is the main means to lead students, this type of discourse is believed to be a Socratic questioning.

Socratic questioning is a type of free discussion when compared to recitation. Burbules (1993) points out that this interaction is mediated by the professor's limited set of questions. In doing so, the professor is able to take students to a pre-established knowledge that otherwise they would not be able to reach on their own. Paul and Elder (2006) observe that this type of dialogue is systematic, disciplined and deep due to its proving function. As the authors suggest, through Socratic questioning a professor proves the meaning, justification or logical strength of a claim, position or line of reasoning. For this reason, it is mainly used to address foundational concepts, principles or theory issues.

Finally, Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007) suggest one more function for Socratic questioning in education. As these authors claim, this level of dialogue allows teachers to identify students' extent of knowledge on a given topic. In doing so, teachers are able to establish the more appropriate prompts for students to reach a particular notion of knowledge. Nevertheless, the fact that the teacher is the hub of the interaction makes academics question the freedom learners have to explore other subtopics and their creativity to develop their own versions of knowledge.

2.3.3.3 Teacher-Managed Debate

Debates are interactions in which participants have the opportunity to consider multiple points of view and arrive to a conclusion. In words of Freeley (2000), debates are processes in which participants enquire and advocate as a result of a proposition. In education, teacher-managed debates are discussions that occur after a presentation. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007), teachers are on the sideline in this type of dialogue. In

other words, teachers are no longer the hub through which all discourse passes since the nature of the debate provides the structure of the discourse.

Debating is a type of dialogue that requires students' active participation. Kennedy (2007) emphasises this notion when stating that learning becomes effective through students' active analysis, discussion, and application of content in meaningful ways. The author also mentions the development of critical thinking since debates entail the provision of reasoned arguments. In this sense, I believe that it is important to bear in mind the nature of debating. According to Burbules (1993), the goal of a debate is not that one of agreement or difference conciliation, but that one in which students are to defend their positions as clear as possible and acknowledge the existence of different views. Accordingly, the author states that the real nature of a debate is to appreciate others' perceptions; these perceptions are made of the strongest arguments a student can elaborate and stand for in front of others. If all these features are met, the results will reflect on the origination of new information and the deep understanding of the same topic.

2.3.3.4 Independent Small Group Discussion

Small group discussion can be considered as any situation in which dialogue and collaboration are at the core of the learning situation. Although this might give the idea that the professor is an absent figure, the teacher is still the key to this type of learning; however, the role of the teacher changes from being directive and informative to facilitator and coordinator (Mills & Alexander, 2013).

Small groups are places where informal discussions take place. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007) claim that in these situations teachers propose the topics and monitor students' interactions. In order to accomplish small group discussions, teachers need to define the goals of the group, outline the tasks to be done, and assign different roles to the

members of the group (Vella, 1995). When small groups meet these features, they become places of dialogic peer interaction. Nystrand (1997) holds the view that small groups are dialogic-dependent since students' interactions, concerning the substance of the lesson, can create the appropriate conditions to take risks, dare, complain, argue, clarify or question. Vella (1995) summarises this notion when stating that small groups are places where students learn from each other, practise their freedom and autonomy, cooperate, and accept one another's ideas.

This level of dialogue allows practising recitation, teacher-mediated dialogue, and teacher-managed debate. However, Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007) also mention that it is at this level of dialogue that students start to move away from the teacher's direction. This might mean that small group discussion gives room to be creative and, hence, finds different ways to build knowledge.

2.3.3.5 Problem-Solving Dialogue

Problem-solving dialogue is closely related to cooperative enquiry in authentic contexts within a community of practice (Innes, 2007). Unlike small-group discussion, problem-solving dialogue entails students' active participation to build their own knowledge. Innes (2007) observes that this level of dialogue is widely used in colleges and universities as a result of more socio-cultural theories. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007) have a similar conception about this. As the authors mention, this level of dialogue is intended to progress through explaining, planning or even designing something. For these qualities, this level of dialogue requires creativity and critical thinking to be able to take part in social exchanges as a result of higher levels of cognition; nevertheless, this should not be understood as a cognitive-driven activity, but as a process in which cognition affects social interaction and social interaction affects cognition.

Compromise is a relevant feature of this level of dialogue. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007) express that at this level of dialogue; students care about a problem and engage in the activity in a way that goes beyond any other school exercise. Knowledge-building discourse has as its main objective the production and improvement of public knowledge and represents the kind of discourse observed in mature-creating teams.

This last level of dialogue has not been described in terms of discourse patterns but in terms of the final goals. It seems that the main emphasis is on community dynamics that supports epistemic invention. This would entail students identifying points of growth, creating their own possible explanations and solutions, and proving them through empirical research, constructive use of authoritative sources and knowledge-building dialogue.

2.3. Previous Studies on Research Group Supervision

Research supervision has been identified by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as an area in higher education in need of improvement (Dysthe & Westrheim, 2003). Despite this recognition, it is still unclear how research supervision interactions actually occur as most studies approach either supervisors (Lee, 2008) or students' perspectives (Drenan & Clarke, 2009; Boyd & Grant, 2017); or even the implementation of new research supervision strategies (Dysthe, Samara, & Westrheim, 2006). Table 2.1 summarises different studies related to research group supervision.

2.1 Previous Studies on Research Group Supervision

Author and year	What they wanted to know	What is known about the topic	How the question is answered	Answer	Significance of the study
Abdallah, F., Hillerich, K., Romero, V., Topp,	From a supervisor's point: What are the challenges that can arise	Roles and relationships within research supervision. Supervisor's	Revision of the literature and an interview with a supervisor	There are two types of challenges: formal issues and content issues.	Although studies on research supervision address graduate and

E. & Wnuk, K. (2010)	during the course of supervising a research work? How to overcome them?	and supervisee's expectations Practical issues		Formality issues are related with organization, ways to communicate, roles.	post-graduate supervision mainly, the same principles may apply to undergraduate levels
Dysthe, O. & Westrheim K. (2003)	How did the combination of supervision groups, student groups and individual supervision function as support for master's students' research and writing processes? What effect did this have, if any, on the quality of the thesis and the completion rate?	Sociocultural theories Dialogism Communities of practice	Net-based questionnaire and individual interviews. Student evaluations	Supervision groups are powerful mediating tools. The two types of group function differently but supplement each other. Multiple perspectives secure better supervision	Research supervision has been identified by OECD as an area in higher education in need of improvement and this study offers a model for this improvement.
Akister, J., Williams, I. & Maynard, A. (2009)	What is the effectiveness, if any, of individual and group supervision from the perspectives of students experience and the learning outcomes?	The role of the dissertation at undergraduate education	Semi-structured questionnaire and a focus groups	Students in group supervision felt more prepared than those in individual supervision. Group supervision fosters enthusiasm and decreases students' isolation.	It is important to find alternatives to one to one research supervision.
O'Neil, S., Schurink, W. & Stanz, K. (2016)	What are the benefits of group supervision?	Dyad supervision Alternative supervision methods Minority of	Auto-ethnographic study from 2004 to 2015. Self-observations	The benefits are: relating to others' work, adding structure to ideas, taking responsibility,	Although many schools use formalized ways of supervision; small group

		studies on group supervision	and self-reflections, artefacts of supervision practice, observations and field notes, interviews, informal conversations, e-mails	and affording opportunities to explain and express	supervision may offer an alternative may have positive effects on group practices.
Ghadirian, L., Sayarifard, A., Majdzadeh, R., Rajabi, F. & Yunensian, M. (2014)	What are the challenges in thesis supervision from both students and faculty members' points of view?	Thesis supervision. Success depending on quality of supervision	Interviews and focus group discussions	Challenges are: supervisory knowledge and skills, atmosphere, regulations related to supervision, and monitoring and evaluation.	Supervision is the most important factor in success of students' research programmes. Therefore, challenges need to be identified and addressed.

On the other hand, studies that aimed to describe actual interactions in the classroom took place at undergraduate programmes and focused on problem-solving dialogue in task based activities (Innes, 2007), and identifying different levels of dialogue used in an English language class (Morfinéz-Cortés, 2013). As discussed above, there is a need to understand how actual interactions occur and how research group supervision affects participants' perceptions. Therefore, the aims of this study were to identify the types of dialogue that took place during the supervision process in order to see how participants were affected, if so. The next chapter will approach the research methodology to answer such questions.

Chapter III: Research Methodology

Research findings are considered the outcome of a set of different logical procedures. Among these procedures, the methods used to gather and analyse data are important since they allow understanding information through particular theoretical lenses to answer the research questions. The study undertaken for this thesis aimed to explore and identify the use of dialogue as well as participants' emerging conceptions through an ongoing process of thesis group supervision. That is why such aims were approached through a research methods strategy that will be described in this chapter. First, the approach and design of research will be presented. Secondly, the context and participants will be addressed. Next, the instruments used to gather data will be approached as well as the strategies to collect and analyse data. Finally, a conclusion will be offered at the end of this chapter.

3.1 Research Approach

Understanding the social world has been one of the main concerns in research. That is why information is collected and analysed through small and manageable logical steps to make sense of it and gain knowledge on the issue to be investigated (Creswell, 2012). Since the aim of this investigation was to study how dialogue occurred in a community of practice formed by MA thesis writers and supervisors, a qualitative approach was used. Among the reasons to have chosen a qualitative approach, there are three that seem to be suit the aims of this study: the scope of qualitative enquiry, the qualitative data collection strategies, and its ways of analysis.

Qualitative research aims to explore an issue to offer a detailed understanding. In words of Creswell (2012) the exploration of words or images helps to create larger meanings which explain social interactions. Richards (2003) holds a similar view when saying that qualitative research strongly contributes to the understanding of the social

world. In addition, Richards (2003) states that the qualitative approach to research helps to explore the complexities of our social world to get close to what actually happens. In other words, qualitative studies do not manipulate the world to make something occur, but seek to comprehend the patterns of people's behaviours. For these reasons, the author claims that qualitative studies are person-centred approaches that depend on the lived world. One more academic that has addressed the nature of qualitative studies is Erickson (1998). The author conceives qualitative studies as interpretive due to their interest in human meaning in social life. Erickson (1998) claims that interpretive research tries to provide information on what happens in social action in a particular setting; the meaning of such actions to the actors involved in them; the way these happenings are organised in patterns; how the same happenings relate to other systems outside the setting, and how daily life might be compared to other ways of organising. These conceptions on interpretive studies support the next sections.

3.2 Research Design

Research is purposeful, carefully and thoughtfully designed. Although an approach offers a specific idea about the nature of the study, there is still the need to define how data will be gathered to answer the research questions. Griffiee (2012) and Yin (1994) hold the view that a research design contains the appropriate directions to answer research questions through empirical data. Accordingly, Creswell (2012) further explains that research designs are specific procedures that cover three main aspects: how data are to be collected, the way it will be analysed, and how it will be reported. Taking into consideration these claims and the objectives of this study, a case study design will be used to know how dialogue occurs in the research supervision process of group of students and how such dialogue has an impact on them.

Case study design is an appropriate strategy when research questions either aim to explore, describe or explain a phenomenon (Yin, 1994). It shares characteristics with ethnographic studies in that the researcher has no control over events and focuses on contemporary phenomena within real contexts; however, unlike ethnography, case studies are driven by previous theoretical foundations (Yin, 1994). As Nunan (1992) states, case study design is more focused when compared to ethnography, which covers a broader scope. In addition, the author claims that while ethnography studies aim to describe the culture in the target group, case study design attempts to address narrower issues. Because these features seemed to correspond to the study's research questions, a case study design was chosen.

The research questions of this study seek to shed light on how dialogue occurs in thesis group supervision as well as how group supervision influences participants' perspectives. In order to answer these questions, the study focused on a single case and analysed a set of sub-units to explore the phenomenon. Hence, the following claims are made. First, as there are no studies on how actual interactions occur within research group supervision, there is a need to explore this issue and develop propositions that are further researched into. Second, it was a single case due to the following reasons: there was just one cohort of ELT MA students in the languages department; in addition, students in this cohort decided to work with different professors to develop their thesis projects; however, there was only a group of seven students that adopted the group supervision model; therefore, this case is considered unique. Regarding the sub-units to be analysed, it can be said that this is an embedded case due to the fact that a number of factors was considered when building the interpretation of the whole process (Yin, 1994). In order to gather the

information to answer such questions –and to match the main tenet of case study design- particular data collection strategies were used.

3.3 Data Collection Strategies

Data is the fundamental source that allows answering research questions. According to Griffiee (2012), data allow to link the theory with what is happening in real life. For this reason, the author claims that data make research empirical since there is a connection between the knowledge researchers have of the world and the world itself. Considering these reasons, it is important to mention that research designs suggest particular ways of data gathering through different strategies –as well known as data collection instruments. As observed by Yin (1994), the kinds of data collection strategies used in case studies are direct observations, artefacts, and systematic interviews. These strategies are founded on the words from participants to obtain their views and, at the same time, come from multiple sources of information in the context where the phenomenon is occurring (Creswell, 2012). In other words, everything is learnt from the participants in their real contexts. Since this is a case study aiming to identify how dialogue occurs in thesis group supervision and how it affects participants' perceptions, three strategies were used: observations, a focus group, and interviews.

3.3.1 Observations

As a primary source of information, observations are strategies of data collection that allow gathering open-ended and first-hand information (Creswell, 2012). This type of observation has particular features which make it scientific. As Griffiee (2012) reports, observation needs to be systematic, intentional, and theoretical. The systematic feature refers to the notion of being constant and focused on a particular observed feature. In other words, it is principled and covers an area and time of interest. Accordingly, the intentional

characteristic has to do with the fact of having a purpose to observe. In this case, the driving purpose for observation is closely related to giving answer to the research questions. Finally, the theoretical quality makes it possible to link theory to actual happenings –or as Griffiee (2012) states: the knowledge of the world to the actual occurrences of the world.

3.3.2 Interviews

A second strategy of data collection was interviewing. Interviews are widely used in qualitative research –including case studies. Creswell (2012) observes that interviews are the best ways for participants to vocalise their experiences. In doing so, researchers do not impose any constraint on the way participants answer but allow them to create their own responses. Nunan (1992) holds a similar view when claiming that interviews are ways in which a person elicits data from another by means of person-to-person encounters. Alike observations, interviews are purposeful. In this sense, Griffiee (2012) observes that as a research tool, interviews are structured conversations in which the main goal is to build meaningful data that can be gathered, analysed, and reported.

3.4 Participants

For the purpose of this study a Thesis Seminar class from the masters in English Language Teaching of the *Facultad de Lenguas* was chosen. This class took place from August 15th to December 5th during the 2016 Autumn Semester. Sessions were scheduled on Mondays from 4 p. m. to 6 p. m. The objective of such class was to develop the introductory and literature review chapters of students' thesis projects.

This class was formed by seven students: four female and three male; and a thesis advisor –a female professor. It may be relevant to mention that this was not the first time the professor taught to these students as she had taught a course during the first semester of

the masters programme. For ethical reasons, participants' names were changed to respect their privacy and identity. Maria was the thesis advisor and the students were: Ana, Eunice, Joe, Aldo, Eric, Gloria, and Lisa. Each one of the students worked on a different project. Four main themes were approached in such projects: English language teaching, literacy, professional development, and research. Although students were working on different topics, they all had in common to be working the same stages at the same time. This gave valuable reasons for students to relate to each other's work as well as to help giving feedback, making suggestions, and building on each other's work.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data based on words and actions from participants are crucial for qualitative research. As mentioned earlier, two data collection strategies were used for the purposes of this study: observations and interviews. This section describes the procedures followed to gather the relevant data for this study.

3.5.1 Observations

Observations were the first source of data. Before carrying out observations, participants were asked their permission and agreement with being observed. On August 22nd 2016, participants accepted to be observed and recorded from August 29th to the end of their Thesis Seminar class autumn semester. In this type of observation the researcher took a participatory role since he was also attending such class as a student. According to Creswell (2012), participatory observation allows the researcher to understand the experience under observation from the participant's perspective. This meant that the researcher, as an insider, was able to observe and record information. For this reason, the researcher did not take any notes while attending the sessions but recorded all the spoken interactions among

participants. A total amount of ten sessions was recorded. These sessions took place between August 29th and November 28th during the 2016 Autumn Semester.

3.5.2 Interviews

After analysing the recordings and obtaining the data relevant to this study, participants were asked to have two interviews with the researcher: an individual and a group interview. For the group interview, participants were asked to share their insights regarding preliminary results. These results focused on the number of sequences of dialogue, instances of hedging, and the types of dialogue used throughout the semester. In the individual interviews, participants were first asked to provide information about a key moment for them in the elaboration of their thesis project. As a main feature, this key moment should have involved the use of interaction with others. To further understand their responses, participants were asked to explain why they had chosen such moments. In a second part of the interview, students were shown the excerpts of the conversations that they had after their presentations throughout their Thesis Seminar class. After that, they were asked to choose the one that was most meaningful to them and provide a detailed explanation on how that particular dialogue helped them to develop their thesis projects. To gather this information, semi-structured interviews were used so that participants had the freedom to elaborate their own responses.

3.6 Analysis

Data collection strategies in qualitative research obtain information from words and actions that participants have during throughout the time of investigation. Since this information was formed of words and images mainly, it was necessary to analyse them to group them into larger meanings. These larger meanings allowed understanding patterns and purposes of behaviour and provided insights that enriched the comprehension of our social world

(Erickson, 1998). For the purposes of this study, directed content analysis and descriptive statistics were used to give meaning to the data. Directed content analysis looked at the types of dialogue that occurred in the interactions that took place right after participants' presentations.

The requirements for interactions to be considered sample of analysis were the following. First, interactions needed to occur right after participants' presentations. These presentations were related to the design of chapters one and two of seven theses. Second, interactions needed to be a two-way communication where either the supervisor or another student started an interaction that initiated a dialogic exchange. Third, interactions needed to be focused on the topic of discussion which related to the previous presentation of the student.

From the 10 recorded sessions, transcripts were developed for five lessons in which students presented their advances in their thesis projects. The researcher, in a rater role, categorised the interactions using the categories proposed by Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007), and Innes (2007). After the interactions were categorised, the amount of instances of each type of dialogue was counted as well as the number of participations each student had in such interactions. This was done so to understand the patterns and purposes of the dialogical behaviours participants had in the process of defining chapters one and two of their thesis projects.

After such patterns were identified, it was necessary to gather data to consider against these findings. For this reason, the data provided by the interviews and the focus group were fundamental. Such data were also analysed through content analysis to support, in a dialogical way, the interpretations got from the previous analysis.

The main purpose of this chapter was to present essential information about the approach, the research design, the data collection strategies, the procedures, and the ways of analysis used in this study. In the following chapter, results obtained from the strategies described in this chapter will be presented.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

This chapter introduces the analysis of the data coming from observations, a focus group and interviews. Firstly, a depiction of the environment in which the interactions occurred, is addressed. This portrayal displayed how interactions were triggered and, hence, provided a wider panorama that can help understand the scenario in which interactions occurred. Secondly, a description through figures focused more on the identified sequences of dialogue presented along with the interpretations got from the focus group. Thirdly, the sequences of dialogue were categorised according to Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007) and Innes (2007). Finally, the emergent insights in regards of participants' experiences were portrayed.

4.1 Oral Presentations and Artefacts as Triggers of Dialogue

As stated in chapter I, this research aimed to explore how dialogue occurs in a community of practice during the thesis supervision process borrowing from socio-cognitive (Bandura, 1989) and socio-cultural (Vygotsky, 1978) theories of learning. For the purposes of this study, ten two-hour sessions were audio recorded throughout the 2016 autumn semester. These sessions aimed to reach different objectives that were related to the development of research skills. As suggested in the course's scheme of work, the three main goals were: establishing the theoretical framework of the study, rewriting the first chapter considering the theoretical framework, and setting the research methodology. For these reasons, these sessions were devoted to cover different themes through lecturing, students' presentations, and group discussions.

Since the analysis of all the sessions would have been a massive task, it was decided to narrow down the amount of data to be analysed. This was a difficult process due to the

fact that, somehow, all the instances of interaction contributed to the construction of the theses. However, in order to reduce the amount of data it was decided that only the conversations taking place right after students' presentations would be the sample for this research. Thus, five sessions out of ten were considered due to the fact that in those sessions students presented the progress they had made in their theses. Table 4.1 shows the dates and the themes covered during the chosen sessions.

Table 4.1 Sample Selection

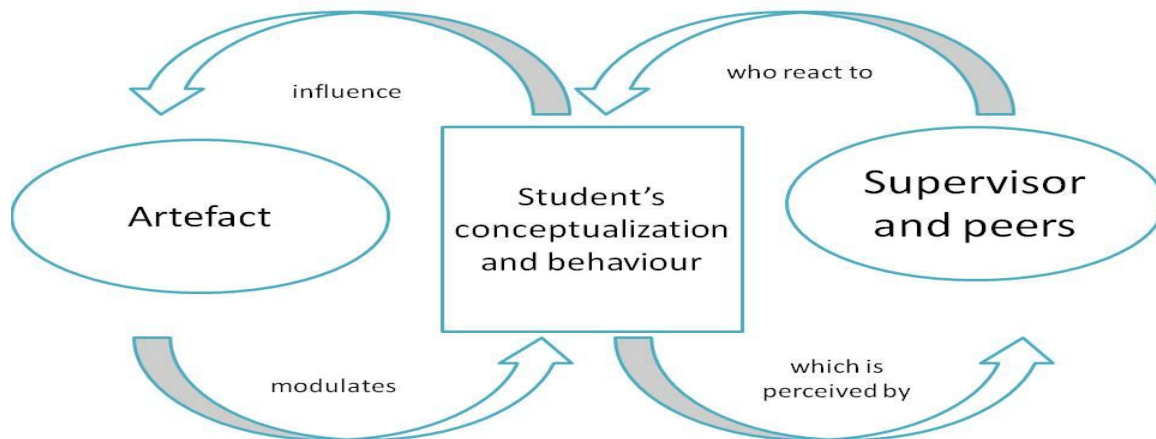
Date	Content of Presentations
September 12, 2016	Themes to be covered in chapter I
September 19, 2016	Literature Review first outline draft
October 10, 2016	Literature Review outline draft with authors
October 17, 2016	Explanation of projects by students
November 7, 2016	IMRD model including research methods

There were different reasons for this decision. First, those conversations seemed closely related to the themes each student was addressing in their thesis projects. Secondly, there was at least one presentation addressing each stage of the thesis; therefore, students presented their progress for chapter one, two, and three of their theses. Finally, students used graphical representations to support their claims when explaining what they were doing.

The strongest reason to have considered only the interactions occurring after the presentations was the graphical representations used by students. Graphical representations were considered artefacts as they mediated students' presentations (Vygotsky, 1962). As

explained above, students used these representations to articulate their ideas during their presentations. In addition, representations showed how students thought of the organisation of their projects. Both of these components –articulation of thought and modulation of performance—were considered by Vygotsky (1962) who claimed that artefacts are cultural tools that along with social interactions trigger cognitive change. Moreover, and seen from socio-cognitive lenses (Bandura, 1989), representations as symbols not only influenced students’ performance during their presentations but also triggered their peers and supervisors’ reactions. These reactions were manifested in the interactions arisen after such presentations. The process is presented in figure 4.1

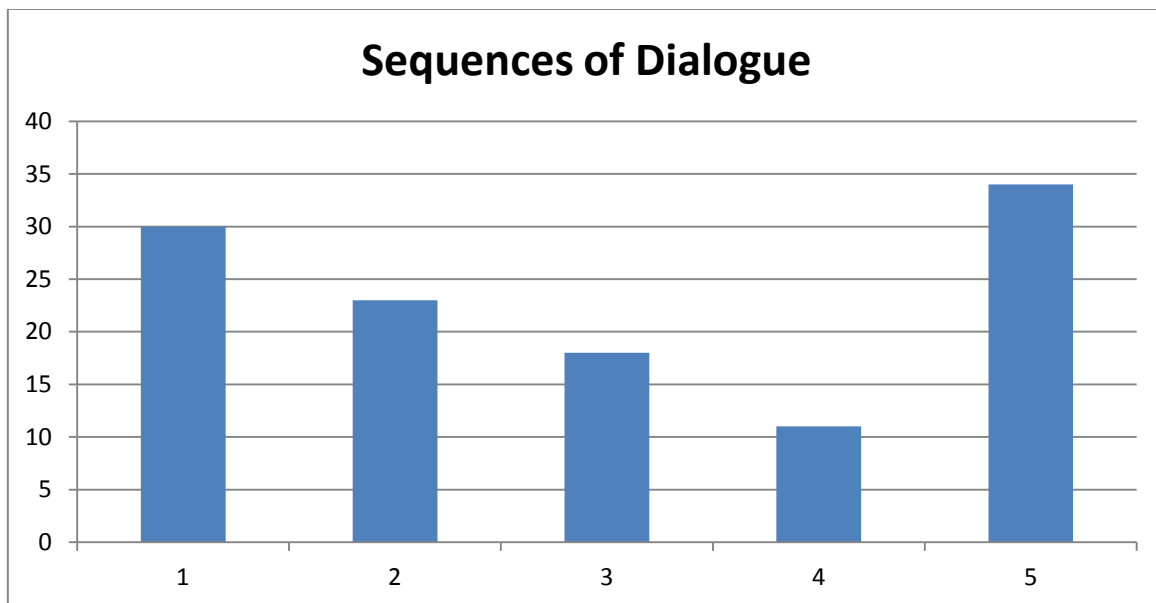
Figure 4.1 Interactions trigger



4.2 Overview of Sequences of Dialogue and Interpretations from the Focus Group

A pattern was identified when analysing sequences of dialogue through figures. In a general picture, there were a total of 120 sequences of dialogue that occurred after 30 presentations during the five sessions. It is important to mention that a sequence of dialogue was considered as an interaction that, despite the initiation, had an elaborated answer or answers rather than a single word reply. Sequences of dialogue also focused on particular issues and developed around particular topics. The number of sequences per session varied throughout the sessions. Figure 4.2 shows the distribution of sequences of dialogue per session.

Figure 4.2 Sequences of Dialogue throughout the sessions



As shown in figure 4.2, the amount of sequences of dialogue was higher in session 1 – that addressed the themes to be covered in chapter 1- and in session 5 – which was meant to have students presenting their progress through an IMRD model including their research methods – the IMRD model stands for introduction, methods, results, and discussion as a prototypical structure for research articles (Swales, 1990). To be precise, session one had a

total of 30 sequences of dialogue; whilst session five had a total of 33. This may suggest that sessions one and five evoked more interactions due to the objectives of such sessions. Session one represented the first time the community was exposed to the projects of each one of the members. Since it was the first exposure, it might be natural that peers had a high number of reactions through either questioning or commenting. Alike session one, session five aimed to have students present chapters I, II, and III through an IMRD model. It could be assumed that this session had a high number of sequences due to the introduction of a new stage in the research process: the research methodology.

Participants took part in a focus group and were asked to provide their insights on the development of dialogue throughout the semester. This was a strategy to explore participants' perceptions. In regards of the amount of dialogue per session, participants commented the following:

Eric: I think that peaks represent the sessions in which some of us struggled the most when making differences among the core concepts.

María: but maybe...I think that also... in the last session we were discussing the methodology... it's every time that you have something new ...at first because it was a new project ... in a way everybody was trying to make sense of their own projects and then...why did everything change? Because we were more or less listening to people who had like lots of issues with things and then by the end we were working with something different that was the methodology or you were already thinking about it maybe the dialogue is stronger when you've got new topics.

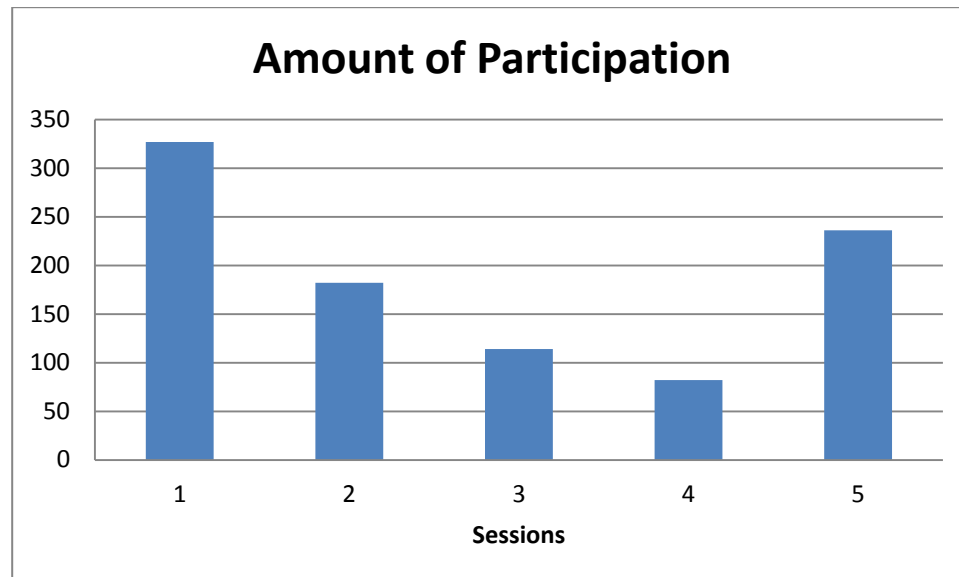
In addition, participants also noticed that session 4 was the one in which they had had the least instances of dialogue. In addressing this issue, a participant commented:

Eric: Session four was not a presentation session but it was a kind of round table in which we shared the things we wanted to do ...so maybe that's why...the purpose of the session and probably the activity involved since we didn't react to it as much as in other sessions.

Participants agreed on the idea that tension in understanding was one of the main triggers for dialogue. Although this idea may mean that only difficult moments trigger dialogue, it should not be understood that way. As elaborated by Maria, it was the introduction of new topics that allowed having higher sequences of dialogue. This argument may also be true for session four. As reported by participant Eric, this session did not have a proper presentation pattern. Consequently, because there were no new things to report, the number of sequences of dialogue remained low.

In the same manner, the amount of participation and instances of hedging followed a similar pattern. For the purposes of this study, participation was every time a member talked and contributed to the conversation. It is relevant to mention that the sequences of dialogue varied in the amount of participations; in addition, the sequences of dialogue that had the highest number of participations were debates. Figure 4.3 shows the number of participations per session throughout the semester.

Figure 4.3 Participation in Dialogue throughout the semester



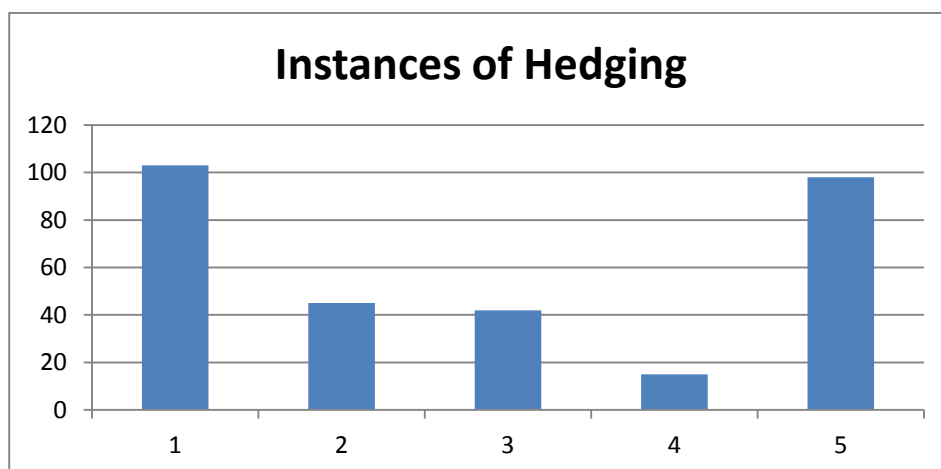
As seen in the figure above, the highest amount of participation occurred in session one. Although this might suggest that there were more sequences of dialogue in such session, what this means is that sequences of dialogue were longer and had more turn takings from the members of the group than the sequences in session five – which had the most sequences. However, it can be assumed that the number of sequences of dialogue strongly influenced the number of participations; hence, each sequence of dialogue provided an opportunity – or lots of opportunities – for members of the community to contribute to the conversation. Regarding the amount of participation, a participant commented the following:

Maria: people participate, there is participation. Some participate more, some less. The ones that participate less participate in their sessions; but then the ones that participate more, those are the ones that participate in the rest of the sessions and that give ideas and say things for the rest. It also has a lot to do with previous experiences because Ana for example is someone who has a lot of experience.

The previous comment addresses not only the amount of participation per student but also the reasons why some students may have participated more than others. As suggested before, although the amount of participation depended on the sequences of dialogue, participants were aware that students' contributions may have varied due to previous experiences.

Finally, one more feature taken into consideration was the use of hedging. According to Jamali-Nessari (2015), hedging might be a linguistic indicator of the openness of a speaker to negotiate what is uttered. As the author suggests, although hedging may be understood as a signal of hesitation, from a heteroglossic (Bakhtin, 1981) point of view it could be understood as an invitation to negotiate what is said in the case that people have a different point of view. In the interactions analysed for this study, three types of hedging were identified: modal verbs, mental state verbs, and adverbs of probability. Figure 4.4 shows the amount of instances of hedging throughout the sessions

Figure 4.4 Hedging



As shown in figure 4.4, there were a total of 303 instances of hedging. Once again, the pattern is similar to the one of sequences of dialogue per session. There was a higher

amount of hedging in sessions one and five than in sessions two, three, and four. It seems that participants had more reasons to explain why hedging occurred the way it did. One of the participants said the following:

Gloria: or maybe because at the beginning we were again...it was like a puzzle that we were trying to figure out and then we tried to keep our face and then once that we understood what we were talking or dealing with each one of us...the relationship the one that we were saying...we became closer...and then again when we came to deal with the literature review we were confused again and then the questioning and the puzzling started all over again so I guess that you try to keep your face when you are not very sure about what you are talking about.

However, another participant believed that there was another reason for the members of the group to hedge:

Ana: but I think that it was not because we had already built a relationship and we had already explored our projects. I think that perhaps the reason for hedging would have been another one that was not to save our own face but to not step on somebody else's face...for respect

As shown above, the focus group allowed having different perspectives on the development of dialogue throughout the semester. As describing was not enough, the focus group provided more information to interpret and understand this process. In the next section, the different types of dialogue will be introduced as well as the assumptions as why they happened.

4.3 Categorisation of Dialogue Sequences

As previously mentioned, there were a total of 30 conversations, one per every presentation given by students throughout the 2016 autumn semester. Out of these conversations, 120

sequences were considered as dialogical interactions. The amount of sequences varied in each session which resulted in the following distribution: 33 sequences in the first session, 25 in session two, 18 in session three, 11 in session four, and 34 in session five. In this section, the 116 sequences will be classified according to Bereiter and Scardamalia (2008) and Innes (2007). From Bereiter and Scardamalia's categorisation, three levels occurred: Socratic questioning, debate, and problem solving dialogue – which was further analysed through Innes's classification on PSD (2007). Table 4.2 summarises this information.

Table 4.2 Types of Dialogue during sessions

Type of Dialogue	Instances	Session
Socratic Questioning	1	Session 2 (literature review-first outline draft)
Debates	2	Session 1 (themes to be covered in chapter 1) and 5 (IMRD model presentation)
Problem-solving dialogue	117	It happened in all sessions.

4.3.1 Socratic Questioning

Socratic questioning was, in this study, the type of dialogue used the least. As explained by Bereiter and Scardamalia (2008) this type of dialogue features a purposeful and constructive sequence of questions. It occurred only once which represents a 0.86% of the total amount of dialogical sequences. This instance of dialogue took place during the second session. It is important to bear in mind that this session represented a first attempt to organise the content of the literature review. Consequently, the content of this excerpt related to this organisation.

Table 4.3 Socratic Questioning

<p>1 <i>Maria: this is really a process. Do you see that order literacy enquire based learning and genre analysis? Or do you see a different order?</i></p> <p>2 <i>Ana: I did at first but that was before we had our discussion perhaps I would move this one here and then this one here</i></p> <p>3 <i>Maria: that's how I view it because there you are discussing your theoretical framework</i></p> <p>4 <i>Ana: aha</i></p>
--

As observed in table 4.2, the content of this sequence of dialogue focuses on the organisation of the themes covered in chapter two. In this case, the supervisor –Maria – initiated the sequence with two questions rather than telling Ana how to organise her work. Questioning provided the opportunity to Ana to reflect and elaborate an answer that was close to Maria’s previous conclusion. That is why Ana refers to previous discussions with Maria and reaches the expected insight without any trouble. Maria’s second participation seems to indicate that she had elaborated a conclusion before asking Ana for an alternative order. Indeed, this was the main hint for this sequence to be classified as Socratic questioning; as stated by Burbules (1993) a professor can take students to a pre-established conclusion through questioning.

This instance of Socratic questioning allows assuming that this type of dialogue is useful to provide students with opportunities to reflect on what they are doing and what they may do in the further. In addition, it can be a way for them to reflect on the process they are going through; in other words, a way for them to discover through guided questioning the path that may be the most appropriate.

4.3.2 Debate

During the semester there were only two instances of debate. As Freeley (2000) points out, debates result from a proposition in which participants enquire and advocate. The examples

below show how such propositions triggered discussions in which students vocalised their arguments to explain the reasons behind their decisions. Table 4.3 shows the first example of these debates.

Table 4.4 Debate

1 Carla: I would leave Bandura out
2 Maria: he loves him. je je No way
3 Carla: I think that you can explain the phenomenon by...
4 Eric: it's not that I love him but what he says makes sense to me...and...ah
5 Carla: it makes sense. Of course it makes sense. But...this is...mmm...I don't know probably it's my problem. The same I was telling Ana. I don't know how to marry two theories that have been criticised to see life or any phenomenon from two different perspectives
12 Eric: what I am trying to do is to find this balance between these two theories. Because I was also reading that Bandura works with quite a lot of human capabilities and they are very individual things. However, he also acknowledges that these human capabilities are triggered by social interaction, that's when I feel that the sociocultural foundation is like really strong. It has really strong arguments regarding social interaction so...yeah...I am trying to make this balance between these theories and I have this belief that ahh...one cannot talk about knowledge building without social interaction nor about social interaction without any cognitive impact...

As seen above, the initial proposition for this debate was the suggestion to leave an author out of the picture. That was why Eric started expressing why he believed that it was worthwhile to include this author's theoretical foundations. In response to his first attempt, Carla expressed her view on why she felt that this author should not be included. However, at no point did she try to have Eric change such decision; rather, she left that as a proposition which could be either considered or ignored. In the following excerpt, another proposition raised one more debate.

Table 4.5 Debate 2

1 Eric: and I have a comment on the research questions I think that they might be a little bit biased... because you are assuming that there are benefits
6 Aldo: ok...the last one is because I read a lot on research that has positive results and

negative results... and it is very interesting to read the ones that have negative results because that's what rises on the effects on having effective gaming...

10 Eric: yeah but my point is that the term itself benefit is like very positive and you might want to use a term that is more neutral

13 Aldo: well I want to sell the idea of gamifying with benefits

14 Maria: yeah but in research you would not tend to do that

15 Aldo: ok

16 Maria: maybe you can get to the conclusion later that it may benefit but in the question doesn't have to imply it

As seen in the second excerpt, the proposition in this case was considering the possibility to use another word instead of benefit. However, this was not expressed as mandatory, rather as a much hedged observation. In response to this observation, Aldo shared his reasons to choose the word benefit. At the end it was up to Aldo to decide what to do with his question.

From these instances the debates seemed to be triggered when the supervisor opinions were, somehow, different from students' perspectives. Therefore, in order for debates to take place, there needed to be a disagreement. Disagreements may entail more than simply expressing points of view; as Kennedy (2007) observes, it is through active participation that students put a series of processes into practice: analysis, argumentation, and application of knowledge to express their stance. In addition, and considering the fact that debates did not present any instance of authoritarian points of view, it can be said that participants defended their positions as clear as they could. In doing so, they avoided coming to difference conciliation which, as Burbules (1993) observes, is not the main goal of debates.

4.3.3 Problem-Solving Dialogue

Problem-solving dialogue (PSD) was the type of interaction used the most. The reason behind this fact is that PSD is closely related to cooperative enquiry in authentic contexts

within a community of practice (Innes, 2007). As described earlier, students talked about their progress and had their peers' comments and feedback after their presentations. The process entailed the different features that Bereiter and Scardamalia (2008) identified in PSD: explaining, planning, and designing. However, Bereiter and Scardamalia's categorisation was not enough to analyse the occurrences of this case; that is why, Innes' (2007) typology was used since it proposes a more detailed classification of problem solving interactions regarding their purposes. In this section, examples of these interactions will be presented and, some of them, highlighted as the most used at each of the stages of the thesis projects. Table 4.6 summarises the types of problem-solving dialogue found throughout the sessions.

Table 4.6 Problem-solving dialogue type distribution

Type of problem solving dialogue	Instances	Peak session
Simple link between the content and the project	30	10 instances in session 2
Suggestions for ways to analyse or categorise the project in theoretical terms	31	9 instances in session 2
Unsupported opinion –good or bad- about the project	1	1 instance in session 3
Identifying and giving opinions of specific issues facing the project and its problems	23	11 instances in session 1
Identifying or analysing issues facing the project and its problems	29	11 instances in session 5
Putting forward suggestions for dealing with problems.	3	3 instances in session 5

4.3.3.1 Simple link between the content and the project

This type of PSD was one of the most used. Its peak occurred in session two when students were meant to present the first outline of their literature review. This type of PSD features the connections made between the content –in this case the themes to be covered in the literature- and how they related to the research project. There were a total of 29 instances of this type throughout the semester; however, it was in session two that a maximum of ten sequences of this type occurred. The following excerpt shows how such interactions developed.

Table 4.7 Making connections between the content and the project

1Eunice: mmm...I think you already said it but I don't remember it very well. Why do you want to have both sociocultural and cognitive?

2Eric: oh yeap...amm because the social...I think that the social or the sociocultural perspective gives importance to the social interaction people have

3Eunice: mjm

4Eric: amm whereas the sociocognitive...I don't think it does give importance to what is going on within the individual but to how the interaction the individual has with others has impact on the self...right so that's why I am taking into consideration these two perspectives.

In this sequence Eunice's question triggers the dialogical sequence. Her question aimed to understand why Eric decided to use both perspectives to carry out his research project. Therefore, Eric tried to explain how such theories would help him to understand the phenomenon he wanted to explore. Another sequence similar to the one above happened after Lisa's presentation.

Table 4.8 Making connections between the content and the project 2

1 **Maria:** *The other point that I...that I have problems with is your sociocultural and your child engagement in sociocommunity*
2 **Lisa:** *mjm*
3 **Maria:** *what's the difference?*
4 **Lisa:** *ahhh I think that social cultural ah factors are beyond the environmental factors as Branfordbrand ecological systems*
5 **Maria:** *aha*
6 **Lisa:** *And the second, I think, circle only talks about family ...school*
7 **Maria:** *aha*
8 **Lisa:** *in this sociocultural...l we learn talk about well we talk about teachers but I also wanted to talk about more socioeconomic and other things that have nothing to do with family*
9 **Maria:** *aha*
10 **Lisa:** *and then the childhood the whole childhood in the context*
11 **Maria:** *what do you mean by childhood engagement by sociocommunity*
12 **Lisa:** *I mean church, school and other things. For example here family environment I am talking about beliefs of the parents and here the sociocultural amm something bigger...*

In this case, it seems that Maria did not perceive clearly Lisa's understanding of socio-cultural and socio-community environments. Hence, Maria asked Lisa to explain it in order to have a better understanding of how such concepts would relate to the project. Alike Eric and Eunice's interaction, Maria and Lisa's interaction aimed to clarify the link between what was presented in the literature review outline and the research project. Therefore, data suggest that due to the need of clarifications of this type, simple connection between the content and the project PSD was the most used at the second stage of the thesis project.

4.3.3.2 Suggestions for ways to analyse or categorise the project in theoretical terms

This was the type of PSD used the most. Throughout the semester, there were a total of 30 instances. Its peak occurred in session two –alike the simple connection between content and the project- with a total of nine instances. As the name suggests, the main aim of this

type of PSD was to offer ideas on how to see the research project from different theoretical perspectives. The following excerpts show how this type of interaction occurred.

Table 4.9 Suggestions for ways to analyse or categorise the project in theoretical terms

<p>1 <i>Maria: you will probably have bilingual literacy practices in high school there's very little...very little in Mexico</i></p> <p>2 <i>Gloria: in Mexico...entonces...first in general...first in high school</i></p> <p>3 <i>Maria: first in general in high school and</i></p> <p>4 <i>Gloria: I can put the Spanish or English literacy practice in high school</i></p> <p>5 <i>Maria: and probably at the very end you will have Mexico</i></p> <p>6 <i>Gloria: that's it...yeah</i></p> <p>7 <i>Maria: you will start with other and then you will get to Mexico</i></p> <p>8 <i>Gloria: right</i></p> <p>9 <i>Maria: No? And then you will...you will focus on similar studies or these studies...that are your study the one you are going to implement, right?</i></p> <p>10 <i>Gloria: yes</i></p>
--

As seen in the excerpt above, Maria and Gloria talked about the project's content organisation through concepts that they both understood and related to literacy practices. However, they did not only talk about the project but Maria also gave some advice on how the literature review could be organised. This advice was given by approaching the terms used in previous studies. The following excerpt follows a similar pattern.

Table 4.10 Suggestions for ways to analyse or categorise the project in theoretical terms

<p>1 <i>Maria: I think that we will have to find a way to narrow it down</i></p> <p>2 <i>Ana: I was thinking of focusing on pretty much the balance between authorial and secretarial writing</i></p> <p>3 <i>Maria: ok...ok how much...for example maybe you have that average children focus a lot on secretarial writing</i></p> <p>4 <i>Ana: mjm</i></p> <p>5 <i>Maria: and maybe less on content</i></p>

In this sequence, Maria's advice related to narrowing the analysis. Although her advice did not approach theoretical terms at the beginning, Ana's response allowed further developing

such advice into something centred on authorial and academic writing. Hence, Maria was able to provide an idea on what the analysis would show. *This type of PSD was the most used throughout the semester particularly for the development of the literature review stage.*

4.3.3.3 Unsupported opinion – good or bad- about the project

This type of PSD was the least used during the semester. There was only one instance of this type. This unsupported opinion occurred in session three – in which the aim was to establish the literature review outline considering different authors. The following table shows how this PSD developed.

Table 4.11 Unsupported opinions

<p>1 <i>Maria: aha and you are only going to work with these people, right?</i> 2 <i>Joe: yeah</i> 3 <i>Maria: only with those participants</i> 4 <i>Joe: yeah</i> 5 <i>Maria: how many?</i> 6 <i>Joe: four...two men and two women</i> 7 <i>Maria: good...good because that will also give us a hint</i></p>

As seen in the excerpt above, Maria gave an opinion that was not based on any theory, rather on her point of view. Something that is worth mentioning is that this particular case, may suggest that this type of PSD is not as used as the others. As Innes (2007) points out, PSD is any interaction that relates to theory in the process of planning a project. Furthermore, the author acknowledges that the development of projects may raise personal comments which may not be founded on any theory but personal perspectives. That is why this sequence was considered as an unsupported opinion.

4.3.3.4 Identifying specific issues facing the project and its problems

This type of PSD was not used as much as simple link between the content and the project or as putting forward suggestions. Nevertheless, its use remained high with 23 instances throughout the semester. Its peak occurred in session one with 11 instances– which aimed to introduce participants’ project for the first time. The following excerpts show how such interactions took place.

Table 4.12 Identifying specific issues facing the project and its problems

1 Ana: as for impact I have read that impact is very difficult to measure when you’re evaluating curriculum it’s very difficult to measure within a limited amount of time, especially because we only have one year...
2 Aldo: ok
3 Ana: so, how do you plan on measuring? I notice that you have like most observable effects but wouldn’t we need to, I don’t know, set within a timeline what are the first effects or the most...
4 Aldo: yes, what I want to do is this group I have is from BINE students and the half of the course will be normally taught and then the second part of the course will implement this and see...
5 Ana: like an experiment
6 Aldo: yeah

In this sequence, Ana identified an issue related to the measurement of impact; besides that, she also noticed that there may have been time constraints. In response to Ana’s comment, Aldo explained what he intended to do to sort the second issue out –the one related to time constraints. However, he did not address the issue related to impact measurement. In the next excerpt, a similar interaction can be observed.

Table 4.13 Identifying specific issues facing the project and its problems

1 Maria: and I have a problem with your first question. I think that it’s too...
2 Lisa: open?
3 Maria: too open. I feel you have two questions. What are the individual factors in participants’ childhood that supported their professional development and what are the contextual factors. And maybe not how would participants describe their childhood.

4 *Lisa*: so...
5 *Maria*: and the first is... your second would necessarily imply your first question
6 *Lisa*: mjm
7 *Maria*: does that sound logical?
8 *Ana*: like the ways that they have observed...how are the reasons to search for professional development. It goes in that way, right?
9 *Maria*: yeah
10 *Carla*: how do participants describe their childhood...oh well...how do participants describe their childhood...where...at what stage? That's missing there
11 *Maria*: yeah...I think that because of the way that she is looking at it I see the first right because you would get to that in order to answer your second and third question. So, I don't see the need...

In this sequence, Maria stated quite clearly that there was an issue with Lisa's research questions. As she observed, one of the questions could be divided into two. To make this claim, Maria used information from the same case; in other words, she did not mention any other author or theory to support what she said rather she based her claims on what she saw on Lisa's artefact. Both of these excerpts show how issues were identified from the case's facts. *This was the type of PSD used the most when discussing chapter I of the thesis project.*

4.3.3.5 Identifying or analysing issues facing the project and its problems

Although this may sound similar to the PSD described above, the difference is that this type of PSD requires using personal experience or bringing in parallel examples from some other research projects to support a claim. Alike the simple connection between the content and the project, this type of PSD had a total of 29 instances throughout the semester. Its peak occurred in session five with a total of 11 instances – that aimed to present the project in terms of its introduction, literature review and research methods. The following excerpts show how these interactions occurred.

Table 4.14 Identifying or analysing issues facing the project and its problems

1 *Maria: I think that you...that in this story you understood that there's a whole ehh amm what do you call it...that is the whole system that affects the way a professor does things but a professor would probably.... You would probably teach differently in a different school because that school has certain characteristics and a certain system and whatever so maybe just maybe activity theory won't work probably you could work with an ecological perspective*

2 *Joe: mjm*

3 *Maria: in which you see how the school they are in...the way they...or else it would be too complex. Do you understand?*

4 *Joe: yeap...amm actually that's part of why I chose four different people because...amm...well amm there are four contradictions and based on these contradictions and the expansive circles it is supposed that these contradictions are every single tension that the system has*

5 *Maria: yeah*

As mentioned before, in this type of interaction besides noticing an issue, participants made use of their experience to support what they said. For instance, Maria did not only point out how Joe's understanding would help him to see things but also how that same understanding may vary according to the context. The next excerpt shows a similar interaction.

Table 4.15 Identifying or analysing issues facing the project and its problems

1 *Aldo: ok within those differences that you have found regardless of Europe and the United States is there something that is relevant for your investigation on those differences...something that is very important for you so that you really have to explain it*

2 *Maria: you know for example things like often when you read ammm when you read authors specially from Great Britain you find for example you find professors or teachers...when you when you read ahh when you read texts written in the United States they generally use instructors, right?*

3 *Eric: mjm*

4 *Maria: but there is something that...ahh...there is a difference between these professors and these instructors because in the United Kingdom people work with small classes instead in the United States they work with very big classes and that of course implies something different...they're really an instructor because they've got sixty seventy students there who once in a while ask questions but it is an instructor so maybe just maybe there might be some difference that has to do with the context and this this is...*

5 *Eunice: well I remember there is difference because according to the definitions they*

say that when it is management it has to do more with people and being in charge of people maybe schools that are rich and that it depends a lot on the people who are working with you

6 **Maria:** *aha*

7 **Eunice:** *and then administration has to do more with marketing and making money*

8 **Maria:** *and with things*

As observed in this excerpt, the issue raised when Aldo questioned the relevance of differentiating management from administration. In order to solve this situation, Maria took advantage of her previous readings and experience to analyse Aldo's point. This experience is evident when she commented on how such practice was called in different contexts. In addition, Eunice also commented that some of her readings did differentiate between management and administration. That is why this interaction is categorised as identifying or analysing issues based on previous experiences since participants supported their claims through facts that they learnt somewhere else. *This PSD type was the most used when discussing the third chapter/stage of the thesis project.*

4.3.3.6 Putting forward suggestions for dealing with problems

This type of PSD interaction aimed to address specific problems and tried to provide a solution to them. This interaction did not occur until the last session in which students introduced their research methods. It could be said that as students built their understanding of what they were investigating, they reached a stage at which they approached very particular issues. Consequently, they were not reconsidering their projects through clarifying ideas, rather through targeting specific situations. The following excerpts show how these interactions took place.

Table 4.16 Suggestions for dealing with problems

1 Ana: and then I have a question that is how do these learners perceive their authorial writing process and final product learning experience and I guess that here it also doesn't make sense to go into systemic functional linguistics

2 Maria: yes

3 Ana: because we are not dealing with the secretarial writing that has to do more with the grammar and

4 Maria: yeah

5 Ana: so

6 Maria: and then something else with that perception you could write...you could use a methodology that is called talk around the text so what you could do is show them their products and tell them well what happened here or what happened here, right?

7 Ana: aha, exactly! Aha that's what I want to do

8 Maria: yeah it's called talk around the text. Ok

9 Ana: so that would be the part in which I have the...well I will have this semi structured interview to talk around the text

In this sequence, Ana noticed that her question related to perception did not have any relation to how systemic functional linguistics may address it. This was the problem identified by Ana. In analysing how it could be solved, Maria suggested that Ana could use a data collection strategy called “talk around the text”. As Maria observed, in doing so Ana would be able to collect the data that she needed through an adequate strategy. A similar sequence occurred after Eunice's presentation.

Table 4.17 Suggestions for dealing with problems

1Eunice: my data but yeah...and then I wrote an example of how...because you suggested it to me like having a...well just like prompts to use in the interview and so I wrote some prompts...because since I am going to ask how they developed then I wrote like what courses conferences ehh groups like those for managers and things like that so that I can help them to remember

2 Maria: why don't you go into narrative analysis try reading on narrative analysis and you will find or narrative inquiry sorry sorry narrative inquiry and then you will find that there are different kinds of narrative inquiry because your interview would be a narrative and sometimes it's ok if people tell you stories because with their stories they tell you things they'll probably tell you stories...the thing is that you go to an interview and ask people about themselves and it takes an hour at least

3 Ana: yeah ...perhaps having several interviews

In the excerpt above, the problem was finding the appropriate ways to carry out the interviews. Eunice was not sure about the types of prompts that could give her the data she needed. For this reason, Maria suggested that Eunice used a strategy for her analysis called narrative analysis. As Maria mentioned, sometimes participants tended to tell stories while they were interviewed; therefore, it would be adequate to use narrative analysis to get the most out of the data.

The fact that this type of PSD did not appear until the introduction of the research methods suggests that this particular stage represents a moment in which participants face different problems. Such problems arise when students hesitate about the strategies that they should use in order to answer the questions that they have established. Consequently, it seems natural that students need this type of dialogue when going through chapter three.

4.4 Participants' insights

Participants were interviewed as a final stage of data collection. These interviews allowed perceiving how participants experienced working with others within research group supervision. The information here presented may reflect three points from the literature review mainly: the notions of community of practice, dialogue, and the views of socio-cognitive theory.

4.4.1 Meaningful dialogues

Participants in this study were initially asked about their perceptions on the most meaningful dialogue to them. This was a question to identify the most meaningful session during the first thesis seminar. Although participants were able to choose one, they also acknowledged that they would not say that a single interaction founded their thesis projects; rather it was the series of interactions that were helpful to build their investigations. The following excerpts reflect participants' opinions about it.

Eunice: When you asked me to choose just one interaction I thought it was going to be difficult because all of them have helped my work...I think it's weird because I am sure that all these interactions have influenced my work and I know that it has become what it has become because of all these comments and observations

Gloria: I would not say that my idea became clear in a single conversation but it happened by not only listening to myself talking but everybody else, all of us working in the same project.

Lisa: All sessions were meaningful for me

Joe: I think that most of the discussions that took place made me realise that I needed to make some changes.

These answers were given when participants were asked to choose their most meaningful interaction. Most participants agreed that their projects were built as a result of a series of interactions. Eunice and Gloria pointed out that their projects were the result of all comments and suggestions given throughout the semester. In addition, participants were able to choose the interaction that they found the most meaningful. Initially, this question was asked to identify common sequences of dialogue according to the categories used. However, it was found that participants' key moments happened in different sessions. Table 4.16 summarises this information.

Table 4.18 Summary of participants' most meaningful sessions

Participant	Most meaningful session	Key moment	Reasons
Eunice	Session 5 (discussion of chapter III)	Noticing how to present the concepts of administration and management	I was very confused on the difference between administration and management which I had been reading like many times so I was like having this conflict on which concept I was going to use and in this session I shared this feeling of confusion with all of you and the group helped me to understand.
Ana	Session 3 (discussion of LR outline)	Realising about how weak the theoretical framework was	I had a crucial moment of realisation how far I was from understanding what I could actually do and it was difficult because it was both professors...you could see I do a lot of mjm because I didn't really know how to argue it was then that I realised that I had a lot of work to do and I was trying to accommodate everything that I was receiving. It was from the third conversation that I notice that I needed to figure out my theoretical framework that was my biggest weakness at that point I was really lost. It was a breakthrough for me because I felt really frustrated because I felt I did not know how to do research and I still don't know
Gloria	Session 3 (discussion of LR outline)	Narrowing down the topic – going from literacy in general to defining literacy practices and events.	I can see myself reflecting more about my topic I can see that in the first conversations my topic was...I was still wondering about what I really wanted to do and I can say that honestly I had an idea but it was not that clear so in the third conversation I could see the light out of the tunnel with the topic with what I was really working on.
Lisa	Session 1 (introduction of the project)	Reflecting on how to organise her research project	I am going to choose the first one because we talked about not only the content of my research but also how I am going to design that because that's the most complex thing to me.
Joe	Session 5 (discussion of research methods)	Finding out that his theoretical framework would not be the most appropriate	I realised of some frameworks that I was supposed to use and then I realized that there was some floss not in relation to the framework itself but on how I would approach by using the framework. I was kind of stubborn about the issue of not changing my framework because I thought that it was pretty powerful in the sense that it also included issues about historicity but once I was discussing with Maria I realised that activity theory was not an appropriate framework to answer my questions and reach the objectives I wanted to achieve.
Aldo	Session five (discussion of research methods)	Defending his stance on using the word benefit	Session five was the most meaningful to me because you guys pointed out that I was using the word benefit. And that day was very meaningful because I defended my point of view.

The table above shows the different opinions participants had in regards of the most meaningful session to each one of them. Lisa believed that session one was the most meaningful to her; Ana and Gloria stated that their most meaningful interaction occurred in session three; finally, Eunice, Joe, and Aldo reported that session five was the most significant to them. Although participants differ in their most significant moments –which also entails that they occurred at different stages of the thesis project- a commonality was found. Most of them acknowledged that understanding core concepts after moments of tension was the turning point that defined their work.

Key moments occurred at different stages of the thesis project and in different sequences of dialogue. Participants affirmed that those moments were meaningful because they represented a struggle to understand a core concept or battery of concepts. Therefore, it can be said that tensions – or struggles- may represent moments of important development as they, in this case, triggered the definition of important elements of participants' studies. In addition, participants expressed that they learnt not only from the interactions related to their own projects but also from seeing others presenting. This is discussed in the next section.

4.4.2 Models

Besides acknowledging that moments of tension represented a turning point in the development of their projects, participants also commented that seeing how their peers presented their progress provided models to them. As mentioned earlier in chapter II, modelling is an important source of information since it allows learners to acquire knowledge, rules, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes (Schunk, 2012). In the interviews, participants vocalized this experience.

Eunice: I think that listening to what my classmates were doing and the authors you were using was like...every time that we met and everybody talked about their projects so for example if I heard someone was reading about this author then I would go and read about it only if I felt it worked for me. I even got ideas on what to do from other people because of their work but it is hard to tell I took this from this person and this from this other person but I am sure that I had that influence from everybody's work. I decided to make some changes because of what I saw other people were doing.

Ana: On different conversations I found things to learn. For instance how to support my theoretical framework that also helped me to look at the different perspectives and to look how I wanted to narrow my research so by looking at what everyone were doing and looking at the authors they were using to support their ideas...that helped me but also the way that people present in the class...that people presented their ideas the different organization that people used that was very different from mine so I also learnt of how the different people in the class structured their thinking and their arguments. It made me reconsider how I was expressing my arguments and also it made me think deep on the different topics that they were presenting.

Gloria: Looking at every single project I started comparing all of it. So I always looked for patterns and I started looking at the puzzles of each one of our works.

The learning of new information was facilitated by looking at everyone's projects.

As seen in these excerpts, Gloria, Ana, and Eunice agreed on the idea that their classmates' presentations provided strategies and knowledge for them to use. As Ana mentioned, by watching others' projects organisation, she was able to reconsider hers and come up with a

version that made more sense to her. Alike Ana, Eunice stated that some of the changes in her work were due to what she saw others were doing. In addition to providing new ideas, watching others presenting also developed a sort of motivation to keep working.

Lisa: seeing like how far they are going in their research pushed me to continue because I don't want to stay behind. I just don't want to stay behind and seeing others finishing. It is motivating for me.

Aldo: Sometimes I feel motivated when I saw someone presenting and I felt totally lost I was like "oh I need to do better" but if it was someone who was doing great then I was like oh I wanna do it that way or I can take that to do mine better

As Lisa and Aldo pointed out, presentations and interactions motivated them to keep working. They did not only perceive the strategies but also the progress their peers were making. These insights suggest that research group supervision is an alternative that has different benefits on how students experience the thesis process. These experiences also shaped participants' conceptions on thesis writing which are addressed the next.

4.4.3 Research Group Supervision as a turning point

Research group supervision was also considered as an experience that changed points of view on two aspects: thesis design and further practices as professionals. In regards of the first point, most participants accepted that they conceived thesis writing as an individual's endeavour only. These beliefs were founded on previous experiences for participants that had written a thesis for the BA.

Eunice: When I wrote my BA thesis the interaction was just with my supervisor. I was like very isolated in so many different ways. I worked on my own but also I wasn't doing research

Ana: I am an introvert even though I speak a lot in class and I like working on my own... I don't like working with other people because I get too anxious, I get too stressed and I am a control freak

Gloria: At the beginning I thought it was going to be one of the most difficult things I was going to do, very challenging

Joe: At the beginning I thought it was too much to explain over and over and over again.

As these opinions show, participants held different points of view regarding different aspects of the thesis: supervision, socializing, and the difficulty of doing research. Nonetheless, they also pointed that the experience of working with others made them appreciate the value of cooperative work when doing their theses.

Eunice: I feel part of a group...the whole group we have for the masters and the group we have for writing our thesis and by that time I didn't belong to any other group so I started realising how important it is to make connections and to talk to other people.

Ana: having this experience has taught me the value of collaborative work so even though I have been working collaboratively in other areas of my life I think that for research it was very clear that one cannot do research without working with others. For me I can understand that I cannot do research without collaboration so if I want to continue a career as a researcher then I need to embrace collaborative work

Gloria: I realised that it is not that bad. So every time that someone struggles we feel empathetic because either we are the same way or we are about to be there so I think that this is how it should be done groups of investigation working collaboratively instead of telling you what to do, making appointments every month without having

even the contact or socializing information. I think that respect has a very important role because without it you wouldn't tolerate and you wouldn't be in the same boat.

Joe: then I realised that the more you present it the more you get to see the flaws. So every time I was explaining, I was like no this is not totally right or I still have some voids of knowledge that I am supposed to know.

Most participants developed a positive attitude towards group supervision. Eunice, Ana, and Gloria reflected on the importance of collaborative work within a community through mentioning different characteristics such as the sense of belonging to group, being empathetic, and embracing collaborative work. Unlike them, Joe's point of view changed in regards of the relevance of presenting his progress more than once. These insights suggest that although benefits are not the same for everyone, participants acknowledged thesis group supervision helped them develop their theses projects.

4.4.4 Impact in further activities

Finally, participants commented on how this experience would influence their further practices as researchers and teachers. The fact that participants reflected on how they would apply their new knowledge –acquired through this experience- to their further practices may also suggest that besides providing strategies, group research supervision served as a successful model to follow.

Eunice: As I have learnt the value of belonging to a community that's what I will try to do from now on even now I am thinking how I am going to do connections with other people.

Gloria: I think I've learnt more about how important the connections and relationships are and the role that relationships play in projects and groups like this one. I think that one of the problems is that we don't know how to act; we don't

know what it is about, what we are supposed to do. We are not that open... I think I started already doing it because they always ask you about collaborative work and this time I've been having to work with a bunch of teachers so I've been sharing how I feel about things and next thing I know is somebody else seconds my voice and then a third so by sharing how you feel everybody feels relieved.

Joe: I think that this experience has influenced my practice as a teacher. For example I have projects for my kids and provide them the rubrics which are supposed to be very informative. But I realize that even though they have the rubrics, they still need to talk about their projects so that they have another chance to provide their thoughts and one may actually guide in regards of what they want to do so as a teacher that's pretty useful. And as a researcher that made me realize that research is a path that you can't go alone and it doesn't matter if you are an expert or not. Presenting your topics, at least in my case, made me realize of the gaps.

Aldo: I think that this experience will help me if I want to study a PhD or being a coordinator or any other situation in which you need to know how to talk to people how to interact with people

As expressed by participants, research group supervision influenced different aspects. For instance, Eunice found out that making connections is relevant for her and need to belong to a group. This statement suggests that she holds the idea that working with others is something that brings benefits. Gloria and Aldo hold a different view. These participants believe that this experience has helped them learn to interact with others. Gloria developed her opinion further by saying that emotions are important when working with others as they may facilitate this work. Something similar may be understood from Aldo's comment on learning how to talk to people. Finally, Joe stated that this experience made him aware of

the importance of talking with others. This insight would help him to improve his practices as a teacher by allowing their students to talk more.

The fact the research group supervision may influence their practices suggests that participants consider and experienced it as a practice that may have good things to offer. Although it could be thought that research group supervision has effects only on the thesis writing process, its effects expand on different aspects of life such as making connections, value the role of emotions, and having new insights on how to use this strategy in the classroom.

In the next chapter, the findings of this study will summarised and discussed along with insights on how these findings may contribute to the understanding of thesis research supervision. There were three main findings that may shed light about this process: discussions centred on artefacts, specific types of dialogues according to the thesis stage, and modelling as an important source of information. This study was founded on both socio-cognitive and socio-cultural theories to present a dimension of the thesis process focused on discussions. These reflections may open new paths to approach the investigation of research supervision that goes beyond studying participants' perceptions rather studying the process as a dynamics made of presentations, discussions, and source of models that, consequently, change points of view.

Chapter V: Conclusions

Analysing the information through particular theoretical lenses has built the stance of this study towards how group research supervision occurs and affects its participants. As stated in chapter I, the aims of this study are: describing how dialogue occurs, identifying the types of dialogue used throughout the discussions addressing chapters I, II, and III, and spotting the effects of thesis group supervision. This chapter will introduce the most relevant findings and the discussions that provide answers to the research questions. Then, it will state the contributions as well as my reflections. Finally, limitations and suggestions for further research will be approached.

5.1 Findings of the study

The main assumption of this study was that thesis group supervision was a process that featured dialogue. However, since most studies on research focused on surveying participants perceptions, there existed the need to explore how actual conversations occurred. This exploration borrowed, firstly, the dialogue index proposed by Bereiter and Scardamalia (2007). Nevertheless, additional information was taken from Innes (2007) categorisation on problem solving dialogue. Taking into consideration such typologies, an exploration on how actual conversations occur among thesis students and supervisors was carried out. This community started the thesis supervision process in August 2016 and was formed by seven students and a supervisor. To collect data, three strategies were used: audio recording of the sessions, a focus group, and individual interviews with participants.

The foundations of this study were constructed on socio-cultural and socio-cognitive theories and applied in three stages. Stages one and two consisted of observing and analysing the sessions in which there were presentations related to the participants'

progress. Interactions occurring right after participants' presentations were analysed regarding not only the types of dialogue that they presented but also features like hedging and length of the sequences of participation. These results were shown and discussed with participants through a focus group. In addition, participants' perceptions were collected through individual interviews which added to the information previously analysed to construct a bigger picture of thesis group supervision.

Results suggested that thesis group supervision is a process that involves different processes that go beyond traditional conceptions on this matter such as supervisor as the only source of information, and thesis students working in isolation. This investigation shows different facts that may describe group supervision as a whole: the need of artefacts to approach and centre the discussion; the existence of dialogue as a reaction to participants' performance and as a trigger for development; participants' presentations as models for their peers; and group supervision experience as a turning-perception event.

5.1.1 Artefacts as dialogue triggers

The role of artefacts was crucial not only for participants to present their work but also for the researcher to narrow down the data to be analysed. In socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1966), the notion of artefact has been described as a tool that mediates thinking; however, it was also found that it mediated participants' performance when presenting in front of the group as well as the centre of the discussions. This finding indicates that learning is connected to artefacts because artefacts empower the different learner practices in the course room (Singh & Richards, 2006). Hence, the idea of artefact was fundamental to select the sample sessions as well as the dialogical sequences that would constitute the main source of information for this study.

5.1.2 Types of dialogue characteristic of thesis supervision

Findings suggested that, from Bereiter and Scardamalia's (2007) index of dialogue, there are three levels that featured this particular thesis group supervision case: Socratic questioning, debate, and problem solving dialogue. Each of these types served different purposes. Socratic questioning was used between the supervisor and one of the students; its main purpose was to guide the student through different questions to reach a conclusion that was previously conceived by the supervisor. This conclusion was related to an alternative organisation of this participant's literature review. Debates occurred for different reasons. The two instances of debate suggest that they occurred when participants were given a proposition to change something in what they were doing. Instead of agreeing with the propositions; participants explained the reasons to do what they were doing. It could be inferred that debates are evidence of a non-authoritarian relationship in which nothing was imposed; it was rather proposed and discussed.

Finally, problem-solving dialogue was the type of dialogue used the most. It seems natural that more than 90% of the interactions took this type of sequence as it relates to the use of theory within a project. Therefore, problem-solving dialogue was the most common and desired type of dialogue in the thesis group supervision process in this study. It was also found that there was a dominant type of PSD from Innes (2007) typology at each of the three stages approached in this study: defining the problem, building a theoretical foundation, and choosing appropriate research methods. In this study the relations between type of PSD and stage of the thesis project were found as follows: when discussing chapter I, PSD focused on identifying specific issues of the project and its problems. When discussing chapter II, the dominating types of PSD were simple content between the content and the project, and suggestions for ways to analyse or categorise the project in

theoretical terms. Finally, when addressing chapter III, identifying or analysing issues facing the project and its problems PSD was the type used the most.

The different types of dialogue used throughout the course may suggest that dialogue is one of the most used strategies during research group supervision. Because dialogue is a type of enquiry to further understand situations (Isaacs, 1999), it allows strengthening one's stance or reshaping it (Singh & Richards, 2006) as a result of participants validations of their own knowledge and beliefs through dialogic interaction.

5.1.3 Peers' presentations as models

Besides providing opportunities to discuss their project progress, findings suggest that peers' presentations and discussions also offered participants models which they could follow. This finding is similar to that of O'Neil, Schurink and Stanz (2016) study. As these authors observe, one of the benefits of research group supervision is relating and comparing ones' work to others' work. This relation and comparison adds structure to ideas and fosters responsibility and explanation skills (O'Neil, Schurink & Stanz, 2016). This may mean that, after all, there is vicarious and not only enactive learning during research group supervision. As participants commented, through watching their peers presenting and discussing, they were able to acquire strategies to organise their work; they also felt motivated to see them succeed and convinced themselves to keep working to have similar outcomes. These findings may be only a couple out of a number of benefits that students could obtain from thesis group supervision and encourage following this line of study.

5.1.4 Thesis group supervision as a turning point

One more finding suggests that group-based thesis served as a turning point. All participants acknowledged that it was through different dialogues that their projects became what they became finally. This acknowledgement is similar to that of Carbaugh (2013)

when stating that dialogue activates expectations and motives that modify participants' conceptions. However, as presented in table 4.16, they had meaningful moments at different stages of the thesis project when understanding core concepts was essential for their investigations. In addition to these insights, some participants also pointed out that relationships among the participants became stronger as well as the feeling of belonging to a group or a community. These findings relate to Singh and Richards (2006) conception of community of practice when stating that communities, as participation structures, entail discourse and activities that do not only shape the life of the course room but also the way meaning and knowledge are built.

Other perspectives on group supervision as a turning point indicated that participants became interested in working within communities because it proved helpful to them. It seems that previous experiences on either working with others or writing a thesis made them sceptical about collaborative work. Nevertheless, they changed their attitude towards collaborative work once they experienced thesis group supervision. This finding supports Wenger's (2010) idea that communities –in this case a research supervision group- entails changing participants' identities. In other words, learning does not only imply the acquisition of knowledge and skills but also the transformation of the person into a knower in a context where things are negotiated.

5.2 Discussion

Group-based thesis supervision is a process that has received little attention (Dysthe & Westrheim, 2003) at least in a Latin American context. For this reason, this study considered worthwhile exploring this issue to understand how it occurs –in terms of dialogical interactions- and how it affects students' perceptions on research supervision. In addition, the methodology used in this study to investigate such processes may add may

contribute to our understanding of actual interactions in group supervision. Most of the previous studies were based on surveys. Results are similar to the ones presented in other studies (Dysthe & Westrheim, 2003; Akister, Williams & Maynard, 2009; O’Neil, Schurink & Stanz, 2016) and suggest that research group supervision benefits participating students. As suggested in these studies, research group supervision is a powerful tool that helps students to further develop their thesis projects in that through socialising students can view others’ perspectives and can relate to other projects. This was noticed through participants’ answers on how they perceived research group supervision; however, besides these benefits, this study also found some other characteristics that may be particular to research supervision processes. These variations were the result of following a different methodology to explore actual interactions in research group supervision which are explained in the next section.

5.3 Research contributions

This study may contribute in different ways to the understanding of thesis group supervision. In a nutshell, it provides information on how actual interactions in thesis group supervision occur; in addition, the way this phenomenon was analysed also offers an alternative on a multi-theoretical perspective. Therefore, it can be said that this investigation has two main contributions: one that adds to the knowledge of thesis group supervision, and a model, based on socio-cognitive and socio-cultural theories, to understand thesis group supervision.

5.3.1 Background theory

As mentioned before, thesis supervision research has been conducted mainly through surveys. In doing so, most studies regard students’ perspectives on how they lived such experience. However, only students’ perspectives do not allow seeing a bigger picture – by

bigger picture, please, do not understand the whole picture. That is why this study suggests understanding thesis supervision as a process that entails elements from both socio-cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives; artefacts, communities, modelling, and dialogue. Although there may be people who think that these are opposite theories, I believe that they could complement each other and allow understanding dialogical processes when writing a thesis, interacting with others and reflecting on these events as triggers for the investigation to develop.

5.3.2 Pedagogical implications: Adding to the knowledge and informing practices

In addition to proposing a multi-theoretical stance to approach thesis group supervision, this study provided an exploration on how such process actually occurs. Therefore, a first attempt to describe how interactions occur within research supervision may provide new insights on how to carry out and what to expect from this process at the first three stages. It was found that artefacts mediate and guide participants' performance not only while structuring but also when presenting their artefact to their peers. As a result, peers reacted through dialogical interactions that served different purposes: guided questioning to reach a conclusion, proposing alternatives, asking for connections between content and project, identifying and analysing issues, and suggesting ways to overcome such situations. It was also noticed that each stage of the thesis process entailed a particular level of dialogue. Finally, findings indicate that participants benefitted from watching peers' presentations and discussions.

Regarding these findings, I believe that thesis supervisors –or in this case advisor- and supervisees may benefit from understanding the development of the first three stages of the thesis. In doing so, they would raise their awareness on how to lead thesis group supervision – from the professors' side- and what to expect and how to benefit from others

– from the supervisee position. Informed practice may raise awareness on how to make the most of this experience. At a larger scale, universities may consider group supervision as an alternative to reach their main goals which are creating and disseminating knowledge. For these reasons, I believe that research supervision should be at the core of universities' objectives.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research

In this study, limitations were related to number of participants, methodological approach, length of the study in matters of time, and the fact that only supervisees' perceptions were taken into account. First, although there were seven participants, this research is considered as a single case study. For this reason the claims made in this thesis may be truth only to this particular case. This does not mean that the findings could not be helpful to understand similar cases; rather these claims cannot be generalised to all cases since each case will present its own particularities. Second, a qualitative study was needed in order to understand the nature of thesis group supervision. However, these findings may trace a path for quantitative studies. Although it would be impossible to generalise any claim, quantitative studies may provide new information and picture the panorama at a larger scale. Third, the data collection was done throughout a semester in which participants approached only the narrowing of their topics, the revision of the literature, and their research methodology. This was done so due to time constraints –if I had waited until my classmates had finished with their thesis, then I would not have completed mine on time. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to explore the types of dialogue used when addressing findings and discussion. Finally, individual interviews took into account only supervisees' perceptions so I would suggest exploring supervisors' opinions and experiences on the

process of research group supervision in further researches. This will offer a general idea on how research group supervision is lived not only by supervisees but also by supervisors.

5.5 A final insight

As a student, this is my second experience writing a thesis. However, unlike many others, I have been lucky to have lived both processes within communities. That is why I do believe that my perception on thesis writing is different from others that have not had the opportunity to work collaboratively while doing their projects. Yes, some may call me Mr Ever Optimist due to this attitude towards facing the thesis, which is something that many others try to escape by choosing alternatives to graduate.

I can say this because I have heard lots of students complaining about their thesis experience. They feel overwhelmed and with no support; they do not know what to do; they are lost. I have seen many others decline because they cannot afford –emotion and mental wise- this process. I have also heard thesis supervisors claiming that writing a thesis equals working in isolation and going through difficult situations- no, I am not exaggerating. I did hear these claims in a round table on thesis supervision at a symposium and many students report they have had this experience. Even though thesis writing processes entails struggling to focus, reorganising and rewriting the thesis; I have enough reasons to say that writing a thesis, besides helping us to obtain a degree, is a turning point experience – this is clear after having a look at the opinions of this study’s participants.

I hope that this study will spark new ideas on its readers – who will surely be thesis students and maybe thesis supervisors. Thesis design, writing, and supervision should not be considered as an individual’s endeavour but rather as a collaborative enterprise in which the supervisor provides mentoring to a student who is learning about both: the project’s content and how to research. Only if both parts consider the research experience as

something meaningful, their engagement will come naturally and success will be reached – research-wise, education-wise, life-wise.

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Appendix A

Agenda for Individual Interviews

1. What was the most meaningful interaction for you? Why?
2. Was there any significant conversation that was not related to your topic but that was meaningful to you? Why?
3. Has this group experience change your perspective on working with others?
4. Do you think that having this experience of working in a community to write your MA thesis will have an impact in your further life? Why?