Students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition in health and social care

Thesis

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Link(s) to article on publisher’s website:
http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.00014085

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STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES OF SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE TUITION IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Kathryn Chandler

Doctorate in Education

5 October 2021
Abstract

This study explores students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition within the researcher’s own context as a health and social care tutor at a large UK-based distance learning university. There is a lack of literature which considers students’ experiences within this context in any depth.

The research explores how students’ narratives of tutorial experiences vary, the factors that account for this variation, and the needs that drive the preferences students express. It uses the Community of Inquiry as a theoretical framework, investigating the relationships between social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence evident within the narrative accounts, and considering the proposed additions to the original framework of emotional presence and learning presence.

The study takes an experience-centred narrative approach, using the Voice Centred Relational Method to analyse diaries and interviews of 10 female students. The responses of 28 tutors to the narratives are analysed to investigate how hearing about students’ experience impacts on tutors’ reported thinking and practice.

The analysis uncovers how tutorial experiences are embedded in the social and cultural contexts of students’ lives and are fitted around their multiple caring roles. These students experience variation in tutorial design and in the tutors’ characteristics. They value friendly, empathetic tutors who enable students’ contributions and respond encouragingly. Students avoid using microphones in tutorials but enjoy taking an active part via other tools. They appreciate hearing peers’ perspectives and prefer small group sizes. A sense of community is missing, however, particularly for students with fewer supportive friends, colleagues, or family members. They long to see people’s faces and build relationships.

Insight into how students’ experiences impact on learning holds the potential to enlighten educators and invites revision of policy and practice. Opportunities to belong to enduring learning communities with an enhanced sense of social presence would benefit those learners who currently feel isolated.
Acknowledgements

Thank you firstly to all the students and tutors who kindly agreed to contribute their experiences to this research and to the Open University for making doctoral study possible for me. Thank you also to Dr Chris Kubiak and Andy Rixon.

Thank you to my supervisors, Dr Alison Fox, and Dr Sue Forsythe who have supported and challenged me throughout the EdD journey. You have both given so generously of your time and ideas and always kept me going in the right direction.

Thank you to my fellow cohort of EdD students who have been such a supportive group and to the EdD programme staff.

Thank you to my family, Phil, Juliette, and Emma, who have provided IT support, borrowed books on my behalf, helped with proofreading and provided the starting point for new directions of thought.

Thank you to the friends who have taken an interest in my work and provided encouragement at key points along the way, particularly John Eastwood, Dr Elizabeth Roberts, and Dr Sean Hughes. And finally, thank you to Alistair Fuller who shares my love of stories and has encouraged me every step of the way. One of the best ideas was yours.
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# Acronyms

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<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BERA</td>
<td>British Educational Research Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CoI</td>
<td>Community of Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRF</td>
<td>Common Room Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>Health and Social Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTF</td>
<td>Module Tutor Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OU</td>
<td>Open University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PG</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRPP</td>
<td>Student Research Project Panel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TMA</td>
<td>Tutor Marked Assignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis presents my research into health and social care students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition. This chapter introduces the research, explaining how my interest in this area arose, my positionality as an insider researcher, and the research purpose. It concludes with an outline of my thesis structure.

Throughout my thesis, I will refer to the four dimensions of ethical thinking: ecological, relational, consequential, and deontological, to meet the criteria for an effective ethical analysis (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009).

1.1 The background to my research

1.1.1 My professional background

My background is in nursing, health visiting, community development and, since 2003, teaching in higher education. As an associate lecturer or tutor at the Open University, a university specialising in distance learning in the UK, I support students studying a range of health and social care (HSC) modules. It is a large university of over 168,000 students, which gained an additional 30,000 students between February 2020 and February 2021. With the exception of professional programmes of study, it has an open admissions policy, and 33% of students have one ‘A’ level or a lower qualification on admission (The Open University, 2021).

For the modules that I support, there has been a gradual shift from face-to-face tutorials to online tuition over the past 10 years. I have developed an interest in how tutors can be supported to develop skills in online tuition. I have undertaken scholarship around this issue and provided training and peer support to tutor colleagues. My doctoral research has provided an opportunity to take this interest further.

1.1.2 The research context

To understand my research, it is helpful to know how study and tuition work within my institution and school. HSC modules are studied by students registered on different qualification pathways, including degrees in health and social care; professional programmes in nursing, social work, and healthcare practice; childhood and youth studies; education; and youth justice. They are also studied by students working towards an Open Degree, where students can take modules from disciplines across the faculties of the university to build their degree. This
means that many students studying HSC cannot be described as HSC students, even though they are studying HSC modules as part of their programme of study.

Students study via accessing module materials online and, in some cases, via textbooks, which are written and presented from year to year by a module team supported by learning designers. Students’ main point of contact with the university is their allocated module tutor who typically supports multiple tutor groups with around 20 students in each. Module tutors are managed by a cluster manager who supports all the tutors in a defined geographical area or ‘cluster’. The number of tutor groups in each cluster varies from year to year depending on student numbers. The arrangements for the module under study are explained in section 1.1.5. The university has around 4,000 tutors, all currently employed on an adjunct basis. A Student Support Team provides help with more general queries and students have access to other services, such as the library helpdesk, computing helpdesk and careers support.

Students can contact their tutor, who works from home, by email or phone to discuss their module materials or assignments. The tutor marks their assignments, giving detailed feedback via correspondence using an electronic system. Students interact with their tutor and peers via asynchronous forums, where tutors post activities to encourage discussions. Most students also have scheduled synchronous tutorials.

For some modules, all synchronous tutorials are held in online rooms. For others, there is usually a combination of online and face-to-face tutorials. The distances involved, however, as well as disability or work and family commitments, can make online tutorials the only tutorial option for some learners. With the arrival of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the UK in March 2020, all tuition within the university moved online and will remain so until at least 2022.

Except for students studying professional programmes, tutorial attendance is optional. Students can see the tutorials available and book sessions via an online booking system. The focus and purpose of each tutorial are decided by the module team who also determine the length and frequency of tutorials and when they are scheduled but tutors often have considerable flexibility in choosing the style of tuition and designing the activities.
Some modules also have module-wide online tutorials, large events that are open to any student studying the module and which are sometimes facilitated by members of the module team. This is not the case for the module studied by the students in this research.

### 1.1.2.1 Group Tuition Policy

Until 2016, students attended tutorials within their own tutor groups, although small numbers attended other groups’ tutorials if the date of their own was inconvenient. Since the implementation of a Group Tuition Policy, most tutorials have been arranged in clusters, with students offered a range of tutorial dates facilitated by different tutors that can be booked by students using an online booking system. The policy requires that every face-to-face tutorial must have an online equivalent. Depending on their availability, students may or may not have the option of attending one or more tutorials with their own tutor. Within many modules, the policy has been interpreted as requiring that tutorials are co-presented by two or more tutors, whilst within other modules, tutors work alone. Sometimes, there is a combination of co-presentation and lone working.

### 1.1.3 Synchronous online tuition

My study focuses on students’ experiences of synchronous online tutorials. These are held in online rooms via Adobe Connect™ software. A range of tools are available, including microphones, a box for written chat, emoticons, a hand raise tool, whiteboards, drawing tools, webcams, polls and various ways of sharing slides, documents, audio, and video (Figure 1). Only some of these features would usually be used simultaneously. There are also breakout rooms, which can be set up in advance for small group work.
There are different configurations of online rooms available within the university. Most tutorials happen within a shared room, which can be accessed by the students and tutors within a particular cluster.

There is the facility to record tutorials, and university policy requires that at least one recording of each tutorial event should be made available, unless there is a good reason not to. This recognises that recordings may be helpful to students with disabilities or limited availability.

Synchronous online tuition is significantly different from working in a physical space. Not only must tutors develop technical skills and support students to do so, but they must rethink pedagogy and appreciate the affordances and limitations of the online environment. Tutors at my institution have high quality training and support available to support skill development; a limitation is that there is no financial incentive to complete the training.

1.1.4 The module
I originally planned to consider students’ experiences of online tutorials across a range of HSC modules but was advised by the Student Research Project Panel (SRPP), whose role includes protecting students from being approached by researchers too frequently, that I must choose just one. This limited my investigation to the experiences of students studying one module. When deciding which module to choose, I avoided first level modules, as research conducted
across 422 undergraduate modules within the same university suggested that the experiences of new students differ subtly but significantly from others, perhaps because their coping strategies are less well developed (Li et al., 2017). I also avoided modules that were being re-written or in their first presentation, opting instead for a module with an established tutorial strategy.

The module chosen for my study is a second level undergraduate HSC module about the well-being of children and young people. Students on a variety of undergraduate programmes study this module, including Health and Social Care, Social Work (Scotland only), Childhood and Youth Studies, Education, Early Years, and the popular Open Degree programme. I chose this module because of its supportive module team, cluster managers and tutor colleagues. The module is similar in tuition strategy to many other HSC modules within the university, so my findings are likely to be useful to others.

The module is presented once a year, commencing in October, and ending in May. The students who participated in my initial study started the module in October 2018 and those in the main study started in October 2019. In 2019, according to data shared with tutors by the module team, 951 students were registered on the module, 92% of whom were female and 8% male. A disability was declared to the university by 19% of the students, the most common one being a mental health issue. According to the data, 73% were in employment and 44% in full time employment, whilst 42% were studying full-time and completing another module alongside this one.

This is a module that I know well, having been part of the module team in production on a consultancy basis and subsequently working on the module in presentation as a tutor. This meant that I was familiar with the students’ programme of study and their module materials, as well as the issues that tutors experience when preparing and running tutorials.

1.1.5 Patterns of tuition on the module
In line with the university policy (see section 1.1.2.1), most tutorials students attend are arranged in geographical clusters. For example, a student studying the module in the Northwest of England in 2019 was part of a cluster of 11 tutor groups and could choose between at least seven dates and times for each tutorial. For some tutorials, students have a choice about attending online or face-to-face,
whilst others are solely online. Students also have an opportunity to attend one initial online tutorial within their own tutor group (around 20 students), facilitated by their own tutor. This means that some students who participated in the study experienced three types of tutorials: an online tutorial within their tutor group, clustered online tutorials, and a clustered face-to-face tutorial. See Table 1.

Table 1: Patterns of tuition within the module

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutorial</th>
<th>Tutorial window</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of tutorial</th>
<th>Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial 1</td>
<td>October</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Tutor group</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial 2</td>
<td>October - November</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Cluster group</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial 3</td>
<td>November - January</td>
<td>Online or face-to-face</td>
<td>Cluster group</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial 4</td>
<td>January - February</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Cluster group</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial 5</td>
<td>April</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Cluster group</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial 6*</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Online or face-to-face</td>
<td>Cluster group</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Face-to-face tutorials in May 2020 were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. The end of module assignment, which is usually a focus of tutorial 6 was also cancelled, so attendance at this final tutorial was very low.

It is the students’ experiences of the online tutorials that they attended which are the focus of this study.

1.2 Researcher positionality

1.2.1 Being an insider researcher

Like other practitioner researchers, I am both insider and outsider in relation to different aspects of my identity (Hellawell, 2006; Chavez, 2008; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). My research focuses on an aspect of my own practice as a tutor at the Open University. My questions arise from my own experience. I therefore include myself and use the term ‘we’ when writing about tuition generally, and use ‘they’ when writing about the other tutors who participated in my study. My findings have direct implications for my own work, and the work of others. To maximise its impact on practice, I have chosen not to anonymise the university within which the research is situated. This has ethical implications (see section 1.2.2).

Being both tutor and doctoral researcher presents opportunities and limitations. It offers strengths in terms of understanding the history, context, and policy of the research area and the challenges faced by tutors and students around working
online. I had pre-existing relationships with the gatekeepers within the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care, with the module team, and with the module tutors running the tutorials included in the study. My insider status helped to identify participants for the initial study and possibly made it easier for them to share their experiences with me. It also meant that there was a power differential between myself and these participants; I had responsibility for their tuition, including marking their work, as well as having a relationship with them as a researcher. The participants in my main study were not from my own tutor groups but they were still aware that I was a module tutor and the author of one section of their module materials. As such, I could not engage with their experiences in a detached way. Our relationship was more complex than that of research participant and researcher and these complexities had ethical implications (see section 1.2.2).

Awareness of these complexities influenced my decision to take a narrative approach to the research with a view to acknowledging individual agency and moving away from researchers controlling the process (Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf, 2000). My own experience as a participant in research studies has given me a sense that researchers often ask the ‘wrong’ questions to discover what is important about their research topic from a participant’s perspective. This has led me to the view that an approach which allows participants to choose which issues to prioritise might produce data that more closely represents students’ experiences.

Taking account of ecological ethical thinking (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009), I mapped out the stakeholders involved in my study (Figure 2). The people most involved with the study, including myself, my supervisors, and the study participants are situated in the inner rings. Positioned in the middle rings are those who acted as gatekeepers and without whose support the study would not have been possible, including university managers and policy makers, the module team, cluster managers; those whose approval was required for the study, including the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), SRPP (see section 1.1.4) and Data Protection; and the wider groups of students and tutors who chose whether to become participants. In the outer rings are those who were not directly involved but for whom my research findings hold potential significance for their areas of work or study, including both HSC students and tutors; students and tutors in other
schools and faculties, the EdD community and the wider communities of education, health and social care, and the wider research community.

1.2.2 Ethical considerations

When planning the study, I considered consequential ethical issues for participants. It is important to maximise the benefits and minimise the harm to all involved (BERA, 2018, p. 8). For individual students, I anticipated that the benefits might include reflecting on what they had gained from tutorials and how this linked to their learning. I also anticipated receiving requests for help when interviewing students because of their awareness of my roles as author and tutor. This proved to be the case. Some, but not all, participants wanted to use the opportunity afforded by the interview to discuss questions about the module materials and assignments, or their career aspirations. One student wanted to discuss a
disability that she had not yet declared to the university. Whilst some researchers hold that interviews should not be affected by the researcher’s ‘defended subjectivity’ (Froggett and Wengraf, 2004), Oakley (1981) argues that rapport and neutrality, seen as the requirements of a ‘good interviewer’, are incompatible. Oakley concluded that it was necessary to answer participants’ questions to build rapport and moreover, not to reassure anxious participants was unethical. Taking account of deontological ethics, I took a similar approach and addressed such requests to maximise the benefits of the research and as a way of exercising my sense of duty to the participants. I also encouraged students to discuss their questions with their own tutors.

I identified potential negative impacts of the study and prepared to address these, taking account of relational ethical principles. This included being respectful of participants’ time and supporting those for whom reflecting on tuition raises difficult issues. The involvement of the SRPP in selecting student participants ensured that those approached had not taken part in other research in the previous year. Having chosen not to anonymise the university within which the research is situated, I took steps to protect the identity of all the participants in the study through the use of pseudonyms and redacting data where appropriate.

At every stage, I emphasised that participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw from the study with no impact on their tuition. Some participants did withdraw for personal reasons. I sought permission and advice from gatekeepers and consulted them throughout the study. They gave suggestions about research methods, such as observing tutorial recordings, and it was helpful to think about the different possibilities.

1.3 Research purpose

The research purpose was to investigate in depth what students of an HSC module experience in terms of synchronous online tuition. Students’ experiences, including what they are thinking and feeling during tuition, affect their behaviour during their studies and their learning. It is important, therefore, to see students’ lived experiences from their perspective, one which, as explained in chapter 2, is largely absent from the literature. My aspiration when planning the study was that knowledge of this perspective would support learning design in synchronous online tuition, providing insight to enable tutors to maximise opportunities for
learning and support, as well as informing those who make strategic decisions about tutorial provision and tutor training. With more universities currently using synchronous online tutorials, the findings are likely to be of interest beyond my own institution.

1.3.1 Experiences of community and interaction
Within the focus of students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition, I was particularly interested in whether students experience interaction with peers and tutors and a sense of community with those studying the same module during tutorials. Not only does the literature suggest that these are key themes to explore (see chapter 2) but much of the advice and staff development material my institution provides about teaching online focuses on ways of facilitating interaction and building community, so they are assumed to be an important part of our practice. I was also interested in students’ perceptions of how tutors’ actions contribute to their experiences because, if we know which actions are perceived to be beneficial or detrimental, we can adapt our practice accordingly.

1.3.2 Research questions
My research questions have developed over the course of my study and have been informed and refined by my literature review, the initial study and, in the case of the final question, the way in which tutor involvement in the study evolved over time. They are:

1. How do the narratives of students’ experiences of synchronous online tutorials in a health and social care module vary and what factors account for this variation?
2. What can we learn about the needs which drive the preferences students express around synchronous online tuition in health and social care?
3. How does hearing about students’ experience of synchronous online tuition impact on tutors’ reports of their thinking and practice?

1.4 Chapter summary and thesis structure
This chapter has explained the background to my research, my own positionality as an insider researcher and the research purpose. Chapter 2 presents my literature review, which explores the literature about students’ perceptions of synchronous online tuition, concluding that there is a gap in the literature in terms of studies that examine students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition in
depth, particularly within HSC. It also discusses the theoretical frameworks that can be used to research this topic and explains why the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework is suited as a framework for this study.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology of my study. This chapter begins by explaining my ontology and epistemology. Together, these have led to my choice of an experience-centred narrative approach. I explain my rationale for this choice, as well as my choices around research methods, sampling, data management and my method of analysis: Voice Centred Relational Method. This chapter also explains how tutors’ responses to the students’ narratives contributed to their analysis and then came to be seen as data in themselves, generating an additional research question. I discuss the ethical considerations involved in using this data and show how the data was managed and analysed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the strategies used for enhancing credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of my study in relation to my research questions, explaining how students’ experiences vary in two ways: those that relate to the physical, off-screen, social and material environment of home or wherever the student happens to be during the session, and those that relate to the virtual online environment of the tutorial itself. It identifies five areas in which students expressed clear preferences around synchronous online tuition and uses the data to explore the needs that might underlie these preferences. The chapter then examines two separate tutor discussions to discover how the students’ narratives influenced tutors’ thinking and practice.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study in relation to the literature to show how they contribute to understandings of students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition in HSC and also to understandings of how tutors respond to hearing about students’ experiences.

Chapter 6 presents my conclusions and recommendations, identifying implications for practice, both in terms of my own professional practice and the wider implications for my institution and for other educators. The chapter ends by reflecting on the contribution of this study and making suggestions for future research in the area of synchronous online learning in HSC.
Chapter 2 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the literature about students’ perceptions of synchronous online tuition, including the theoretical frameworks used to research this topic. My interest is in higher education in HSC, where literature is limited, but I have also drawn on literature from other areas, particularly language learning, where synchronous online tuition has been more extensively researched.

2.2 Methods

My study takes a naturalistic approach, using previously published literature to identify questions, disagreements and engaging topics (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). I approached my literature review systematically, as I describe in the following sections.

2.2.1 Search criteria

Because my study is concerned with students’ experiences, this review focused on student perceptions of synchronous online tuition, rather than tutor perceptions or observed behaviours. The initial search focused on material published in the five years to June 2018 plus earlier seminal work. It included peer-reviewed journal articles but also some grey literature pertaining to scholarship around online learning and teaching within my own institution and other universities. As my study progressed, I incorporated more recently published literature.

Only literature published in English was included but no literature was excluded on a geographical basis. The majority of the studies on this topic were published in the United States. A significant proportion of the studies around synchronous online learning undertaken in the UK were completed at the Open University.

The databases used were Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, and Zetoc, which gives access to the British Library’s electronic table of contents. Search terms used were ‘synchronous online’, ‘virtual classrooms’, and ‘web conferencing’. Excluded studies were those focusing on schools, further education, or professional development; those comparing software; and studies about second life or role-play. I subscribed to the
Zetoc database so that I received notification of new publications relating to my search terms, as well as the content of journals that regularly publish material on my chosen topic.

2.3 Findings from the review of literature

2.3.1 Systematic reviews

A good place to begin a literature review is often by looking at the systematic reviews on the research topic. Whilst there are a number of systematic reviews which focus on the impact of distance education more generally, including one which identifies significant benefits of distance education for student nurses (Du et al., 2013), at the time of my initial literature review in 2018, there was only one systematic review on the topic of synchronous online learning (Martin, Ahlgrim-Delzell and Budhrani, 2017). The definition of synchronous online learning used was:

Permanent separation (of place) of the learner and instructor during planned learning events where … instruction occurred in real time such that … students were able to communicate with other students and the instructor through text-, audio-, and/or video-based communication of two way media that facilitated dialogue and interaction (Martin, Ahlgrim-Delzell and Budhrani, 2017, p. 5).

Whilst my focus is on the use of online environments for learning in higher education only, this systematic review considered the use of online environments for both learning and professional development. The search terms used were ‘synchronous’ and ‘online learning’. The authors acknowledge that using alternative terms, such as ‘web conferencing’ or ‘synchronous virtual classrooms’ might have produced more results. All these key phrases have been used for my own review. Interestingly, a search using the second of these terms does identify additional sources, including three papers to which Martin, one of the authors of the systematic review, contributed themselves (Parker and Martin, 2010; Martin, Parker and Deale, 2012; Martin, Parker and Oyarzun, 2013).

Martin, Ahlgrim-Delzell and Budhrani’s review (2017) clearly identifies the basic characteristics of the literature about synchronous online learning for instruction or professional development published in 157 peer-reviewed journal articles between 1995 and 2014. Most studies were conducted in the United States (26%), the United Kingdom (11%), Taiwan (9%) and Canada (7%). Most come from the context of higher education (68%) and 57% used a qualitative approach. The variables most commonly studied were perceptions and attitudes, followed by levels of interaction. Motivation for synchronous online learning
was the variable least often studied. The review does not, however, explore these areas in depth or undertake any meta-analysis, highlighting these tasks as a priority for any future systematic reviews. A further limitation of this paper is the lack of references to the sources reviewed.

A more recent systematic review considers the ways in which the use of technology in education is evaluated (Lai and Bower, 2019) but this focuses on a far broader range of technologies than my study considers, including games, social media, mobile learning devices and virtual worlds. Technologies for online and blended learning made up just 7.7% of the literature considered. Criteria for inclusion were that the study involved empirical research that evaluated technology for educational purposes and had been published between 2015 and 2017 in just one journal, Computers in Education. These criteria were met by 315 articles. The majority of studies took a quantitative approach and even those authors who used qualitative data as well as quantitative were reluctant to define their studies in terms of Mixed Methods Research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), suggesting that there is a perception that quantitative data has recently been valued over qualitative in this area of research. Just 7.4% of the papers reviewed claimed to have used a qualitative approach. Considering the discipline areas covered in the papers reviewed, the nearest category to my own context is medical-related programmes. This is the discipline area for just 5.4% of the papers. So, whilst the relevance of this systematic review is limited in terms of its broad focus, time frame and reliance on a single journal, it does seem to indicate that there is a lack of qualitative studies which consider students’ perceptions of their experiences within synchronous online learning in HSC in any depth.

Before examining the literature relating to students’ perceptions of synchronous online learning in detail, I will consider the literature that explains how synchronous online learning developed.

**2.3.2 The development of synchronous online learning**

Before the widespread use of synchronous online rooms, researchers were already considering the potential of text-based synchronous discussion. In a frequently cited study, Hrastinski (2010) analysed logs, questionnaires, and interviews of two discussion groups that used synchronous and asynchronous communication and concluded that synchronous communication has the potential to enhance participation, whilst also acknowledging that
asynchronous communication affords the advantage of thinking time. A limitation of this study is that whilst it involved students of different nationalities, it did not take account of cultural differences.

Soon after the millennium, the Internet-based real-time audio-graphic conferencing tools available since the 1990s were developed for use in higher education, and educators in the USA began to compare the effectiveness of synchronous tuition with asynchronous (Chou, 2002). In the UK, led by the Open University, synchronous online tuition was introduced to language learning in 2002 (Hampel, 2006) and then, using Blackboard Collaborate™ software and subsequently Adobe Connect™, gradually introduced to other disciplines beginning with ICT in 2009 (Kear et al., 2012). From 2016 onwards, every face-to-face tutorial within the Open University has been required to have an online equivalent (Goodfellow, 2015). A key study of students’ perceptions of tuition, which influenced this development, was based on a survey of 3910 undergraduates completing modules across different faculties with a 16% response rate (Goodfellow, 2014). A perceived benefit of face-to-face and, to a slightly lesser extent, online tutorials, was gaining an understanding of the module concepts. Face-to-face tutorials were seen as better for course-based discussion, understanding how to get good marks, getting to know peers and encouragement to keep studying. Those attending online tutorials reported wide-ranging experiences, positive and negative. Many negative experiences related to technical difficulties or unskilled tutors, both factors which may subsequently have changed as online platforms and tutors’ familiarity with them have developed. Whilst the sample included students studying HSC, there is no breakdown of the data to give responses from this subgroup. A further weakness of this study is the lack of theoretical framework.

In recent years, synchronous online learning has been used within other universities, often as part of a blended approach. With the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic in the UK in March 2020, however, learning throughout higher education moved online and this continues to be the case at the time of writing in July 2021. Online learning is likely to continue to play a significant role in the future of higher education, so it is important to understand how students perceive their experiences of this medium.
2.4 Students’ perceptions of synchronous online tuition

Many studies focusing on students' perceptions consider three related areas: social presence, a sense of community, and interaction. There are also studies which focus on students’ perceptions of different online room tools. All of these will be considered.

2.4.1 Social presence

There are various definitions of social presence, including:

The degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships (Short, Williams and Christie, 1976, p. 65).

This definition is used in a frequently cited study of 10 ICT students' perceptions about asynchronous forum use (Kear, 2010), which indicates how social presence has long been identified as important for online learning. Although small, this study has been influential, happening when synchronous tools were being introduced. In the interviews conducted for Kear’s study, social presence was a major theme, students wishing for real-time communication and to know about each other. Kear argues that social presence is influenced by the features of the online environment and the way people behave within it.

The way in which social presence is defined and understood has evolved considerably over time (Biocca, Harms and Burgoon, 2003; Richardson et al., 2017). A further, widely used definition of social presence is that within the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework:

the ability of participants in the Community of Inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as “real people” (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, p. 89).

Garrison revised this definition multiple times, including a revision to reflect the common purpose and collaborative nature of groups:

the ability to project one’s self and establish personal and purposeful relationships (Garrison, 2007, p. 63)

and then to account for shared group identity, arguing that it is essential for collaboration:

the ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities (Garrison, 2009, p 352).
This definition also recognises the importance of trusting relationships, identified as a crucial missing element in Dyke’s study of science students’ perceptions at my own institution, which found a lack of social presence in asynchronous forums and reluctance to collaborate (Dyke, 2016). Students were fearful of not being as clever as everyone else and lacked trust in others. They often saw formal collaborative activities as ‘tasks to get out of the way’ to succeed, rather than having an intrinsic value for learning, but they valued informal collaboration via Facebook. Students accepted the university’s message about needing to become ‘independent learners’ but thought this meant studying in isolation and working autonomously, rather than collaboratively.

The different definitions of social presence matter because of how they are used in research. Fayram (2016, p. 56), for example, uses Garrison’s second definition (Garrison, 2007) when investigating the nature and role of social presence in synchronous online learning of languages at my own institution and seems unaware of the later revision. The study’s findings, however, may be applicable to online learning in other contexts. They include the importance of students being comfortable, the pivotal role of the tutor and the significance of the affordances of the environment. In contrast, Mongiello’s doctoral study of the synchronous learning experiences of 19 students one year after completing an online childhood practice degree at a Scottish university (Mongiello, 2015) uses a more limited definition of social presence: ‘the ability to portray oneself as real in the online environment’. Social presence itself is not a focus of the analysis, however. Instead, what students valued is described as ‘virtual connectedness’. Virtual connectedness allowed students to share ideas, support and challenge each other, feel less alone, and develop meaningful relationships. The thesis lacks detail about the nature and amount of synchronous online tuition available to the students, but it was text-based only, so a limited form of communication compared to my context, where additional online communication tools are used (see 1.1.3). To give a final example, in a study of 257 students divided between face-to-face and online tutorial provision in an undergraduate digital design course at a Chinese university, which concludes that students perceive significantly higher levels of social presence during face-to-face tuition than those tutored online and also that the need for social presence is perceived as more important in online environments, Zhan and Mei (2013) cite an early definition of social presence from Garrison and Anderson’s work (Garrison and Anderson, 2003). Despite not recognising the elements added to later definitions of social
presence, including the ability to establish relationships and a shared group identity, Zhan and Mei’s work is considered influential and cited by others, including Garrison (Garrison, 2016, p. 95). These complexities illustrate why researchers need an awareness of the definitions in use and to be clear about the definitions we are using ourselves.

It is also important to consider the approach to research taken by the studies in the literature available. Zhan and Mei (2013), for example, take a positivist, quantitative approach to research, providing information about students’ perceptions but not the reasons behind them or considering the impact of these perceptions on their studies. Similarly, a meta-analysis of the relationship between perceived social presence and both student satisfaction and perceived learning indicates strong relationships and identifies factors that affect the relationships (Caskurlu et al., 2020). This includes course length, with stronger relationships in longer courses but the possibilities for exploring the reasons behind these relationships are limited. A study that looks at experiences in more depth is a study of eight postgraduate education students in a 15 week online course in the USA (Yamagata-Lynch, 2014). The primary source of data was reflections based on activity theory, which were thematically analysed. Students felt that synchronous sessions combined with forum discussions strengthened social presence, some feeling that they became better acquainted than in face-to-face settings. They benefited from the spontaneity of synchronous communication. Students perceived a stronger need for ground rules online and a clear sense of course structure, so that they could organise themselves. This relates to the idea of learning presence, a proposed addition to the CoI model (see section 2.6.2), which links to the concept of heutagogy or self-directed learning and is particularly relevant to distance learning (Palloff and Pratt, 2003).

There may be a link between student training in online skills and the development of social presence. Heiser et al. (2013) undertook an action research study within my own institution over three years using an online questionnaire emailed to 499 students attending sessions to develop synchronous online learning skills with a 23% response rate. Most evaluated the sessions positively. The authors conclude that student training is essential, not only in technical skills, but in skills around social presence. This can be via the use of emoticons, images, text chat or using webcams. This study focuses on language learning, where enhanced social presence can help mitigate for lack of vocabulary and fluency. Social
presence skills might also be vital for HSC students, as practice-related study requires enhanced communication.

2.4.2 A sense of community

Other studies from different international contexts focus on perceptions of ‘community’, another concept which has multiple definitions. Gauvreau et al. (2016) used a transcendental phenomenological approach, which involved identifying ‘community’ as a phenomenon, the researchers ‘bracketing out’ their own experiences and collecting data from people who had experienced it. They surveyed 61 Canadian postgraduate students attending optional online professional skills workshops, who also participated in a focus group. Students experienced a strong sense of community, feeling connected with peers and enjoying sharing knowledge and experience in small groups. The authors note the pivotal role facilitators played in generating the sense of community through providing interaction opportunities, but their role is not examined in detail, which would be helpful.

Berry (2019, p. 164) defines community as ‘feelings of membership and closeness within a social group’. Their study using video and interview data from doctoral education students shows that synchronous online community is essential and plays a key role in retention (Berry, 2017). Similarly, in a survey about the online adaption of a face-to-face course in mentoring for 39 STEM postgraduate educators in the USA (McDaniels, Pfund and Barnicle, 2016), students rated the learning community positively. Extensive measures were taken to make it welcoming and inclusive. This study suggests online education can be as personal as face-to-face, but the resources available to facilitators at this institution, including extensive time for tutor planning, might not be available elsewhere.

These studies contrast with Olson and McCracken’ work (2014) with 38 undergraduates of an unspecified subject at a small USA college. Their quasi-experimental study considered the impact of introducing weekly synchronous online sessions. Student experience was measured using course evaluations and the Classroom Community Inventory (Rovai, Wighting and Lucking, 2004) and they found no difference in achievement or experience between those receiving synchronous online tuition and those without. This is perhaps not surprising, however, as the course was only five weeks long, the medium new to students and tutors, online sessions were described as ‘lectures’, and student microphones were
muted. Sessions where students had opportunities to collaborate might have produced different results.

These studies all focus on doctoral study in the USA and Canada, where the factors influencing sense of community might be very different to my own context of working with undergraduates in the UK.

2.4.3 Interaction

Other studies examine perceptions of a third aspect of students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition: interaction. Interaction could be understood as a mechanism for building community. In the context of asynchronous online learning, it is seen as a key component of student engagement, where engagement is defined as

students using time and energy to learn materials and skills, demonstrating that learning, interacting in a meaningful way with others in the class (so that these people become ‘real’) and becoming at least somewhat emotionally involved with their learning (i.e. getting excited about an idea, enjoying the learning and/or interaction) (Dixson, 2015, p. 146).

Heins et al. (2007) suggest that ‘interaction’ itself is difficult to define and measure. They define interaction as reciprocal events that require at least two objects and two actions (Wagner, 1994, p. 8). Four types of interaction have been identified in online tutorials: ‘learner to interface’, ‘learner to content’, ‘learner to teacher’, and ‘learner to learner’ (Martin, Parker and Deale, 2012).

A survey of 1056 adults with experience of online learning in a wide range of contexts in the USA found that lack of interaction was the biggest barrier to learning online (Muilenburg and Berge, 2005). This had a strong relationship with students’ enjoyment of study and the effectiveness of learning, although these relationships are not necessarily causal. Similarly, a study of 206 students’ perceptions of synchronous online tuition in maths and computing over five years at my own university found that, whilst it was seen as being as effective as face-to-face for learning and convenient, it compared poorly for interaction (Lowe, Mestel and Williams, 2016). Those without the option of face-to-face sessions rated the interaction more positively, perhaps because they were unable to make a comparison. The online environment was perceived as challenging for dyslexic and visually impaired students but helpful for those with mental illness. Keeping numbers low was identified as important; 20 students in a group were considered too many.
Interactive activities enable tutors to take the role of facilitator, rather than teacher (Hampel, 2006), reconceptualising the tutor-student relationship. When Hokanson et al. (2019) developed a survey instrument to gather 50 postgraduate and postdoctoral STEM students’ perceptions of synchronous online professional development workshops, students valued peer interaction and experiences of community more than session content or learner-created materials. Going further, Bondi et al. (2016) describe using online tutor-student ‘co-generative’ dialogue with 25 postgraduate students to review suggestions for course improvements. The evolving community of students helped each other, rather than relying on staff. They felt that opportunities for social interaction with each other, not just course content-related interaction, were important. A limitation of this study was the dual role of Bondi as researcher and tutor, but Bondi demonstrates reflexivity and gained the perspective of colleagues who assisted with the coding.

Limited insight into the perceptions of HSC students in my own context comes from nursing students’ responses to a consultative forum about what they wanted from online tutorials in April 2018. Nine mentioned the importance of interaction, either because it reduced isolation, helped them explore different perspectives, or supported them to focus. Students valued tutorials highly and wanted more. A limitation of this data is the low response rate, which was just 15 students from a nursing student population of over 1000 at the time. In contrast, a survey of 29 science students within my own institution showed that only three of the 29 students valued the opportunity to work with others (Butler, 2018). This is perhaps not surprising, however, as observations of 74 tutorials within another phase of the same study found that most tutorials were didactic with little interaction. More of the students in this study did value the sense of reduced isolation that tutorials brought, however. Another study in the same faculty that collected both qualitative and quantitative data from 11 maths tutorials to gauge students’ responses to set interactive activities found that they engaged students effectively and students found them useful and enjoyable (Rogers, 2019).

### 2.4.4 Perceptions of online room tools

Some studies explore students’ perceptions of different features of online rooms. Analysis of questionnaires returned by 209 students attending the first three synchronous online psychology tutorials held within my own institution (Middleton and Smith, 2013) suggested a reluctance to use the microphone, 38% reporting using it in session 1, 47% in session 2 and 15% in session 3. In my experience, this is a common issue and microphone use is much
lower in some HSC modules. Over 75% of the psychology students reported using the text chat, which some found distracting. Students were generally positive about their first experiences of online rooms. There were mixed responses to breakout room activities, which the authors concluded needed detailed planning. Up to 170 students attended these sessions; these unusually high numbers are likely to have affected experiences.

Other studies have considered the affordances and limitations of the online environment. A survey of 39 STEM postgraduate educators in the USA (McDaniels, Pfund and Barnicle, 2016) found that the text chat made it possible to ask questions when someone was talking, which is impossible when working face-to-face, but can be distracting. Another study used surveys with open-ended questions about synchronous online tuition conducted with 62 education students at the University of Florida (McBrien, Cheng and Jones, 2009). Students commented positively on the affordances of the online environment. Polling tools, for example, allowed shy students to express opinions confidently, without feeling judged. Some struggled with technical problems, the lack of non-verbal cues or having too many simultaneous interactions. Participants had different amounts of experience of synchronous online tuition, so it would have been valuable to examine whether this variable affected response.

Several studies specifically consider the impact of tutor webcam use on student perceptions. Webcams are rarely used in my own context, as they are bandwidth intensive and can result in students losing their online connection. An experimental study with 33 postgraduate students in a USA medical school found that tutor webcams made no difference to student satisfaction or achievement but had a positive impact on students’ feelings of instructor co-presence (Han, 2013). In contrast, a study of 40 ten-minute online interactions via Skype between a teacher and French students learning English (Guichon and Cohen, 2014) found that webcams made no difference to students’ perceptions of teacher presence, although the teacher spoke more when webcams were absent and there were more student silences, perhaps reflecting the lack of visual clues. It is not clear if students had opportunities to establish a relationship with the tutor beforehand, which may have influenced perceptions.

Only one study reviewed specifically mentions student webcams. Gedera (2014) interviewed and observed six students at a New Zealand university. Students were positive about the affordances of online rooms, particularly being able to see each other via webcam, but reported anxiety about technology failure, which did occasionally happen. Gedera fails to
mention which subject students were studying or even the level of study, although students were presenting research, so may have been postgraduates. Providing this information would give more context to the findings. A further limitation is the small number of participants.

Several sources consider students’ views of recording online tutorials. Lowe, Mestel and Williams (2016) found that numbers of maths and computing students’ use of recordings within my own university rose from 31% in 2009 to 74% in 2014. Whilst there were some concerns about privacy and suggestions that students’ names should not be visible, there was strong support for recording. There was increased awareness of the effect that recording might have on interaction over this period, but still only 20% of students felt that the session being recorded would affect their participation. Nursing students responding to a student consultative forum at my own university in April 2018 were unequivocally positive about recording but the numbers responding (15 students) were low. Those who feel positive about recording might be more likely to respond, especially after seeing the responses of peers. A research study might provide a more representative picture.

2.4.5 The efficacy of synchronous online tuition

It is difficult to draw conclusions around efficacy or to draw comparisons between different contexts. According to Giesbers et al. (2013), synchronous online tuition varies so much that it is hard to agree what successful tuition might look like. The characteristics of students also vary considerably, and these influence their perceptions. In their study of 110 participants in an online economics course at a Dutch business school, the authors theorised that intrinsically motivated, autonomy-orientated learners would be more likely to engage in discussions, but this was only found to be the case at the beginning of the module. There was a positive relationship between use of asynchronous forums and participation in online tutorials. In a related study with the same participants (Giesbers et al., 2013) the relationship between motivation, tool use, participation and performance was examined. Participating in synchronous learning was a stronger predictor of positive course results than tool use, suggesting that being present and hearing others is more important than making use of all the tools available.

Students’ views of synchronous online tuition are also affected by their own skills and confidence. In a study of 850 language students at my own institution during 2008 and 2011 (Murphy, 2015), students identified a need for a stronger focus on interpersonal skills and
relationships due to the lack of non-verbal communication in the online environment and what might be described as a need for enhanced social presence, but also enhanced teaching presence, where the tutor is able to ‘support and enhance social and cognitive presence for the purpose of realizing educational outcomes’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, pp. 89–90). This study highlights how students feel about participating in an online session where other students seem so much more confident in their language abilities, describing the experience as demoralising and making them feel ‘awful’, as well as how quiet students are not easily noticed in online classrooms.

2.5 HSC students’ perceptions of synchronous online tuition

I am particularly interested in the perceptions of HSC students. There are few recent studies that look at HSC students’ experiences of online learning at other universities and some have limited relevance to my own context. One used interviews to research 10 postgraduate nursing students’ experiences of blended learning at a UK university (Gallagher, 2015). Although some students in my context do experience blended learning, attending face-to-face tutorials, as well as online, not all do and there are substantial differences. Gallagher’s participants did not experience synchronous tuition, only asynchronous. They were postgraduates, and online learning was new to them, whilst my context involves undergraduates with recent experience of online study. Gallagher found that tutors had limited experience of facilitating online learning and did not use it to its full potential. Problems with technology were common. These issues impacted on students’ experiences.

There are several studies that focus on the introduction of synchronous online tuition within nurse education. An Australian study that used a course evaluation instrument and questionnaires to compare experiences, satisfaction and exam results of first year distance nursing students after the introduction of synchronous online tuition found an increase in student satisfaction compared with previous years (O’Flaherty and Laws, 2014). Students liked the poll feature, which enabled them to contribute answers anonymously and compare their own progress with others. A number commented on online tutorials helping them to feel part of a group, reducing isolation and providing opportunities for sharing and collaboration. The exam pass rate rose considerably. There is a lack of information about the size of the groups studied and whether the tutors were the same from one year to the next. It would also be helpful to clarify at what stage of the research the flipped classroom approach mentioned in the paper was introduced. Another study of 43 American postgraduate students in nurse
education to evaluate their experiences of the introduction of weekly synchronous sessions produced similarly positive feedback (Foronda and Lippincott, 2014). The students enjoyed the sessions and liked the convenience and flexibility of learning synchronously online. They described high levels of interaction that made their perceptions of their experience as good as or better than face-to-face, although they did have occasional technical problems. The study is limited in that only the written chat facility in the online room was used to gather the focus group data, thereby privileging the voices of the students who felt most comfortable communicating via typing over others.

I have found no qualitative studies which consider HSC students’ perceptions of their experiences of synchronous online tuition in detail. This provides a clear rationale for my study, which seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of participants in HSC tutorials.

Having reviewed the literature available regarding students’ perceptions of synchronous online tuition, it is important to also look at the frameworks available to conceptualise students’ experiences of learning.

2.6 Theoretical frameworks

There are a variety of frameworks used within the studies reviewed in this chapter, which have been considered for their relevance to my own study.

Salmon (2003), whose action research produced the influential five-step model to inform moderation of asynchronous online learning, considers both the technical and pedagogical aspects. Students are described as moving through the steps of access and motivation, online socialisation, information exchange, knowledge construction, and development, with interactivity increasing and learning happening once students move towards the formation of learning communities. This model has not to my knowledge been used in the context of synchronous online learning. As Dyke (2016) highlights, this model contains an unhelpful assumption that has become embedded in university culture: that almost all students can progress through all stages of the model if the tutor is sufficiently skilled and works hard enough. This assumption reduces the likelihood that researchers will seek out other explanations for reluctance to collaborate online.
Laurillard’s Conversational Framework (Laurillard, 2002), used in Gallagher’ study, (2015) shares these limitations. Like Salmon, Laurillard argues that both asynchronous and synchronous dialogue promote student-student interaction and therefore have potential pedagogical benefits, but the success of the dialogue is determined by the tutor. Laurillard sees web conferencing as offering limited potential, as it invites ‘less than a lecture’ (Laurillard, 2002, p. 158) but this is perhaps not surprising, given the limited nature of the technology available at the time Laurillard was writing.

Other studies (McBrien, Cheng and Jones, 2009; Lowe, Mestel and Williams, 2016) seek to apply transactional distance theory (Moore and Keegan, 1993), which suggests that three elements determine the extent to which ‘distance’ is experienced by students: dialogue, structure, and learning autonomy. McBrien, Cheng and Jones (2009) found the theory challenging to apply; many responses could be coded to more than one element. Lowe, Mestel and Williams (2016) also refer to the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, which will be discussed below.

Many theories used in synchronous online tuition research are rooted in ideas around the social nature of learning, reflecting the importance of community, as identified in the literature about students’ perceptions earlier. Tutors seeking to develop the skills of their peers in online tuition at my institution are influenced by Vygotskian socioconstructivism which holds that people learn through interacting with their social and physical environment and reflecting on their experience. Consequently, they promote interactive approaches (Barnes and Sainsbury, 2015; Barnes, 2017). One social theory of learning is Engeström’s activity theory (Engeström, 1987), which describes how learning happens via social interaction, mediated by students, teachers, rules of behaviour, tools and cultural artefacts, community, and the division of labour. In two studies (Yamagata-Lynch, 2014; Bondi et al., 2016), participants themselves engaged with this theory to reflect on their experiences. They were postgraduate students, however; undergraduates might find using this theory more challenging.

2.6.1 Communities of Practice

It was an activity theory reading group which first stimulated the ideas of Lave and Wenger around communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). They propose that learning is ‘situated’ in relationships, with learners learning from their peers and sharing experience of practice. Learning involves ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, newcomers at the edge of a

Communities of practice involve a community who interact and learn from each other, a shared domain of interest, and a shared practice (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002). Applying this theory to my context, the communities are the students and tutors, the shared domain of interest is HSC and there might be several elements of shared practice, including study and professional practice, most students having some experience of providing health or social care.

Given the nature of my own university’s tutorial policy (see section 1.1.2.1), the group coming together for each tutorial is unique and short-term. I have considered whether such a tutorial can be described as a community of practice. Wenger’s definition of a community of practice:

> groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (my emphasis) (Wenger, 1998, p. 4)

implies that such a community needs to meet more than once.

The framework has further limitations. It prioritises the social, so that people are not always seen as individuals with their own values, histories and practices (Hodkinson et al., 2004) and can stifle innovation and creativity if everyone holds uniform perspectives. Laurillard (2002) argues that situated learning is about the relationship between the learner, the activity, and the environment, whilst academic learning is concerned with understanding descriptions of the world or a particular way of looking at it via the creation of artificial environments. Laurillard uses mathematics to illustrate her arguments, however, and the distinction between situated and academic learning might be more blurred in other disciplines.

A double-layered Community of Practice model has also been proposed, which conceptualises the relationship between the students’ online learning environment and their learning in the external, off-line world (Lee, 2018). A focus on communities of practice can bring students and tutors together around a common domain and common practice but few universities have embraced the concept, perhaps because they lack the necessary permeable boundaries (MacGillivray, 2017). To use the community of practice as a theoretical framework, it is necessary for tutors to have an egalitarian approach and see
ourselves as learners alongside those we teach. Downes, a well-known philosopher in the field of online learning, argues that online learning communities rarely approach the type of community conceptualised by Wenger because they are artificial, contrived communities with fixed starts and ends, and limited to a specific group (Downes, 2005). I have found few studies which use this framework to examine online learning. Perhaps this is not surprising given the limitations outlined.

2.6.2 Community of Inquiry

An alternative framework is the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, which gives a clear account of the mechanisms involved in learning (Levine, 2010) and is used as a theoretical framework for some studies I reviewed (Kear, 2010; Gallagher, 2015; Murphy, 2015; Fayram, 2016; Lowe, Mestel and Williams, 2016; Ozaydın Ozkara and Cakir, 2018). A systematic review of the ways in which technology use in education is evaluated found that four of the six studies that looked at types of presence in online environments used the CoI framework (Lai and Bower, 2019). The framework has also recently been adapted for use as a learning design model (Nolan-Grant, 2019). Whilst Nolan-Grant’s study is concerned with asynchronous online learning, rather than synchronous, its use in this context suggests that the CoI continues to be seen as a robust framework.

A CoI is defined as a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding (Garrison, Archer and Anderson, 2011, p. 2).

Originally used by Peirce in a scientific context (Pardales and Girod, 2006) and usually attributed to Lipman (2003), the term ‘community of inquiry’ has frequently been applied to asynchronous computer-mediated higher education (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999). This is surprising given that one of Lipman’s characteristics of a CoI is face-to-face relationship, a characteristic often absent online.

The CoI framework conceptualises the relationship between the elements necessary for a worthwhile educational experience (Figure 3). It considers social presence, a key theme identified in the literature review of students’ perceptions of synchronous online tuition, alongside teaching presence and cognitive presence. The framework adopts Dewey’s philosophy of education, seeing education as a social, interactive process, where practical inquiry or critical thinking are necessary to construct meaning or, in other words, enable cognitive presence (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999). Of the three types of presence,
teaching presence is described by the framework’s creators as the ‘binding element’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, p. 96), as without input to set the climate and select the content for the interaction, social presence and cognitive presence cannot be generated and there will consequently be no community of inquiry. Students themselves, as well as teachers, can contribute to teaching presence (Anderson et al., 2001) and the CoI survey instrument recognises three types of teaching presence: design and organisation, facilitation, and direct instruction (Athabasca University, no date).

Figure 3: The Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999)

Additional types of presence proposed to exist within a CoI include emotional presence (Cleveland-Innes and Campbell, 2012) and learning (or regulatory) presence (Shea et al., 2012; Kilis and Yildirim, 2018; Blaine, 2019). Garrison disagrees with these additions, arguing that learning presence is incongruent with the collaborative constructivist principles of the framework, that separation between teaching and learning is artificial, and that there is insufficient evidence to warrant the inclusion of emotional presence separate from social presence (Garrison, 2017). Whilst following the rationale for this disagreement, I chose to consider the possibility that the proposed additional types of presence might be relevant for the purposes of my study. Using the CoI Survey Instrument (Athabasca University, no date), I developed descriptions of what these presences might look like within online tutorials (Table 2). The additions to the original framework are shaded.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of presence</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>What this might look like in an HSC online tutorial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social presence</td>
<td>‘the ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities’ (Garrison, 2009, p. 352)</td>
<td>Students build relationships with others, feel comfortable interacting, and feel that their point of view is recognised. They share a sense of identity as students of HSC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive presence</td>
<td>‘the extent to which learners are able to construct meaning through sustained communication’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, p. 89)</td>
<td>Students feel interested and motivated by tutorial activities and find discussions helpful in appreciating different perspectives, constructing explanations, and understanding concepts. They make connections between theory and practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching presence</td>
<td>involves both design and facilitation to ‘support and enhance social and cognitive presence for the purpose of realizing educational outcomes’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, pp. 89–90)</td>
<td>The tutor designs tutorial activities that enable dialogue and help students learn. The tutor supports students to sustain focus on the activities, gives direction and provides feedback to clarify students’ understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional presence</td>
<td>‘the outward expression of emotion, affect, and feeling by individuals and among individuals in a CoI, as they relate to and interact with the learning technology, course content, students, and the instructor’ (Cleveland-Innes and Campbell, 2012, p. 283)</td>
<td>Students respond emotionally to ideas or activities and feel comfortable expressing emotions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning presence</td>
<td>‘reflects the proactive stance adopted by students who marshal thoughts, emotions, motivations, behaviours and strategies in the service of successful online learning’ and ‘indicates the exercise of agency and control rather than compliance and passivity’ (Shea et al., 2012, p. 90)</td>
<td>Students show self and co-regulation that involves planning, monitoring or use of strategy triggered by the tutorial activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Lipman (2003), whilst all inquiry is practice and communal, community does not always involve inquiry. Inquiry requires self-criticism. Within the modules I tutor, however, critical thinking is integral to learning. In the module under study, the learning objectives require students to ‘critically engage with the social issues that affect children and young people’. Tutorial activities aim to develop critical thinking skills. The CoI framework could, therefore, be applicable to my study.

The framework has been criticised because so few of the studies applying it examine the central claim that a CoI produces deep, meaningful learning or indeed, contain any measure of learning at all (Rourke and Kanuka, 2009). In response, the framework’s designers argue that it embraces constructivism and emphasises learning processes, not outcomes (Akyol et al., 2009). As such, it is a useful framework for examining what students experience in tutorials.

The framework has some limitations. Fayram (2016) critiques its failure to allow for the interdependence of different aspects of social presence within the online language learning environment. Some also suggest that the framework misses the reciprocal nature of learning, with tutors able to learn from interaction with students (Edwards, Perry and Janzen, 2011).

Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2010) identified some limitations of their model retrospectively, suggesting that it needed a stronger focus on the relationship between the elements. Education depends on the interaction of all three elements, so research should examine the presences together. It is this interconnectedness, Edwards, Perry and Janzen (2011) suggest, that makes the framework so useful.

### 2.6.3 Choice of theoretical framework

Students in my context can be considered potential members of communities of practice in relation to their practice of HSC and potential members of communities of inquiry in relation to their study of HSC. Sometimes, these communities will overlap, as students discuss their practice within their studies. In respect of my study of synchronous online tuition, however, tutorial communities seem best viewed as communities of inquiry. Whilst the CoI framework is thought to inadequately capture the reciprocal nature of learning, its focus on learning processes, including critical thinking and the significance of identifying with the group, and its recognition of interconnectedness between different elements give it significant advantages.
2.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the literature about students’ perceptions of synchronous online tuition and the theoretical frameworks that have been used for research in this area, concluding that there is a gap in the literature in terms of studies that examine students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition in depth, particularly within HSC. It has also discussed the different theoretical frameworks available for conceptualizing synchronous online learning and concluded that the CoI framework is best suited as a framework for this study.

My consideration of the literature has helped to frame the first two of my research questions, which are:

1. How do the narratives of students’ experiences of synchronous online tutorials in a health and social care module vary and what factors account for this variation?
2. What can we learn about the needs which drive the preferences students express around synchronous online tuition in health and social care?

The next chapter will explain my choice of methodology to explore these questions.
Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction
This chapter begins by explaining my ontology and epistemology. Together, these have led to my choice of an experience-centred narrative approach. I will explain my rationale, as well as my choices around research methods, ethical considerations, data collection and management and my approach to analysis. This chapter will also explain how tutors’ responses to the students’ narratives contributed to the analysis of the narratives and came to be seen as data in themselves, generating a new research question. I will explain the ethical considerations involved in using this data and how it was managed and analysed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the strategies used for enhancing credibility, dependability, and transferability.

3.2 Ontology and epistemology
My ontology is a relational ontology, which prioritises relationships (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998) and recognises that they are often central to people’s experiences (Jankowska, 2014). I consider reality to be continually socially constructed, with no two people interpreting the world in the same way. This is consistent with an interpretative approach to research and the use of qualitative methods, which are appropriate for extracting meaning from data and understanding issues in depth (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). As my study developed, I realised that I needed to take a more critical perspective when discussing my findings and I explored other theoretical traditions.

My epistemology holds that research participants should be viewed as the ‘privileged knowers’ or experts (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 42) and that their voices should be heard. My research design is affected by my ontological and epistemological positions. It could be considered as a design that utilizes student voice, which has been a strong focus of education policy over the last 20 years. Higher education is no exception but the student-initiated discussions of the 1990s, which might be aligned with the top of Hart’s ladder of participation (Hart, 1992), have disappeared in the wake of students being repositioned as consumers. ‘Student voice’ has become a noun concerned with measurement and benchmarking (Hall, 2017). Student voice is facilitated, but only in accordance with the ‘rules’ prescribed by official bodies and some voices, especially minority voices, are often muted (Canning, 2017). Students’ experiences, Canning suggests, can be best captured via
breaking the link with measurement and instead focusing on ‘what happens’. Authentic student voice can only be captured by reconsidering the relationship between voice and power and involving students in dialogue in which they can set the agenda and focus on the issues that are important to them (Hall, 2017). One way of doing this is via research methods that enable students to share their own narratives of their experiences.

3.3 Narrative approach

Reflecting on my ontology, epistemology, and research questions, I decided to take a narrative approach, which gives external expression to individual, internal representations of phenomena, such as thoughts and feelings. It is appropriate for gaining in-depth understandings of students’ perceptions and experiences (Cousin, 2009; Baughan, 2017). Storytelling is how we make sense of the world and construct our identities, so narratives can reveal truths about human experience (Riessman, 2008).

3.3.1 Broader context

Narrative approaches are situated within the broader context of biographical methods, which have recently become popular, reflecting a drive to acknowledge individual agency and move away from researchers controlling the process (Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf, 2000). This approach may reduce the power differential between participants and researchers compared with other approaches. Riessman, an influential narrative scholar and the author of a seminal methodological resource on narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993), cautions against constructing an empowerment narrative, however (Riessman, 2008). Whilst empowering participants may be the intention, participants’ experiences may not always resonate with the stories researchers tell ourselves.

Narrative researchers often use the term ‘informants’, rather than ‘participants’ (Baughan, 2017) but there are examples of literature where the term participants has been used, particularly in relation to Voice Centred Relational Method (VCRM) (Gilligan, 2015; Woodcock, 2016; Brady and Lalor, 2017), which is my chosen method of narrative analysis. I have used the term ‘participants’ throughout my work, also referring to those who took part as students or tutors according to their role in the tutorial experiences that they described.

3.3.2 Event-centred or experience-centred?

A narrative approach can be either event-centred or experience-centred, the boundaries between which are porous and overlapping (Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou, 2013). Event-
centred narrative research is concerned with the spoken recounting of particular past events. It assumes that internal and individual representations of phenomena are constant. Narrative in this context is seen as a series of sequential events organised in time and held together with a plot. Labov provides a detailed, systematic method for analysing event-centred narrative, which draws on linguistics (Labov and Waletsky, 1967; Labov, 1997). It assumes that stories have a set structure: abstract, orientation, complication, evaluation, and coda (Stalker, 2010). Whilst this method can make transcripts more manageable, criticisms include its lack of allowance for the partial and constructed natures of narratives, as well as limitations around culture and gender (Labov and Waletsky, 1967). Patterson (2013) recounts difficulties in applying Labov’s model and concludes that an experiential approach often produces more comprehensive analyses.

My reading led me to take an experience-centred narrative approach, which explores stories more broadly and assumes that narrative is intrinsically social; internal and individual representations of phenomena can change dramatically over time and according to context, a single phenomenon resulting in different stories (Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou, 2013). The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is important; people are simultaneously positioned in multiple ways and their words will be interpreted in multiple ways. Paying attention to the context of narrative, rather than focusing only on the text itself, enables the study of identity (Phoenix, 2013). This had relevance for my study, where, based on my review of the literature, I was interested to investigate experiences around students’ abilities to identify with others in the learning community.

3.3.3 The benefits of a narrative approach
The benefits of a narrative approach include giving students a voice and enabling them to emphasise their own perceptions, so they have more control over the telling of their story. This generates rich, insightful data. The telling of stories emphasises relationship and reciprocity and can have a therapeutic value (Szczepanik and Siebert, 2016). I anticipated that this may have relevance to my study in situations where students have had challenging or negative experiences during tutorials, which sharing might help them to process. I was conscious of the need to build supportive relationships with participants to facilitate this aspect of the process, taking account of relational ethics.
3.4 Learning from the initial study

3.4.1 The changing focus of the study

My initial study sought information from two sources: students and tutors. When beginning my research, it seemed important to include tutors’ experiences. The role of the tutor is pivotal in synchronous online tuition (Fayram, 2016; Gauvreau et al., 2016). Analysing both tutor and student experiences can make any mismatch of perceptions obvious (Gallagher, 2015; Shi and Stickler, 2018). Two colleagues who tutored on a range of HSC modules but not the module under study kindly completed diaries of their tutorial experiences from a tutor perspective and were interviewed. Following advice from the examiners of my initial study, who suggested reducing the breadth of my research, I decided to focus on student perceptions of online tutorials going forward and involve tutors by sharing students’ narratives with them.

3.4.2 Refining the research tools

Four students who began the module under study in October 2018 agreed to take part in my initial study (50% of those deemed eligible by the SRPP). One later withdrew for medical reasons. Unlike the main study, where only students from outside my own tutor groups were invited to take part to reduce any bias associated with my tutor role, these students were from my own tutor groups. The rationale for this was that it might be easier for me to build a relationship with them and gain honest feedback about how it felt to take part, including their thoughts about the research instruments. This proved to be the case. Steve, Samantha, and Gemma (pseudonyms) completed diaries and were interviewed by telephone about their experiences of one or more online tutorials. They told me how they felt about the study and what might encourage other students to participate. They subsequently corresponded with me by email to refine the diary sheet.

3.4.3 Learning about narrative analysis

The initial study was also an opportunity to learn about different approaches to narrative analysis. Through Riessman’s work, I learned about the importance that many narrative researchers attach to keeping narratives intact during analysis (Riessman, 2008). Although there are examples of narrative studies that use a thematic approach to analysis, such as Mongiello’s doctoral study (Mongiello, 2015), narrative researchers tend not to theorise across cases. Analysis is case-centred. Separating narratives increases the likelihood of
missing truths in the stories or misrepresenting them. When I attempted to apply a thematic approach to analysing the data from my initial study, it generated more themes than were helpful.

Riessman (2008) describes four different types of narrative analysis: thematic, which focuses on what is told; structural, which focuses on how the narrative is organised; dialogic/performance, which focuses on narrative context; and visual, which focuses on images. From reading examples of narrative research (Riessman, 2008; Wells, 2011; Phoenix, 2013; Squire, 2013; Twist et al., 2017), I realised that even one type of narrative analysis could consider a combination of different aspects of narrative accounts, depending on the research focus. For example, pieces of structural analysis can be usefully embedded into principally thematic accounts (Riessman, 2008). I decided to consider four aspects: the context of the narrative and how it was co-constructed, language, identity, and content. Using this approach, I was able to identify the strongest themes by looking in detail at each narrative and then stepping back and looking at the overall story. This resulted in an in-depth analysis from four different perspectives. It required a high level of researcher reflexivity, particularly in terms of looking at the context of the narrative and how it was co-constructed.

### 3.5 Data collection

#### 3.5.1 Ethical approval

Inclusion in the main study was based on freely given, explicit consent, which required participants to opt in, following BERA Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2018, p. 9). An invitation letter was prepared plus a participant information sheet (appendix 1) and consent form (appendix 2), designed to make the purpose of the research clear and transparent. A diary sheet was also prepared to share with student participants (a completed example from Tilly is shown in appendix 3). Participants were asked to consent to joint copyright of their diary and to their anonymised quotes being used within my work. Participants could withdraw consent at any time before the data was anonymised.

I applied to the Student Research Project Panel (SRPP) for approval, which was granted with reference SRPP 2018/082 for the initial study and then extended for the main study in the following year with reference SRPP 2019/091.
Approval was sought from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for the initial study in August 2018 and for the main study in August 2019 and granted with reference HREC/2997/Chandler.

In December 2019 I contacted HREC regarding a proposed amendment when potential participants requested to be interviewed by email rather than telephone. Two students requested this because using the phone made them anxious and one because of hearing loss. None of these students had a disability marker; they had not shared their disabilities with the university. This amendment was approved, and the students completed amended consent forms to reflect this change.

In April 2020, a further amendment was approved by HREC to allow tutor involvement in the data analysis. Participants were asked to consent to joint copyright of their forum contributions and to use of their anonymised quotes within my work. Participants could withdraw consent at any time before the data was anonymised. I checked whether the university’s Tutor Research Project Panel needed to be consulted. This panel is only concerned with studies that involve over 30 tutors, so this was not required.

I completed the university’s data protection compliance requirements and was allocated registration number 3306016.

### 3.5.2 Approaching potential participants

Those using narrative methods to research experiences of learning within higher education are advised to seek out at least five narratives from the group under study and 10 if time allows (Cousin, 2009). Each narrative has the potential to generate large amounts of rich data and achieving an in-depth understanding of each narrative is always given priority over having a larger, broader sample.

To find participants for the main study, I was able to approach students from a sample of 450 of the 951 students registered on the chosen module in October 2019 who came from all tutor groups other than my own. This sample was requested and authorised by the SRPP and generated by the Data and Student Analytics department. It excluded students who had opted out of research involvement or taken part in other research within the last year.

I invited students from this sample to take part in the study by sending individual emails, initially in randomised batches and later targeting male students and those from under-
represented ethnic groups. Attached to the emails were a participant information sheet (appendix 1) and consent form (appendix 2), which were previously approved by HREC, SRPP and Data Protection.

I sent 372 invitations by individual email, followed by the same number of follow-up emails one week later. This generated 39 responses (10%), none with consent forms attached. I engaged in conversation with these potential participants, mostly by email, via the module-wide welcome forum in which I had posted some information about my research, and in one case via telephone. Many students had simply not realised the significance of the consent form and returned it once this had been explained, whilst three students wanted to clarify how much time would be involved before making a commitment. Three others asked if they could be interviewed by email. These conversations elicited 17 consent forms (4.5% of those invited).

A diary sheet was prepared and shared with participants. A completed example from Tilly is shown in appendix 3. Nine students returned the diary sheet and one student responded to say that she had not attended any tutorials during the module or completed the diary sheet but that she would like to be interviewed. Whilst it seemed unlikely that this student would have any relevant experience to offer the study, it felt important to include her. When she shared her narrative, I discovered that she had experience of attending tutorials when studying a previous module and it was insightful to explore why she had chosen not to attend tutorials this time around. She was also able to compare her experience and perceptions of university tutorials with online tutorials that she regularly attended in another context.

Two students later withdrew from the research, including one who had arranged an interview but had to withdraw for family reasons, and another who said that her studies were not going well. Five students did not return their diary sheet or respond to further contact, despite two email reminders. These included two of the three students who had expressed a willingness to be interviewed via email. Ten students remained and took part in the study.

3.5.3 Sampling-related issues and limitations
The response rate of 4.5% to the request to take part in the study seems low compared to that typically experienced in educational research. According to Cohen et al. (2018) responses from a quarter to a third can be expected if potential participants receive a reminder. Within the context of distance learning, however, students are often time poor.
Researchers conducting another study with HSC students of a different module at my institution received replies from only 6.5% of those eligible to participate in their study (Simons, Beaumont and Holland, 2018). Recruiting students at the start of a module seems ideal for the researcher wanting to collect data over the length of the module but is not timely from the student perspective, as students are attempting to integrate study into their lives alongside work and family commitments. This may have prevented the five students who initially consented to take part from returning their diary sheets. They may have been struggling to keep up with their studies or withdrawn from the module. They may have intended to attend tutorials but did not do so and therefore felt that they had no experience to offer the study. Towards the end of the data collection period in March 2020, the coronavirus pandemic reached the UK, creating unanticipated stresses for HSC students, many of whom were keyworkers and/or parents with children suddenly requiring home-schooling. The end of module assignment was cancelled, and the associated tutorial poorly attended. This may also have contributed to some diary sheets not being returned.

A further issue was that receipt of the list of potential participants was delayed by two weeks. It was scheduled to be available to me immediately after tutor-student allocation to allow time to invite participants and for them to decide on their involvement in the study before the module started. The delay meant that many participants only decided to participate after the first tutorial had taken place. In addition, a problem with the tutorial booking system meant that some students were not aware of tutorial 1 happening. Attendance at this first learning event was therefore possibly low across the cohort compared with previous years and indeed, some participants talked about tutorial 2 as being their first opportunity to attend a tutorial. Consequently, a limited amount of data was collected about tutorial 1, which only three of the 10 students who took part in the study attended. I was keen to have data from the first tutorial, as it is different from other tutorials later in the module, happening in tutor groups, rather than larger clusters of multiple groups. In my initial study, participants favourably compared their experience of this smaller group to their experiences of later tutorials in clusters. These comparisons revealed significant differences, the initial study participants seeming more at ease in their own tutor group and one participant describing in detail how she felt ignored in a cluster tutorial where a tutor seemed to pay more attention to ‘their own’ students. There are implications of these issues for my study, both in terms of the missing tutorial for some of the students who participated in the study and will not have been
able to compare these two types of tutorials and in terms of the associated lack of data about tutorial 1.

3.6 The participants

The student profiles on the virtual learning environment listed the different degree programmes on which participants were registered. Data provided by the Data and Student Analytics department included participants’ gender, age group, ethnicity, study intention (employment/career, personal development or equally important), employment status, previous qualifications and whether each student had a disability marker. Students give permission for this data to be shared for research purposes within the university when they register, so its use here is compliant with UK legislation (The Data Protection Act, 2018).

The extent to which different groups of students studying the module were represented by the ten students who took part in the study is shown in Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 3: The extent to which different groups of students were represented by the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Students registered on the module</th>
<th>Students eligible to take part</th>
<th>Students in the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability declared</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working full-time</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working part-time</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying two modules together</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: The extent to which different ethnic groups were represented by the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Students on the module</th>
<th>Students eligible to take part</th>
<th>Students in the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>87.9%</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated/unknown</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the study participants identified as female. Asian students were overrepresented, whilst those identifying with other ethnic groups were underrepresented. Despite prioritising the underrepresented groups of students when sending out invites and posting a message (with the permission of the module chair) in the module-wide forum to encourage a response from a diverse range of students, there were no volunteers from these groups. Fewer were studying more than one module or working full-time than might have been expected but this may have been because these groups of students had more time available, both for attending tutorials, which were the focus of the study, and for participating in research. There were far fewer students with disabilities in the sample eligible to take part than would have been representative of this group of students as a whole, suggesting that a previous research study involving the students with disabilities might have taken place within the previous year. Two of the participants had disabilities that they had not declared to the university.

The background data supplied for individual participants is shown in Table 5. The participants chose their own pseudonyms, with one exception who asked me to choose for her. The students came from a range of age groups, had a mixture of study intentions and previous qualifications and various employment. They were registered on a variety of degree programmes. Participants’ backgrounds cannot be fully represented by this data, however. There was much variation within it in terms of the nations that the students came from and resided in, for example.
Table 5: Participant background data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Study intention</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Disability declared</th>
<th>Previous qualifications</th>
<th>Degree programme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>56 &amp; over</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Equally important</td>
<td>Not in work</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Less than A-levels</td>
<td>Open degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Under 25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>A-levels or equivalent</td>
<td>Open degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Did not specify</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>HE qualification</td>
<td>Study not linked to qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Employment or career</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>A-levels or equivalent</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Did not specify</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilly *</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Did not specify</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not known</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Employment or career</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>A-levels or equivalent</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korina</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Equally important</td>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>A-levels or equivalent</td>
<td>Childhood and youth studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amie</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Did not specify</td>
<td>Home/family</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>PG qualification</td>
<td>Childhood and youth studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Did not specify</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>A-levels or equivalent</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Student who requested an email interview
This data was collected when the students registered with the university and changes can happen between their registration and the research taking place. Sophia, for example, stated that she was not in employment when she registered. At the time of her interview, she was working as a childminder. The data does, however, give an indication of the breadth of backgrounds of the study participants.

3.7 Data collection methods

This section explains my approach to data collection, using participant diaries and interviews, and justifies their choice within the context of a narrative approach.

Different approaches can be taken to gathering data about tuition, including looking at students’ perceptions, tutor perceptions or observing and analysing the tutorials themselves. My initial study incorporated tutor perceptions, as well as student perceptions, but this made the focus of the study too broad. Observing and analysing tutorial sessions themselves was an option, as many tutorials are recorded, and I could have requested permission to access and analyse recordings. Indeed, when analysing the data that I gathered, looking at tutorial recordings might have filled in gaps in the data in some instances. This approach would not, however, have provided in-depth data about student experience on its own and I concluded that it would raise some complex relational ethical issues, especially given my own position as a tutor on the module. I chose not to do this, as whilst tutors are required to make recordings for students’ benefit, anecdotal evidence suggests that tutors can feel anxious about their use for other purposes, including research. I considered how different approaches might impact on the data collected. Using the CoI framework and survey instrument, one Turkish study has compared undergraduate computer education students’ perceptions with observed behaviours and found only small differences (Cakirğlu and Kılıç, 2018).

Because I sought to understand student experiences in depth, my study focused on student perceptions but used a narrative approach, giving a rich picture of individual students’ personal experiences of online tuition. This section will provide detail about the methods used to collect data to address the first two research questions:
1. How do the narratives of students’ experiences of synchronous online tutorials in a health and social care module vary and what factors account for this variation?

2. What can we learn about the needs which drive the preferences students express around synchronous online tuition in health and social care?

An overview of these methods is shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Overview of research methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>What this included</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diary sheet</td>
<td>Learning network table</td>
<td>Initial study data suggested that the relationship between the interactions with others during tutorials and students’ wider learning networks was not straightforward and needed exploration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions to help participants recall their experiences at interview.</td>
<td>Students in the initial study expressed a strong preference for a more structured diary sheet. The questions were informed by the Col framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A further question was added about where the student was when they joined the tutorial and what was happening around them.</td>
<td>Informed by previous work (Chandler, 2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Telephone interview with minimal schedule based on the diary entries and straightforward open questions.</td>
<td>To allow participants to construct narratives in ways that are meaningful to them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email interview with minimal schedule based on the diary entries and straightforward open questions.</td>
<td>To allow participants unable to communicate by phone to construct narratives in ways that are meaningful to them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3.7.1 The diary sheets**

Experience-centred narrative research can incorporate a wide variety of materials, researchers frequently including both participants’ and their own written reflections (Squire, 2013). I used participant diaries, asking participants to note their
experiences of synchronous online tuition on a diary sheet to provide a starting point for the subsequent interviews. A completed example from Tilly is shown in appendix 3.

The use of diaries as a data collection method does have some limitations. Firstly, writing about an experience either during or shortly after it could distort the experience itself, the student trying to juggle an extra task alongside the tutorial. Secondly, if the task seems overly complicated, then there is a risk that the student will not complete it. To minimise these risks, it was important to think carefully about the content of the diary sheet. It was simple and not at all structured for the initial study but was subsequently developed with input from the initial study participants who expressed a strong preference for more structure and corresponded with me by email to provide feedback on draft versions.

The first part of the diary sheet contained what I am describing as a ‘learning network table’. This was devised after the narrative shared by Gemma, an initial study participant, highlighted how students’ opportunities to discuss their studies with those outside the university might influence the need that they feel to interact with others during tutorials. Gemma’s personal learning network comprised of her partner, who was studying the same module, and her work colleagues, many of whom shared the same degree pathway. Whilst she described her connections with university staff and other students as not particularly important because of having plenty of opportunities to discuss her studies with colleagues, family, and friends, Gemma still commented positively on the opportunities to interact during tutorials and valued others’ perspectives. The relationship between the interactions with others during tutorials and interaction with her wider learning network was not straightforward. It seemed important, therefore, to gather information about participants’ personal learning networks.

Whilst personal learning networks have sometimes been defined in terms of professionals making connections with other professionals (Rajagopal et al., 2012), I used a broader definition, asking students to think of all those with whom they discussed their studies either in person or online, including colleagues, family and friends, other students and university staff. This definition is similar to that of Couros (2010), who defines personal learning networks in terms of human connections:
Personal learning net-works are the sum of all social capital and connections that result in the development and facilitation of a personal learning environment (Couros, 2010, p. 125).

I used a table format, which could easily be completed digitally, then saved and emailed to me. The initial study participants liked the idea of completing the table and provided helpful suggestions for its development, including the use of the letter G to represent a group. They also suggested that there should be space to add further categories of people if needed, although no students in the main study did so.

The second part of the diary sheet asked students to share their experiences of one or two online tutorials that they attended at any point during the module. The rationale behind specifying one or two was to avoid the expectations of potential participants seeming too onerous. I also wanted to maximise the students’ control over which experiences they chose to share. I anticipated that some students might provide details about more than two tutorials and two participants did so.

The initial study participants’ feedback about the diary sheet suggested that guidance was needed about how much to write and that it would be helpful to add some questions to indicate which aspects of the tutorials to focus on. I used ‘immanent’ questions, defined as those which reflect the interests, formulations and language of participants, rather than ‘exmanent’ questions, which reflect the theoretical framework and the language familiar to the researcher (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). I asked for information about tutorial activities and the role of the tutor, about contributions and building relationships with others, how the student was feeling during the tutorial, what was gained from the tutorial, and what the student planned to do differently as a result. These areas were informed by the Community of Inquiry framework as applied to asynchronous computer-mediated higher education (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999) and the modifications suggested around emotional presence (Cleveland-Innes and Campbell, 2012) and learning (or regulatory) presence (Shea et al., 2012; Kilis and Yildirim, 2018; Blaine, 2019). A further question about where the student was when they joined the tutorial and what was happening around them was informed by previous work (Chandler, 2016), which identified how students sometimes undertake other activities simultaneously with attending online tutorials. These activities can impact on their experience. I also asked for information about the title and date of the tutorial, so that I knew which tutorial events the student had experienced. As a
module tutor, I had access to the outline of proposed content of each tutorial session prepared by the module team for comparison with the participants’ experiences.

### 3.7.2 Telephone interviews

Diary data was used as the basis for a stimulated recall interview via telephone. Stimulated recall is a technique first developed to check students’ memory of what happened during a lesson (Bloom, 1953). In research, the technique often involves video or audio recordings of participants’ actions, which can be used to prompt more accurate recall of experiences when participants are interviewed about them later (Calderhead, 1981; Dempsey, 2010; Gazdag, Nagy and Szivák, 2019). This method has also been used in relation to artefacts, such as diaries (De Smet et al., 2010; Burden, Topping and O’Halloran, 2015) and that is how it is used here.

The diaries provided a good starting point, prompting participants to remember what had happened and how they had felt during tutorials that took place some weeks previously. I was able to ask them about experiences which they had already thought about, giving them more control over their narratives. Stories are more likely to be found when the research participants control the flow of information and can be encouraged to expand on their answers (Mishler, 1986).

Experienced narrative researchers advise using unstructured interviews, minimal interview schedules and straightforward open questions that allow informants to construct narratives in ways that are meaningful to them (Riessman, 2008). These suggestions were reflected in my interview schedule (appendix 4). I viewed research as a process, listening to the data as I went along and adapting the questions as appropriate (Rubin and Rubin, 2012).

Whilst face-to-face interviews would have been advantageous because they enable non-verbal communication and more emotional feedback (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018), they were not a feasible choice for interviewing my participants, who were located throughout the UK and for whom a telephone interview seemed less intrusive.

### 3.7.3 Email interviews

Three participants who originally agreed to take part in the study did so on the condition that they could be interviewed by email, two because telephone conversations induced anxiety for them and one because of hearing loss. It
seemed important to agree to this, taking account of both relational and deontological ethics (Stutchbury and Fox, 2009) in terms of respecting these students’ wishes and enabling them to contribute their experiences, thereby maximising the benefits of the study in terms of capturing the experiences of as wide a range of students as possible. In addition, students who are unable to speak on the phone might require an adjusted tutorial environment, so their experiences were important to include.

Within narrative research, email allows marginalised participants to share their experiences with comfort and control by maximising the distance between themselves and the researcher (Cheng, 2017; Hawkins, 2018). It improves the inclusiveness of the study (Ison, 2009). It gives access to the experiences of those who struggle with spoken communication, but also allows greater equality, as participants can revisit the conversation, just like the researcher. In a methodological appraisal of two research studies to determine the appropriateness and equivalency of email interviews compared with telephone interviews where participants had a choice of method, email interviews compared favourably (Hershberger and Kavanaugh, 2017). They provided rich, insightful data and some participants would not have taken part had email not been an option. Interviewees report that they find this method convenient (Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015).

Some researchers also describe email interviews as convenient, not least because of the time saved on transcription and because they can be an accessible way of interviewing busy people (Cheng, 2017; Hawkins, 2018). In contrast, others warn that they can be time-consuming for researchers and that conducting multiple simultaneous email conversations can be challenging (Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; Mongiello, 2015). Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez (2015) advise conducting no more than two at a time. This advice fitted with the requirements of my study, where only small numbers of participants requested to use email. Whilst email interviews are sometimes associated with high level of withdrawals from studies and incomplete responses (Cheng, 2017), others report no withdrawals and surprisingly lengthy and detailed responses, leading to prolonged engagement (Hawkins, 2018). Although email interviews lack the clues present in telephone interviews to indicate feelings, such as tone of voice, pauses or hesitations, other aspects of email communication can indicate emotion, such as emoticons or...
capitalisation (Hawkins, 2018). It is advisable to set boundaries to define closure of the interview, either in terms of time or the number of responses exchanged (Bowden and Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; Hawkins, 2018). I decided to set the boundaries at two weeks and 10 exchanges. I also noted techniques used by email interviewers, including funnelling, recursive questioning and acknowledging what was said before moving onto the next question (Ison, 2009).

Only one of the students who requested an email interview, Tilly, went on to complete the diary sheet and be interviewed. Afterwards, Tilly commented that it might have been easier to set aside a time for email exchanges when we were both sat at our computers, so that the conversation happened in a shorter timeframe. With only one participant participating via email, there is limited scope for making comparisons with the effectiveness of telephone interviews but there are several observations worth noting. There was far less evidence in the emails from Tilly of any emotion connected with Tilly’s tutorial experiences compared with the other narratives, but this may have been related to Tilly herself or her experience, rather than the interview method. As I had fewer opportunities to ask questions in a written conversation than in a spoken one, Tilly had more control over the topics discussed and was therefore even more likely than the other participants to have focused on the aspects of tutorials that were most important to her. In addition, she had attended more tutorials than the other participants, six in total, and was willing to share information about all of these. Her interview contributed a lot of data to the study that would not have been available otherwise.

### 3.8 Data collection process

The process I followed when collecting data is shown in Figure 4. On receiving the diaries, I noted the topics mentioned and compared them with those apparent in the literature review to help me identify additional interview questions for each participant. After each telephone interview, I typed up the transcripts as soon as possible, replaying short sections of each recording several times for accuracy and then typing the words using Dragon™ software. When words were emphasised in speech, I underlined them. I recorded pauses, unfinished sentences, overlapping speech, indistinct words, laughter, and any emotions apparent from tone of voice. Each of these is an aspect of the way that a participant performs their story and conveys meaning. Typing up the transcripts myself helped me to become familiar with the details of the data.
Every participant had the opportunity to check and comment on the transcript via email. This included Tilly who had been interviewed by email and for whom I collated our discussion into one document. This part of the process was made clear to participants on the consent form, although it was also explained at interview that checking the transcript was optional and that there was no expectation that participants would do so if they did not want to, or they did not have time. Of the 10 students who participated in the study, six responded to the invitation to review their transcript and said that there was nothing that they wanted to change or add.

A summary of the data collected from the students in the study is shown in Table 7. Whilst the dates of the tutorials were collected as an extra way of checking which tutorials students had included in their diary sheets, this information has not been reported. Sharing it might make students identifiable to the tutors or other university staff with access to the tutorial timetables.
### Table 7: Summary of the student data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Online tutorials attended</th>
<th>Learning network table and diary sheet</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Korina</td>
<td>Tutorial 2: Success with assignments</td>
<td>107 words</td>
<td>Telephone interview 22/11/19 Length 32 minutes 3604 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Tutorial 2: Success with assignments, Tutorial 3: Society and health</td>
<td>619 words</td>
<td>Telephone interview 6/12/19 Length 45 minutes 4340 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amie</td>
<td>Tutorial 3: Society and health</td>
<td>169 words</td>
<td>Telephone interview 18/1/20 Length 35 minutes 3720 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Tutorial 2: Success with assignments, Tutorial 3: Society and health</td>
<td>335 words</td>
<td>Telephone interview 23/1/20 Length 37 minutes 4301 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilly</td>
<td>Tutorial 1: Everything you need to know about [module name], Tutorial 2: Success with assignments, Tutorial 3: Society and health, Tutorial 4: Writing your report</td>
<td>1334 words</td>
<td>Email interview 5/2/20 – 18/2/20 3582 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>Tutorial 1: Everything you need to know about [module name], Tutorial 3: Society and health, Tutorial 4: Writing your report</td>
<td>122 words</td>
<td>Telephone interview 6/2/20 Length 50 minutes 6453 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>Tutorial 3: Society and health, Tutorial 4: Writing your report</td>
<td>387 words</td>
<td>Telephone interview 9/3/20 Length 43 minutes 4378 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>Tutorial 3: Society and health, Tutorial 4: Writing your report</td>
<td>126 words</td>
<td>Telephone interview 17/3/20 Length 30 minutes 3876 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Learning network table completed during interview. Diary not completed.</td>
<td>Telephone interview 10/4/20 Length 30 minutes 3673 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Tutorial 1: Everything you need to know about [module name], Tutorial 3: Society and health, Tutorial 5: Getting to grips with TMA04</td>
<td>239 words</td>
<td>Telephone interview 10/4/20 Length 55 minutes 3673 words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22 tutorials</strong></td>
<td><strong>3438 words</strong></td>
<td><strong>357 minutes 41600 words</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.9 Management of data

Data was stored in password protected and encrypted individual documents on a local network protected by two firewalls. It was backed up nightly over an encrypted channel to a remote server in a secure building and stored on an encrypted volume.

Data was processed only in ways participants would reasonably expect, openly and honestly, and respecting the right to be informed. Diary records and interview transcripts were anonymised after participants agreed the transcripts. Interview recordings were then deleted. Anonymised data was stored in separate files and folders. Approval for these plans was received from Data Protection and entered on the Information Asset Register. These arrangements took account of the Data Protection Act (2018) and met my deontological obligations and legal responsibilities as a researcher, both nationally and as a representative of the university.

Participants chose their own pseudonyms. With narrative analysis, protecting participants’ identity can be difficult due to small sample sizes (Squire, 2013). Sometimes it was necessary to redact personal information within the data to remove any risk of a participant being identified. In Amie’s case, for example, I redacted the information she shared about her country of origin, her first language, and the type of learning difficulty experienced by one of her children, any of which might have identified her to her own tutor. It was also important to protect the identity of the tutors and other students mentioned in the narratives. The personal nature of some comments about tutors, as well as references to gender, would mean that tutors might be identified if some aspects of the data were not omitted/changed, so steps were taken to take account of deontological and relational ethics and to protect their identity.

Additional steps were taken to ensure the security of the email interview data. My email system is password protected. I asked Tilly whether her email system was password protected and not shared with others. After the interview, all the emails sent and received were copied into a single document, in which Tilly was identified by her chosen pseudonym only and all emails were deleted.
3.10 Approach to analysis

I followed the suggestion that deciding on the significance of data should be a human task (Rubin and Rubin, 2012), rather than using a computer programme, such as NVIVO, which can give a false impression of scientific objectivity when data analysis is, in reality, subjective, messy and uncomfortable, requiring a high degree of reflexivity (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). Interpretive approaches are associated with the hermeneutic tradition, which involves searching for a thorough understanding of the meaning that people attached to interactions, actions and objects (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011). Like Mauthner and Doucet (1998), I viewed the analysis process as ongoing and continuous throughout the research, rather than a discrete phase.

In my initial study, I included four aspects to my analysis: the context and how the narrative was co-constructed, language, identity, and content. I was able to identify the strongest themes by looking in detail at each narrative and then stepping back and looking at the overall story. This was effective but I remained open to other approaches to analysis, subsequently exploring and selecting Voice Centred Relational Method (VCRM).

In examining data analysis techniques, I realised that they are not neutral. They contain ontological and epistemological assumptions. I sought out a method which was compatible with my relational ontology and my epistemology of viewing participants as the ‘privileged knowers’ or experts (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011, p. 42). Whilst I sought to hear the experiences of students of different genders, the fact that only women had volunteered to share their experiences made the use of a feminist methodology designed to foreground the different voices of girls or women, some of which might usually be subjugated, particularly relevant.

3.10.1 Voice Centred Relational Method

VCRM is an approach to narrative analysis, which reflects a relational ontology (Brown and Gilligan, 1991; Mauthner and Doucet, 1998) and recognises that relationships are often central to people’s experiences (Jankowska, 2014). This made it useful for my research, where my initial study data suggested that students’ interactions with peers and relationships with others were central to their tutorial experiences. Relational methodologies and ethical ways of thinking align and bring ontology and epistemology together.
VCRM assumes that people have multiple and sometimes contradictory understandings of their experiences, which other qualitative methods of analysis may not capture. It originates from the clinical methods of psychologists, including Freud, Breuer and Piaget (Gilligan et al., 2003). According to Gilligan (2015), an American feminist psychologist, this approach to analysis was first implicit in her best-known work on female moral development and the ethics of care, ‘In a different voice’ (Gilligan, 1982). It arose from disquiet about the tools available for coding qualitative data at that time (Gilligan et al., 2003). Subsequently, it was developed in work with others (Brown et al., 1988, cited in Gilligan, 2015) and named as the ‘Listening Guide’ by Gilligan. It can be used for any narrative containing a first-person voice or in which one might be expected (Gilligan, 2015).

VCRM looks for the different voices within the narrative, what is said and not said, and how voices are influenced by social and cultural context, as well as relationships and structures of power (Brown and Gilligan, 1991). This seemed relevant to my study, as students’ tutorial experiences are embedded in the social and cultural contexts of the university and students’ broader life experiences. Within VCRM, however, there is no clear definition of ‘voice’ or ‘self’. Individuals’ stories and sense of self are in a constant state of flux, with participants deciding how much to share or hold back (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). The method refutes the possibility of capturing the ‘authentic’ voice of the participant. Rather, the researcher aims to hear more of the participant’s voice and gain more of an understanding of their experiences than they might have done otherwise.

VCRM incorporates the feminist principle that researchers can best understand a phenomenon by building relationships with participants, rather than taking an objective, detached position. This was important for my research, as my insider status prevented me from taking an objective, detached position. A strength of the method is that it keeps participants’ voices respectfully in the foreground, whilst also considering the researcher’s privileged and powerful role in the analysis, the part of the research process where the participant has no control (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). A further strength is the inbuilt reflexive elements, researchers reflecting on how they are located socially and emotionally in relation to participants; the way in which their academic and personal experiences impact on their research; and how their institutional and interpersonal contexts shape their decisions, as well as their ontological and epistemological positions (Mauthner and
Doucet, 2003). These strengths mean that the method can highlight significant aspects of narratives that might otherwise have gone unnoticed (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003; Woodcock, 2016).

Researchers using VCRM carry out at least four steps, which involve three or more listenings of the data. The term ‘listenings’, rather than readings is used because the process of sharing the narrative involves participation of both the teller or research participant and the listener or researcher (Gilligan et al., 2003). None of the listenings are intended to stand alone; only together can they represent someone’s experience (Gilligan et al., 2003). By listening to interview recordings and marking the transcript with different colours for each listening, it is possible to trace different voices through the interview (Brown and Gilligan, 1991). The researcher makes notes and interpretative summaries of each step.

The steps involved in VCRM can be:

1. listening for the broad story, including who is speaking and to whom, telling what stories (Brown and Gilligan, 1991). This encompasses the context and the drama, paying attention to repetitions, metaphors and emotional resonances, revisions and absences, changes of narrative position, silences, and also considering the researcher’s own response to the narrative. Researchers note where they feel a connection or touched by the narrative and where they do not, how they feel and why they think they feel this way, and how this affects their interpretation (Gilligan et al., 2003). The literature reviewed presents its own distinct perspective, the impact of which is acknowledged.

2. listening for the self or the voice of the ‘I’ speaking in the story, the researcher allowing the narrator’s voice to enter their psyche and understanding the story on the narrator’s terms through that relationship (Brown and Gilligan, 1991). This involves listening for the first-person voice, including its modulation and rhythms, and how the narrator speaks about themselves (Gilligan et al., 2003). I poems are constructed by extracting every appearance of ‘I’ in the text in order, together with the associated verb and other significant words, each placed on a separate line.

3. listening for contrapuntal voices within the data. The term contrapuntal is drawn from the musical form counterpoint, where there are two or more
metrical lines in relationship. This reading can have different foci to suit the research purposes, but the key task is examining how different voices relate to each other (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Woodcock, 2016). It can involve more than one listening. For example, Brown and Gilligan (1991) listened for voices of care and voices of justice. They sought to be ‘resisting listeners’, questioning the dominant culture and identifying when voices might be influenced by oppression or stereotype. Mauthner and Doucet (1998, 2003) and Jankowska (2014) considered relationships in their third listening and social, cultural and political contexts in their fourth listening, whereas Davis (2015) listened to the contrapuntal voices of the personal and the communal, as represented by ‘I’ and ‘we’. The I poem technique described above has been adapted for the purpose of hearing contrapuntal voices (Jankowska, 2014; Woodcock, 2016).

4. composing an analysis of what has been learnt via separate listenings in relation to the research question, using the whole transcript and bringing the separate voices back into relationship with each other. Researchers consider how they have come to know what they learnt. The research questions may then require revision (Gilligan et al., 2003).

The steps in my analysis were as follows:

1. listening for the broad story, including the context and the drama, paying attention to repetitions, metaphors and emotional resonances, revisions and absences, changes of narrative position and also considering my own response and the responses of other tutors to the narrative.
2. listening for the ‘self’ speaking in the story through the construction of I poems and reflecting on participants’ expressions of identity as a student.
3. listening for the contrapuntal voices of the personal, the communal and the institutional context, as represented by ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘they’ to gain insight into the extent to which students perceive themselves to be part of a community and how they perceive their relationships with peers, tutors, and others.
4. listening for evidence of the different types of presence from the Community of Inquiry framework using my descriptions of what these presences might look like within online HSC tutorials that I developed from the CoI Survey Instrument (Athabasca University, no date) (Table 2), adding a deductive layer to the analysis.
5. composing an analysis of what I learnt from the separate listenings in relation to the research questions, using the whole transcript and bringing the separate voices back into relationship with each other, whilst also reflecting on how I came to know what I learnt, and reviewing my research questions.

3.10.2 Ethical implications of using VCRM

Whilst researching this approach to analysis, I questioned the ethical implications of listening for different voices within my data. Whilst VCRM is concerned with ensuring that participants’ voices are not subjugated by the researcher (Gilligan et al., 2003), there seems to be tension created when a researcher goes beyond really listening to what participants know they want the researcher to discover and begins analysing the data for hidden subtexts, whether conscious or unconscious. Gilligan (2015, p. 73) acknowledges that ‘a good method is also an ethical method’, and frames this ethical dilemma as a relational one, which is about researchers being prepared to question social and cultural norms and communicate their deliberations to the extent that participants can communicate what they really think. When using VCRM, the researcher and participant are usually in an ongoing relationship, the participant having the chance to get to know the researcher before sharing their experiences, so that they feel comfortable doing so (Bright, 2016). Whilst Brown and Gilligan had opportunities to build close relationships with participants over some years in the context of their work as psychologists (Brown and Gilligan, 1991), my relationships with the participants in my study were of a different nature (see section 1.1.4) and, by necessity, of a shorter duration. For me, the most important ethical considerations around analysis were deontological and relational, maintaining a commitment to analysing the data thoroughly and consistently, but also to foregrounding the findings that contribute to a better understanding of how to provide students with positive tutorial experiences, consistent with the aims of the study as shared with the participants.

The creation of poems within the process of VCRM generates powerful research outputs that enter the world of art-based literature (Gilligan, 2015) and can be presented separately from the discussion about the narrative in which they originated or even performed. Reflecting on the ethical implications of this possibility, I concluded that it would not be appropriate to do either of these things.
One reason was that the participants had not been consulted about my use of VCRM; my approach to analysis had been decided at a later stage in the study. Secondly, each poem only presents some of the voices that can be identified within one listening to a narrative and these need to be seen in the context of the whole narrative and its analysis. I decided that the poems generated from the narratives should not be presented separately or performed but only be used to present the study’s findings within the context of this thesis and within other academic literature, again consistent with the aims of the study as shared with the participants.

3.11 A reflection on my approach to analysis

The aim of my analysis was to hear as many as possible of the different voices within the data whilst also being reflexive about my own role in its co-construction.

When preparing to analyse the data, I first gathered the data for each participant into a single document, bringing together the background data supplied by the Data and Student Analytics department, the learning network table, diary sheet and interview transcript. Collating the information helped me to identify similarities and differences between the various sources for each participant and to maintain my commitment to case-centred analysis.

My steps were listening for the broad story, listening for the ‘self’, listening for contrapuntal voices, listening for evidence of the different types of presence from the Community of Inquiry framework, and composing an analysis of what I learnt. I applied these steps to both the diary sheets and the interview transcripts.

3.11.1 Listening for the broad story

When listening for the broad story I paid attention to the stories that the participant was telling, including the context and the drama in terms of the details of incidents and experiences that the participant thought significant enough to share. It included what happened during the tutorials but also participants’ experiences in their homes or workplaces. This is what Brown and Gilligan term the ‘who, what, when, where, and why of the narrative’ (Brown and Gilligan, 1991, p. 46). This step is important to do first because it ‘maps the psychological terrain’ and helps the researcher to identify their own role in the creation of the narrative (Gilligan, 2015, p. 71). I noted what was said and not said, which gave insight into aspects of the participants’ relationships with the university and with others, including their
families, friends, and colleagues. I noted pauses; which words were emphasised; repetitions; metaphors; emotional resonances, such as sighs or laughter; revisions; absences; and the participants’ language around relationships. Most narratives included some language that reflected tutors’ control and power, such as when Karen explained about breakout rooms, ‘You’re just sort of put into these rooms and expected to communicate’ (Karen, interview, 10/04/20).

I worked from detailed interview transcripts, which included all the ums and errs, plus typographic devices, such as underlining the emphasised words and including pauses in square brackets. This helped me to analyse what was happening at different points in the interview and consider different interpretations. For example, the sighs and slower speech, which were features of the first part of Deborah’s interview, were absent from the second part, suggesting that these features were likely to be related to how she felt about the first tutorial she described, rather than how she felt about another aspect of her life at the time, although I was also conscious that her speech may have become more rapid as she grew more confident in the interview (Deborah, interview, 09/03/20). Handwritten notes made immediately after each interview and whilst transcribing the recordings enabled me to capture and reflect on such details. I added these notes and further thoughts as comments when typing up each transcript. An example of a section of the transcript of Lisa’s interview is shown in appendix 5.

I reflected on my own influence on the narrative and how the data had been co-constructed between myself and the participant, conscious of our relative positionality and differences in power and culture. This was important, as our interactions, including the format of the diary sheet and interview, together with the participants’ perceptions of me in my multiple roles of researcher, tutor, and author, guided the participants’ responses and led to them prioritising some aspects of their narrative over others. For example, Korina and Sophia, two of the three Asian students whom I interviewed, seemed particularly conscious of my tutor role, and were reluctant to appear critical of the tuition that they received. Their preferences around tuition only became apparent in the later stages of the analysis. I had a key role in co-constructing Joanne’s narrative. She was at her parents’ home for the interview and did not have a copy of the diary sheet with her, so I helped her to recall what she had written. I took care to say exactly what was on the sheet and encourage her to expand on it.
I also reflected on my own response to each narrative, thought about why I had responded in this way and how it might have affected my interpretation of what each student had shared. My responses were often influenced by my experiences as a tutor and a learner and occasionally, as illustrated by a comment on Lisa’s transcript (appendix 5), by the information gathered in other interviews, even though I was trying to focus on each narrative separately. I tried to be aware of the impact of the literature that I had read when analysing my responses. When reflecting on Deborah’s narrative, for example, I felt concerned about the preference she expressed for having two simultaneous conversations, as this contradicted my previous learning about what might constitute best practice in tuition, as well as the experience of other participants in the study and some of the literature I had read (McBrien, Cheng and Jones, 2009; McDaniels, Pfund and Barnicle, 2016).

I also recognised that participants themselves had been changed by the sharing of their narratives. Towards the end of Sophia’s interview, she started thinking aloud about how she might connect with other students, whilst my responses to Lisa helped her realise that being dyslexic did not preclude her dream of becoming a teacher. Joanne commented that participating in the study had helped her to think about how she might improve her focus during tutorials.

### 3.11.2 Preparation of vignettes

Analysis strategies used by qualitative researchers can be divided into two types: connecting strategies based on contiguity and categorising strategies based on similarity (Maxwell and Miller, 2008). Maxwell and Miller suggest that VCRM uses a mixture of both types. After listening for the broad story, I used one of the connecting strategies they describe: the preparation of vignettes to reduce the data and identify key relationships. I prepared a vignette of each student’s narrative to share with colleagues to meet the obligations of relational ethics, but also so that tutors could consider whether there might be any changes that they could make to their practice to enhance students’ experiences going forward.

A vignette is a focused description that retains chronological flow and a story-like structure, which is designed to provide a vivid portrayal of an event that is typical or representative (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I condensed the main ideas from each narrative into two pages or less to avoid overwhelming colleagues with
information. An example of the vignette of Karen’s narrative is shown in appendix 6.

Because of author bias, a vignette can never be truly representative (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I thought carefully about what to include and omit. This process often revealed more about my own response to the narrative, which I noted. To enhance accessibility, repetitions, pauses and indistinct speech, which were all included in the transcript, were excluded. Typographic devices were also excluded with the exception of [laughter] to show where laughter happened.

Changes were made to protect participants’ identities. Some students shared information about themselves or used vocabulary that might have enabled their tutor to identify them. These details, such as the Scottish students’ references to ‘message boards’, rather than forums or chat boxes, were omitted or changed. What I did not change at this point were details that identified the university or the module that students were studying, such as the names of the tutorials. This ensured that the vignettes made sense to the audience for whom they were prepared.

I shared the vignettes with module tutors, managers and the module team in a tutor forum and invited responses via the forum or via email. Later, I anonymised the vignettes further, removing references to the module and university, so that they could be shared more broadly with other educators via my research website (Chandler, 2021). At this point, I also contacted the students who took part in the study and invited them to review their vignette on the website and give feedback. Two participants contacted me, and their feedback was positive.

I copied tutors’ responses into the relevant document to be included in the analysis of the students’ narratives, focusing both on the responses, any ongoing discussion, and my own responses to both of these. Some stories generated responses from several tutors and some discussion, whilst others, particularly those posted later and during the coronavirus pandemic, when tutors were exceptionally busy, generated no responses at all.

Despite encouragement to do so via a separate email, none of the module team or managers responded to the narratives, although I could see that many read the forum thread in which they were posted. They may have felt uncomfortable about responding to students’ experiences, which included comments about tuition
provided by those they manage, or they may simply have been too busy to respond. Similarly, I was conscious of some tutor colleagues reading without commenting and recognised that for some, students’ suggestions and the responses of some colleagues may have felt threatening or challenging. It seemed important to respect their decisions not to comment.

3.11.3 Listening for the ‘self’

Listening for the self or the voice of the ‘I’ speaking in the story involved listening for the first-person voice, including its modulation and rhythms, and how the narrator spoke about themselves (Gilligan et al., 2003). This is a further example of a connecting analysis strategy used within VCRM (Maxwell and Miller, 2008). As described by Gilligan et al., (2003), I constructed ‘I poems’ by removing every ‘I’ statement from the narrative and placing each on a separate line, together with the associated verb and other significant words. Occasionally, it was important to be aware of the information about context removed by this process. For example, when Joanne stated, ‘I think that helps greatly’ in relation to having a break (Joanne, interview, 17/03/20), this was in the context of there not having been a break in the tutorial that she was describing. Whilst some researchers, including Gilligan, favour an approach that strips out all context and grammar, I chose not to do this, concluding that to remove them entirely can diminish the narrator’s voice (McKenzie, 2021). This process produced a list of ‘I’ statements, which amplified the narrator’s voice and usually enhanced my understanding the story on their terms (Brown and Gilligan, 1991) but the lists were long and unwieldy. An example of a section of an I poem from Amie’s narrative is shown in appendix 7.

The methodology of creating I poems has evolved in multiple directions (McKenzie, 2021) and I developed my own approach. Many of the ‘I’ statements within the narratives I collected could be divided into three broad types:

1. those relating to identity, such as ‘I do childminding’ or ‘I’ve got dyslexia’.
2. those relating to feelings and preferences, such as ‘I felt totally absorbed’ or ‘I love to find the opinions of the other students’.
3. those relating to actions taken before, during or after tutorials, such as ‘I find someone there who also feels the same’ or ‘I’m taking notes’.

I developed new ‘I’ poems by separating the ‘I’ statements into these three types, omitting other I statements and keeping them in the order in which they appeared.
in the narrative. Occasionally, it was hard to know how to classify a particular statement. When this happened, the statement was sometimes included in more than one poem or omitted. I continued to show which words had been emphasised in the narrative via underlining them.

Whilst this step might be seen by narrative researchers as a fracturing of the data (Riessman, 2008), these ‘I’ poems gave me further understanding of the narrative from the participant’s perspective. The identity poems helped me understand students’ perceptions of themselves as adult learners, whilst the feelings poems gave insight into how they felt about their tutorial experiences. Joanne’s identity I poem (Figure 5), for example, gives more detail about her personal learning network, as well as mentioning her full-time work, whilst her feelings I poem (Figure 6) brings out both her enjoyment of tutorials and her preferences in relation to many different aspects of them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joanne - Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't really talk to a lot of the other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm getting on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know what any of this is about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm on the laptop,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't speak to many other students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I kind of think ‘Am I on the right track?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm going to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was going in the right direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've got sort of like my partner at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've got this assignment to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I obviously have friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'll talk to them about what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am on a Facebook group and WhatsApp group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't actually read all of those!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'll dip into that to ask a question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've got one student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't really email my tutor with questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've had some contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've had an email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't really ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do look obviously on our module forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only really contribute to that if it's required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work from Monday to Friday, 9 to 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I could get a bit ahead of the game</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5: Joanne’s identity I poem*
Figure 6: Joanne’s feeling I poem

The action I poems gave me insight into what students were doing in tutorials and in some cases, what a student was struggling with or not able to do. This highlighted the challenges they experienced. For example, the use of ‘didn’t’ and ‘couldn’t’ in this section of Sophia’s action poem emphasises the technical challenges she experienced in one tutorial she describes, despite being a frequent attender at tutorials (Figure 7). Sophia was the only student who reported having significant technical difficulties herself, although other students sometimes mentioned the tutors having technical problems.

Joanne - Feelings

I quite like with the tutorials
I don’t like to speak
I prefer to type in the chat box
I just feel like there’s a delay
I always find chatting quite a nice thing
I find that’s quite good cos
I find someone there who also feels the same
I find them all informative
I find my tutor very good
I do find them informative
I think a break helps greatly
I think sometimes they could maybe be shorter
I think that’s quite useful.
I think it could be a bit more structured
I feel like I know about a particular thing
I was more interested in part one.
I’m always happy to…
I’m always happy to join in and contribute
I do quite enjoy the tutorials
I’d rather kind of focus on the person that’s talking
I would like to have something still a bit more interactivity.
I quite like it when we’re refreshed
I feel like there should be maybe only be two or three times for questions.
From the I poems, I gained insight into the individual factors that affected each participant’s tutorial experiences, as well as their individual tuition needs. They helped me to see what worked for them and what could be improved. I then moved on to examine what are termed as ‘the contrapuntal voices’.

3.11.4 Listening for the contrapuntal voices

When listening for the contrapuntal voices or how different voices relate to each other (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Woodcock, 2016), I considered the personal, the communal and the institutional context, as represented by ‘I’, ‘we’, ‘you’ and ‘they’. This helped me to gain insight into the extent to which students perceived themselves to be part of a community and how they perceived their tutorial experiences to be influenced by relationships with others. I adapted the poem technique used by Jankowska (2014), who analysed students’ experiences of personal development planning in higher education, by placing personal views (I statements) on the left of the page, collective opinions (you statements) in the middle and references to tutors (they statements) on the right for comparison. Using this method, the different degrees of indent help the listener to separate the different voices within the narrative. I adapted the method by including ‘we’ statements, which gave an indication of where students had felt part of the group and broadened out the inclusion of those participants referred to as ‘they’ to
include not only the tutors and peers participating in the tutorial but also family members, friends, or colleagues. An example of a section of the contrapuntal voices within Joanne’s narrative is shown in Figure 8. A longer example is shown in appendix 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>An example of a section of the contrapuntal voices within Joanne’s narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think most of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they’re just trying to keep on top of any questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the first tutor is doing the presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you’re face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you might wait until the end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people generally just ask their question as and when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they think of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that’s why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you then have that second tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you’re the other tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you probably can lose quite a few of the questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do find where, if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you’re paying attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you can miss those</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you’re in a face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you might say</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m gonna go through this and then ask me questions at the end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we still have that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They’ll still be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you got any more questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it could be a bit more structured</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: An example of a section of the contrapuntal voices within Joanne’s narrative.

This worked well in the analysis of most narratives. The contrapuntal poems could be compared with the information in the learning network tables, both sources giving me insight into the students’ perceptions of the relationships that influence their tutorial experiences, both within the tutorial and without. These relationships included those with families, friends, colleagues, other students, and tutors, as well as relationships with the university more generally.

The process provided different perspectives concerning students’ perceptions of other students. In Korina’s interview, for example, ‘we’ is used frequently and consistently in some parts of the interview, suggesting that Korina does identify as part of a group when in tutorials (Korina, interview, 22/11/19). In contrast, Amie’s main use of ‘we’ is in relation to the WhatsApp group she belongs to. She also uses ‘our students’ when talking about the group, suggesting a strong sense of belonging to it. When talking about other students within the context of the tutorial, however, she uses ‘they’, for example: ‘the students are doing their studying at home, they are communicating with their teachers’ (Amie, interview, 18/1/20).
suggests that Amie experiences a sense of community within the WhatsApp group, rather than within tutorials.

Listening to the contrapuntal voices highlighted how participants frequently changed from ‘I’ to ‘you’ when talking about themselves. This change in grammatical structure can reduce emphasis on personal agency and act as a distancing device (Capps and Bonanno, 2000). Participants used it to signal when they felt that the issues they raised were common to other students, not just themselves, and should be addressed for everyone’s benefit. This is evident when Tilly explains in her interview about her views on student numbers (Figure 9).

![Contrapuntal voices example]

I think the tutorials work better with a smaller number
you are all vying for attention
the tutor doesn’t get time to answer them all.
you can be lazy
you can wait for someone else to ask/answer the questions!

**Figure 9: Use of ‘you’ within Tilly’s narrative**

Examining these contrapuntal voices seemed initially less useful in my analysis of Deborah’s narrative. When I started this listening, I realised that key parts of the narrative were misrepresented by the process of isolating the ‘I’, ‘we’, ‘you’, and ‘they’ statements. For example, ‘It was assumed that we had all watched the video’ became ‘We had all watched the video’ (Deborah, interview, 09/03/20).

Much of the first part of Deborah’s interview was phrased in the passive voice and identifying this was informative in itself. It further evidenced the impression gained from the first listening that Deborah felt differently and negatively about the first tutorial she described compared with the second. Passive voice can indicate that a narrator experienced a lack of agency, as can ‘verbs of necessity’, such as ‘had to’ (Capps and Bonanno, 2000). There are examples of this within Deborah’s narrative, such as ‘we had to put...’ Her use of the passive voice also reduces emphasis on others in the account to avoid attributing blame, which might make the listener less sympathetic to the narrator (Bamberg, 1997). In this narrative, Deborah avoided attributing blame to the tutors leading the sessions. In this way, listening to the contrapuntal voices helped me to hear subtleties of language used within the accounts.

Deborah’s narrative is also an example of where other voices could be heard within the data, which spoke about the realities of the lives of female students as
they sought to balance study with care of their families and work. She talks about support from her partner, sharing parenting responsibilities, returning to work, and making the most of the time with her eldest son:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deborah - contrapuntal voices of studying, working, and caring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My partner that I live with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’s planning on doing...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’s planning on starting a course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he’s very interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He obviously knows,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he’ll take the children away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’ll take them out of the house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He takes on the parenting duties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m doing my assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he’s interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he’s going to be facing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he starts the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t have enough free time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I only get my oldest son for half the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He’s at his dad’s the other half</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try and avoid any tutorials that are based on my half of the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t want to take any time away from him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I go back to work,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my partner is going to be the one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wouldn’t think it would be very fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d like to do my share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can fit round my home life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try and make my studies fit my home life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m working hard to get this qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I failed my module last year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m going to have to re-sit next year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve finished doing this part</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 10: Deborah – contrapuntal voices of studying, working, and caring*

Examining the contrapuntal voices showed how family, friends, and colleagues played key roles in mediating the relationship between the participants and their studies, both positively and negatively. Family members were sometimes physically present during tutorials. Tilly, for example, often joined sessions from her kitchen diner, with her family getting dinner and eating around her and once, she joined via a mobile whilst collecting her daughter from a club. Seven of the students were working in caring roles with children and young people. Examining the contrapuntal voices in Lisa’s narrative highlighted the importance of her supportive relationship with her colleagues and her manager, who checks her assignments, as well as how her studies link with her family life as an expectant
auntie. In contrast, Korina’s narrative explored the disconnect she experiences between her studies and her work; her colleagues know she is a student, but she does not have opportunities to share her learning. In these ways, examining the contrapuntal voices highlighted aspects of the narratives that may not have been attended to otherwise.

3.11.5 Listening for evidence of the different types of presence

My final listening involved identifying evidence of the different types of presence within the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework. I used my descriptions of what these presences might look like within online HSC tutorials that I developed from the Community of Inquiry Survey Instrument (Athabasca University, no date) (Table 2 and Figure 11), adding a deductive layer to the analysis.
Figure 11: What the different types of presence from the CoI framework might look like in an online HSC tutorial

Social presence
Students build relationships, feel comfortable interacting and feel that their point of view is recognised. They share a sense of identity as health and social care students.

Teaching presence
The tutor(s) design tutorial activities that enable dialogue and help students learn. The tutor supports students to sustain focus on the activities, gives direction and provides feedback to clarify understanding. Where there are two tutors, they work well together.

Cognitive presence
Students feel interested and motivated by tutorial activities and find discussions helpful in appreciating different perspectives, constructing explanations and understanding concepts. They make connections between theory and practice.

Learning presence
Students show self and co-regulation that involves planning, monitoring or use of strategy triggered by the tutorial activities.

Emotional presence
Students respond emotionally to ideas or activities and feel comfortable expressing these emotions.
The inclusion of this listening highlighted the extent to which my thinking had been influenced by the CoI framework. I coded the presences identified within the diary sheet and interview transcript, using a different colour for each type:

- social presence orange
- cognitive presence blue
- teaching presence purple
- emotional presence red
- learning presence green.

In some narratives, the different types of presence occurred together, particularly when students described an interactive activity, such as Vicky’s explanation of how the tutors showed a video and invited the students to discuss questions about it:

But doing that and listening to how the tutors and how the students in the chat box were tackling it, it did throw up some ideas that I hadn’t thought of, which made me think about it in a slightly different way (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20).

A longer example of listening for the different types of presence in Deborah’s narrative is shown in appendix 9.

Finding evidence of the different types of presence confirmed that synchronous online tutorials in my context could be considered as communities of inquiry. Variation in the numbers of instances of the different types of presence between narratives, as well as variation in the extent to which the types of presence overlapped, provided a further lens through which to view the narratives and compare with the findings of the other listenings.

For each of the 22 tutorials attended by the students, I created a diagram to analyse the evidence of the different types of presence suggested by each narrative. An example is shown in Figure 12.
Figure 12: The different types of presence identified in Vicky’s narrative of tutorial 3
These diagrams helped me to examine the relationships between the different types of presence suggested by each narrative, teaching presence, social presence and cognitive presence coming together to influence each student’s experience as a whole. In Vicky’s narrative of tutorial 3 (Figure 12), some teaching presence is apparent in that the tutors supported the students to focus on the session and designed two activities to enable dialogue and help students learn: a video-based activity and a referencing activity. Social presence, which I defined as the extent to which students felt comfortable interacting, were able to build relationships and felt that their point of view was recognised, played a role in Vicky’s experience. Students shared how they were tackling their assignment via the chat box, but social presence was limited in that one tutor was talking during this written conversation, so it was hard for Vicky to focus. Cognitive presence or in other words, the extent to which Vicky was able to construct meaning, also played a role. She ‘switched off’ for the part of the tutorial that covered referencing, a skill in which she already felt competent, but the combination of the other activity and discussion made her appreciate different perspectives and make links between theory and practice.

Learning presence, which is explained as that which

‘...reflects the proactive stance adopted by students who marshal thoughts, emotions, motivations, behaviours and strategies in the service of successful online learning’ and ‘indicates the exercise of agency and control rather than compliance and passivity’ (Shea et al., 2012, p. 90)

is not part of the original CoI framework and has been dismissed by Garrison who claims that separation between teaching and learning is artificial and incongruent with the collaborative constructivist principles of the framework (Garrison, 2017). Despite this, I decided to look for evidence of learning presence separately to determine whether it was helpful to do so. I wondered if there might be some overlap between learning presence and cognitive presence, as both types of presence are concerned with what students do but thought it might be possible to distinguish between students’ behaviour in relation to constructing meaning (cognitive presence) and their behaviour in terms of how they exercised agency in relation to their learning (learning presence). I looked for evidence of learning presence by recording instances of self or co-regulation, where students’ narratives mentioned planning, monitoring or use of strategies that were triggered by the tutorial activities. Instances of learning presence identified in Vicky’s
narrative (Figure 12) included using ideas offered by other students in the tutorial for her assignment and contacting her tutor to ask if tutorials could include more examples. Searching for learning presence separately did prove helpful. The instances of learning presence identified often also appeared within the action I poems created in the second stage of the analysis, which involved listening for the ‘self’ and highlighted what students had done differently, if anything, as a result of their participation in the tutorial. As such, instances of learning presence could be seen as an outcome of tutorial attendance, and I chose to include it in an ‘outcomes’ column on the diagrams that I created.

Similarly, although emotional presence, which is defined as

the outward expression of emotion, affect, and feeling by individuals and among individuals in a CoI, as they relate to and interact with the learning technology, course content, students, and the instructor (Cleveland-Innes and Campbell, 2012, p. 283)

is not part of the original CoI framework and has also been rejected by Garrison who claims that there is insufficient evidence to warrant its inclusion separate from social presence (Garrison, 2017), I decided to look for evidence of this presence. I did this to determine whether it was helpful to look for this type of presence separately. There was a sense in which instances of emotional presence seemed one step removed from the tutorial itself. Whilst my description of what emotional presence might look like in a HSC tutorial involved students responding emotionally to ideas or activities and feeling comfortable expressing the emotions within the tutorials, the emotions that I identified within the narratives were often those expressed outside or after the tutorials, when completing the diary and interview, rather than in the tutorial itself. As such, these instances did not meet Cleveland-Innes and Campbell’s definition of emotional presence as ‘outward expression’ (Cleveland-Innes and Campbell, 2012); the emotions would not have been expressed had the students not taken part in the research. Their expression within this context, however, could be understood as representative of another outcome of the tutorials in terms of how the students felt about their experience and so I recorded them in the outcomes column of the diagrams. Examples of emotional presence identified in Vicky’s narrative (Figure 12) included feeling ‘fine’ but also ‘not overly comfortable.’ Just as instances of learning presence identified often also appeared within the action I poems, instances of emotional presence also sometimes correlated with the feelings I poems created in the second stage
of the analysis. In this way, the search for emotional presence proved helpful in contributing a more complete picture of each student’s tutorial experiences.

Overall, the addition of this extra listening through a more deductive lens and the construction of diagrams to illustrate what I learned proved valuable. It allowed consideration of the relationship between different types of presence but also provided an additional source of information that could be compared with that gained from earlier stages of the analysis.

3.11.6 Composing an analysis of what I learnt

None of the listenings stand alone; only together can they represent someone’s experience (Gilligan et al., 2003). After completing all the listenings, I composed an analysis of what I had learnt for each individual narrative, drawing on the notes that I made when completing each step, comparing my learning for the different listenings, and bringing the separate voices back into relationship with each other. For each participant, I reflected on how I came to know what I had learnt, including the extent to which the method of interview had enabled them to share their own story.

Whilst considering what I had learnt, I related my learning to my first two research questions:

1. How do the narratives of students’ experiences of synchronous online tutorials in a health and social care module vary and what factors account for this variation?
2. What can we learn about the needs which drive the preferences students express around synchronous online tuition in health and social care?

For each participant, I expanded my diagrams of the different types of presence experienced in different tutorials to show the factors I had identified that may have influenced their tutorial experiences. The two parts of Amie’s expanded diagram are shown in Figure 13 and Figure 14. I included the information about the students’ individual characteristics that I had received in the initial data sample and augmented this with information the student shared via their learning network table, diary, and interview. I also included what an ideal tutorial might look like from each student’s perspective, based on the information I had learned from each student. I added information to each diagram to make visible the presence or absence of people, such as family members, in each student’s physical, off-line
environment, as my experience of listening for contrapuntal voices indicated that their presence or absence could impact on students’ tutorial experiences. For example, in Amie’s experience of tutorial 3 (Figure 13), the presence of her children watching television nearby could have affected her participation in the session at any point. I placed the three I poems generated in the second stage of the analysis underneath to show the different aspects of identity, actions, and feelings that my analysis had uncovered (Figure 14).
Figure 13: Amie’s experiences of synchronous online tuition
Figure 14: Amie’s I poems

Identity
I mean, last year was my first year
I am more comfortable when I am writing
I’m from [country]
I think learning a new language is really hard
I do understand most of it, 90% of it
I’ve got four children
I wanted to improve my numbers
I mean
I wanted to do better
I mean
I had a busy ... last year
I was doing another course at the same time
I could not
I couldn’t pay much attention to my modules.
I am relatively free
I thought of attending as many tutorials as
I can
I have not met with anyone in my WhatsApp or Facebook
group in person
I have done my studying in [country]
I needed help
I had no idea what essay writing was all about
I needed that help because of my background
I had never come across academic writing
I needed more help from the start.
I mean, now
I’m okay
I’m getting good scores
I mean obviously at the start it was a whole new method
I mean obviously
I had to glean information
I do struggle with critical writing

Actions
I joined in on time
I could write on group chat
I should attempt my assignment
I was trying hard to capture
I haven’t attended too many tutorials
I mean, last year was my first year
I attended one tutorial
I did not bother attending any more tutorials until this year
I attended
I attended
I attended
I attended
I did my assignment
I went to that tutorial two or three times.
I just wrote
I did not use the microphone
I just did not use the microphone
I am talking
I am listening to English
I am constantly translating it in my mind
I have to say them in [my first language]
I do have to tell them to just sit down and watch TV
I can interact with my tutors
I have got some good feedback
I was just wondering how to follow it
I definitely will, yeah...
I will definitely watch it

Feelings
I felt totally absorbed
I have felt
I mean these tutorials are really important
I was pretty much engaged
I was like enjoying
I was learning at the same time
I was excited
I was happy
I am more comfortable when I am writing
I feel motivated
I feel thankful
I have always wondered that teachers could
provide students with some good examples
I would try to allocate some time for students
and teachers to have a conversation
I do struggle with critical writing
The creation of these expanded diagrams made it possible to see more of the information gathered from the different sources and listenings simultaneously. This was valuable as it enabled me to make comparisons. It became apparent that there was overlap between the information available through the feelings I poems and the information available through the analysis of emotional presence. This can be seen in Amie’s expanded diagram (Figure 13 and Figure 14), where Amie’s experience of tutorial 3 was positive. Also apparent was the frequent overlap between the information available via the action I poems and the information available through identifying instances of cognitive presence and learning presence. Both show what Amie did during and after the tutorial and give similar pictures but different details.

Sometimes the information provided by the different sources and stages of the analysis was contradictory. For example, tutors and other students were completely absent from some learning network tables (appendix 10) but the existence and importance of these connections was apparent via the different listenings to the narratives, particularly for Sophia, Korina and Tilly. I concluded that these participants had not considered tutorials when completing their learning network table and thinking whom they talk with about their studies. The learning network tables were a useful tool, however, as they provided the stimulus for students’ inclusion of details about their individual situations at home and at work that impacted on their learning and their tutorial experiences.

### 3.11.7 Categorising analysis strategy

Based on what I had learned from each narrative, I expanded my analysis to include a categorising analysis strategy that looks for similarity-based relationships (Maxwell and Miller, 2008). According to Sorsoli and Tolman (2008), conceptually clustered matrices are the tool most often used for this purpose within VCRM. These order the display according to variables that reflect the research questions, so that the findings across all cases can be presented and meaning can be generated more easily (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I created a matrix with a row for each research participant and three columns that contained information to help me address my first two research questions: one identifying the individual factors affecting their tutorial experiences, another summarising their experiences of different tutorials, and a final column comprising the elements in each participant’s
ideal tutorial (appendix 11). Only at this point did I start to consider the issues raised across the narratives in relation to the research questions.

3.12 The tutor data

3.12.1 Introduction

The vignettes of the students’ narratives were shared with two groups of tutors: those tutoring the module studied by the students using the module tutor forum (MTF) and a broader group using the university-wide tutor common room forum (CRF).

Initially, I planned to share the vignettes of the students’ narratives with colleagues supporting students on the module to meet the obligations of relational ethics. These tutors had played a key role through providing the tutorial experiences that were the focus of my research and they had expressed an interest in the data. It had always been my intention to stay in close contact with these significant stakeholders and keep them informed about the study. I wanted colleagues to hear about students’ experiences and consider whether they might make changes to their practice to enhance students’ experiences going forward. I had originally anticipated arranging an opportunity for some online meetings to share my findings and discuss the implications but decided not to wait until the gathering of data was complete to begin this conversation, instead sharing each vignette on the MTF as it was prepared. This allowed tutors to focus on one or at most two narratives at a time. I encouraged tutors to think about each narrative individually and holistically, rather than making comparisons. This was consistent with a narrative approach, each narrative being considered one at a time, rather than hastily looking for themes (Riessman, 2008).

Discussions about the narratives in the MTF proved insightful. There was much to learn from them that was relevant to educators in other disciplines, and I decided to widen the conversation by sharing the vignettes with a broader group of tutors in the CRF.

During the forum discussions, it became apparent that the tutors’ forum posts could be seen as data in themselves. Tutors shared insightful stories of their own experiences, both as tutors and in other roles. This section will describe how ethical approval to use them as data was obtained. It will then explain how the
contributions were used in the analysis of the student narratives and how they generated a new, third research question to explore:

- How does hearing about students’ experience of synchronous online tuition impact on tutors’ reports of their thinking and practice?

3.12.2 Ethical considerations
Prescott et al. (2018) describe two types of data gathering via forums. In the first, the forum is created for research purposes and participants consent before posting. In the second, the data pre-exists and is ‘mined’ by the researcher. The forums used in my study fell into neither category. They were pre-existing forum communities, but I initiated the forum threads to share my research with colleagues, rather than for the purpose of gathering data. The potential for tutors’ contributions to augment the analysis of the primary data and generate findings of relevance to colleagues and other educators only emerged as the discussions evolved.

In discussion with HREC, I considered the most appropriate way of requesting permission to use this data. The university computing guidelines state that forum contributions are the intellectual property of the author and must be properly acknowledged when quoted but study participants also have rights to privacy and confidentiality (BERA, 2018). It was important to respect these rights. When tutors contributed, they were not expecting that their posts would persist or be used for research. I designed a tutor information sheet (appendix 12) and consent form (appendix 13) that reflected HREC guidance and offered tutors the opportunity to participate anonymously as the default position, but also acknowledged their right to be identified in publications if they specifically and willingly waived their rights to privacy and confidentiality.

Invitations to participate in the study were sent out after the forum posts had been made, followed by one reminder. Nine tutors did not respond. There may have been several reasons for this. Many tutors had an unusually high marking workload, cut-off dates having been adjusted for the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. I also knew from other forum threads that two of those approached took voluntary severance from employment around this time. Only one tutor declined permission, explaining that they had not posted their contribution with research in mind, but others who did not respond may have felt similarly.
All those participating chose to do so anonymously. Most chose their own pseudonyms with three exceptions who asked me to choose for them. As with the student participants, inviting tutors to choose their own pseudonym felt like a respectful step. Some commented that they were pleased to be asked.

### 3.12.3 Forum contributions

The tutor data was gathered in two stages. I invited the module tutors to comment on the vignettes of students’ narratives as they were prepared, sharing them gradually via the MTF between February and April 2020. The subsequent discussion continued until 2\(^{nd}\) June 2020.

On 7\(^{th}\) May 2020, when all 10 vignettes were available, I shared the link to the vignettes on my website (Chandler, 2021) in the CRF. The subsequent discussion continued until 3rd July 2020.

Those who contributed were self-selecting, so are not representative of these groups as a whole. The numbers of tutors (other than myself) involved are shown in Table 8. Whilst module tutors could have taken part in both conversations, I was the only one who did so, although there may be others who read both threads. I know most of the tutors in the MTF well but not most of the tutors in the much larger community of the CRF.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8: Numbers of tutors involved in the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of tutors with access to the forum</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of tutors who made contributions to the thread</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of readers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of tutors who responded to invitation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of tutors who gave consent</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number who gave additional information</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.12.4 Responses to the students’ narratives

Some responses were quite general, saying how insightful the tutors found the narratives. Other responses were more specific to particular narratives, such as this tutor’s response to Amie’s story:

I really like Amie’s vignette and it chimes with my experience. I have long ago moved away on a number of modules from a boring PowerPoint. I use the PowerPoint very much in a barebones way and tend to operate on the fly much more (Sean, post 8, MTF, 20/02/20).

The vignettes also prompted tutors to share their own narratives. Sean went on to describe a tutorial activity he had recently designed for a psychology module in which the students built their own case study. This then generated responses from others. Tutors shared their own narratives around best practice in online tuition, both from the tutor perspective but also in relation to their own studies. In this way, with multiple narratives being shared within these communities, readers understood the students’ narratives not only in the context of their own experiences but in the context of others’ experiences too.

The forums provided spaces for conversations about online tutorials within established tutor communities. Applying Wenger’s definition of a community of practice:

groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, 1998, p. 4)

these groups could be described as communities of practice. The conversations had been initiated by the narratives, and they were conversations that I was part of, but not ones that I had any control over; they took on a life of their own.

Each person who participates in the sharing of a narrative has their own agency, expanding or reducing the story as they play their role of attending, telling, transcribing, analysing, or reading. As a result, all narratives are in constant motion. I recognised that the final level of representation within the narrative research process as described by Riessman (2008), the reading experience, was partially realised at an early stage, before the analysis of the student narratives was completed. Adapting Riessman’s model of the levels of representation in the research process, I added arrows to indicate how the readers contributed to the analysis by responding to what they had read (Figure 15). I added an additional
stage (6) to show how engaging with the narratives prompted readers to attend to their own experiences.

Five tutors offered additional information either by phone or email. When they did so, I obtained additional written consent via email for their contributions to be used for the study. These additional contributions were particularly insightful, as some tutors seemed to speak more freely on a one-to-one basis than in the forums. The two phone conversations were not recorded but I made extensive contemporaneous notes, which were subsequently emailed to the tutors for them to check. Both responded by making additions and amendments.

A summary of data contributed by module tutors is shown in Table 9. A summary of data contributed by tutors in the common room is shown in Table 10. In total the tutors contributed 70 posts, two images, two telephone interviews and five emails.
## Table 9: A summary of the data contributed by tutors in the module tutor forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor</th>
<th>Number of posts</th>
<th>Student narratives commented on</th>
<th>Issues covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Using marking experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutorial purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jess</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Tutor anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Missing face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciating positive feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enquiry/problem-based learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Amie</td>
<td>Moving away from PowerPoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Microphone use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Webcam use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Giving examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoying face-to-face tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of coronavirus lockdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>3 plus 4 emails</td>
<td>Joanne Sophia Korina</td>
<td>Microphone use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement dashboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing on slides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutorials with different tutors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing tutorial slides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Building relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hearing other students' views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contacting tutor afterwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of coronavirus lockdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15 posts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 emails</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10: A summary of the data contributed by tutors in the common room forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor</th>
<th>Number of posts</th>
<th>Student narratives commented on</th>
<th>Issues covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>That all the students are female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The nature of tutorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students want to watch others interact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time lapse affecting webcam image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>Importance of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Microphone use not important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>4 plus phone</td>
<td>Amie, Melissa, Tilly, Karen,</td>
<td>Importance of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conversation</td>
<td>Vicky, Lisa, Joanne</td>
<td>Webcam use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Timing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What recordings do not capture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use of headsets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Early arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preference for own tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student age affecting participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>1 plus email</td>
<td>Amie</td>
<td>Dependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinead</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tilly</td>
<td>Importance of interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other students could learn from the vignettes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiona</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Amie</td>
<td>Co-presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activity and interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students want to watch others interact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How sessions are named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Webcam use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ishmael</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Webcam use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Microphone use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutor training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of coronavirus lockdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Own research into online participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>1 plus phone</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Activity and interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td>PowerPoints and recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Microphone use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Webcam use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developing pedagogy to reflect the technology available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutor skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Co-presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clustered tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hudson</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Webcam use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francesca</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Webcam use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>7 plus image</td>
<td></td>
<td>Webcam use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.12.5 Voice Centred Relational Method

As with the student narrative analysis, my analysis of the tutor narratives used an adapted version of Voice Centred Relational Method (VCRM) (Gilligan et al., 2003). My steps were listening for the broad story; listening for the ‘self’; and listening for contrapuntal voices through the use of ‘I’, ‘we’, ‘you’ and ‘they’. I added a fourth listening, but rather than listening for the types of presence from the Community of Inquiry framework as I did for the student narratives, I realised that I could use this listening to address a third research question.

- How does hearing about students’ experience of synchronous online tuition impact on tutors’ reports of their thinking and practice?

I listened for evidence that tutors considered changing their practice as a result of their discussions. I then composed an analysis of what I had learned.

I was conscious of differences between the student data and the tutor data. Whilst all the student participants were female, eight of the 28 tutors who consented to take part in the study were male. This might raise questions about whether VCRM was a suitable method to use when analysing the tutors’ narratives, but although this method arose from feminist methodology and is designed to foreground the different voices of girls or women, it has also been used to analyse the voices evident in groups of all male participants (O’Keeffe, 2016) and in a study that involved both men and women (Lloyd et al., 2016). I found that the method continued to be valuable for listening to the different voices of all genders in the tutor narratives, just as it had been for the student narratives.
A further difference between the student and the tutor data was that whilst the student data was relatively homogenous in format, most participants having completed a diary and an interview, the tutor data was more diverse. The contributions were not made with research in mind. Colleagues had their own reasons for joining the conversation. Some tutors briefly commented on issues others raised whilst other contributions were longer and/or specific to individual student narratives and could be subjected to more detailed analysis.

For each tutor, I created a separate document and worked through as many of the steps of analysis as could be applied to their contributions. Occasionally and unusually, the voice of the I was absent (Donald, post 11, CFR, 09/05/20; Ellen, post 88, 03/07/20) or there were no contrapuntal voices (Ann, post 41, CRF, 01/06/20; Ann, post 42, CRF, 01/06/20; Ann, post 45, CRF, 16/06/20). When this happened, I asked myself whether these absences were significant or simply reflected the character of the author and the nature of the medium.

### 3.12.6 Analysis of the conversations

Whilst the student narratives were created in my conversations with individuals, the tutor narratives arose through multiway conversations. My primary interest was to analyse the narratives themselves, rather than the social networks that created them because I wanted to use the insights gained to help me analyse the students’ narratives. It was beneficial, however, to have an awareness of these networks and the relationships within them. I created diagrams to represent the order of posts (Figure 16 and Figure 17). Where tutors consented to take part in the study, their pseudonym is given, and the numbers show the order in which the posts were made. Lines show who replied to whom. An ethical dilemma was that it was only possible to create these diagrams by including the posts of those who had not consented to involvement in the study because their contributions were an integral part of the conversation. Whilst their posts are represented, the posts themselves and the roles that these tutors played in the conversations were not analysed.
Figure 16: Diagram to show the order of posts in the MTF
Figure 17: Diagram to represent the order of posts in the CRF
Larger versions of these diagrams helped me to analyse the discussions. Tutors did not always reply to the message raising the issue that they addressed, however. For example, Milly replied to Fiona but began her message with ‘Hi Kathy’ (Milly, post 32, CRF, 15/05/20). Some tutors posting in the CRF replied to their own messages (Fiona, post 19, CRF, 14/05/20; Ann, post 42, CRF, 01/06/20; Ann, post 46, CRF, 27/06/20; Hudson, post 56, CRF, 29/06/20) whilst addressing points made by others. In the MTF, I did this myself when sharing vignettes and commenting on other contributions simultaneously (Kathy, post 14, MTF, 16/03/20; Kathy, post 15, MTF, 22/03/20; Kathy, post 16, MTF, 15/04/20). It was therefore important to note what the posts’ contents indicated about the conversation.

I created social network diagrams of each forum conversation using SocNetV software (Kalamaras, 2015) and a degree prestige index (Figure 18 and Figure 19).

![Social network diagram of tutors’ posts in the MTF using degree prestige index](image)

*Figure 18: Social network diagram of tutors’ posts in the MTF using degree prestige index*

In directed graphs, this index shows each person’s prominence in terms of inbound attention (Yang, Keller and Zheng, 2017) or in this case, how many replies each contributor to the forum received. Arrows indicate the direction of
messages, and the numbers of messages exchanged are shown next to the arrows.

I was not surprised to see that I had played a central role in the MTF discussion (Figure 18). I had posted multiple messages to share the vignettes gradually and I would usually contribute frequently and comfortably to discussions in this forum. In the CRF (Figure 19), where I feel on the edge of the community, I had limited myself to thanking individuals for contributing, answering questions, and directing attention to narratives relevant to the topics raised, an exception being when I highlighted recent university advice about using webcams (Kathy, post 69, CRF, 30/06/20). I was surprised to see how much attention my posts had received.

The roles of others are also apparent. Figure 18 shows the key role played by Sean in the MTF discussion, whilst Figure 19 highlights the attention received by
Hudson in the CRF, as well as the comparatively significant attention received by Ishmael and Emma. The majority of tutors are positioned on the edge of the social network diagram and their posts received less attention. An awareness of this was relevant when considering how the discussions might have influenced tutors’ thinking and practice.

3.13 How the tutor data contributed to the analysis of the student narratives

When analysing the student narratives, I copied relevant tutor data into each student narrative document, including tutors’ responses to their vignettes, any subsequent discussion, and my own responses to both of these. This data influenced my analysis of the student narratives in the following ways.

3.13.1 Preparation of subsequent vignettes

Firstly, because the vignettes were shared with the module tutors as soon as they were ready, their responses influenced the preparation of subsequent vignettes. The need to think carefully about phrasing ideas with multiple possible interpretations was foregrounded when one tutor, Louise, misinterpreted Lisa’s comment, ‘I would like more tutorials to be honest’, thinking this meant that tutorials themselves lacked honesty (Louise, post 2, MTF, 07/02/20). Checking the recording, Lisa’s comment was just a figure of speech and she simply meant that she would like more tutorials. I shared this with Louise. Happily, she was not discouraged from making another contribution.

3.13.2 Checking the transcripts

Some tutor responses prompted me to go back to the interview transcripts to check issues that were raised. For example, Eva commented that she was not sure whether, after the tutorial, Korina was describing contacting her own tutor or the tutor who had facilitated her tutorial (Eva, module tutor, email 10/07/20). Whilst Eva thought it was probably Korina’s own tutor and the vignette had not captured the situation accurately, this was not the case.

3.13.3 Demonstrating the value in multiple listenings

Tutors only had access to vignettes, rather than full narratives. This was appropriate, as providing the tutors with more data to engage with would have been an unreasonable expectation in terms of tutors’ time. I noticed, however, that tutors’ thoughts after engaging with the vignettes were often similar to those I had
myself after the first listening for the broad story. Their responses shed light on how much my own understandings developed once I moved on to the subsequent steps of the analysis. Lisa’s narrative is a good example. Tutors noticed what Lisa valued: tips based on tutors’ marking experience and the emails sent by tutors before and after the tutorial (Louise, post 2, MTF, 07/02/20; Jess, post 3, MTF, 07/02/20; Theresa, post 37, CRF, 18/05/20). No one commented on Lisa being dyslexic and struggling with interaction in the online room. This struggle was more apparent once I had applied the next stage of the analysis, listening for the voice of the I. This has implications for sharing my research; it is important to share the findings of the different stages of the analysis, not just the vignettes on their own.

Tutors responded to the vignettes in different ways. Of the 28 tutors, 17 did not comment on specific narratives (see Table 9 and Table 10) but used the discussion to share stories about their own experiences in online tutorials, either as tutors or students. Of the 11 who commented on specific narratives, the majority picked up on just one aspect of one student’s experience that resonated with them. For example, responding to Tilly’s narrative, Sinead posted briefly about the importance of interaction:

Tilly’s narrative in particular read very clearly to me and her ‘ideal’ tutorial... ‘My ideal tutorial would include using the whiteboard, chat box, polls, slides and watching videos but having access to the chat box whilst the video plays so you can ask questions’...certainly is one where interaction is key! (Sinead, post 13, CRF, 11/05/20)

whilst Theresa commented on student numbers, giving a smaller number as ideal than the 15 suggested by Tilly:

Tilly: In my experience, 12 attendees for an online tutorial means that it’s possible to discuss things with the students more easily. Breakout rooms of 4 work out well usually (Theresa, post 37, CRF, 18/05/20).

The longer contributions also quickly moved on from a focus on the student narrative to sharing experiences as a tutor, as a student or both. An example is Eliza’s response to Deborah’s narrative (Eliza, post 4, CRF, 07/05/20). The contrapuntal listening, which involves examining how different voices relate to each other (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998; Woodcock, 2016), shows a brief focus on Deborah, referred to as ‘she’, and how Deborah could have gained as much from accessing the tutorial slides as attending the tutorial, before moving on to describe what tutors should do (Figure 20). ‘You’ is used here to emphasise that this applies to all tutors and ‘people’ to distinguish between herself and others without
similar skill. Eliza then shifts to a focus on the first-person perspective, sharing her own experience as a tutor and participant. As she does so, however, she makes links with issues that Deborah’s narrative raises, wishing more students would use the microphone and preferring to write in the chat box whilst others are speaking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eliza - contrapuntal voices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she could have just read the powerpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students recognise they got something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they couldn’t have got just from reading material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you use a powerpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you have to do something with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people who aren’t used to working in this way need to develop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t use the whiteboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use the chatbox instead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the tutorial needs to be very well organised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I used to wish more students used the mic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t worry about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can see that the freedom to type in the chatbox as you think of something is beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find myself wanting to type in the chatbox as I think of things</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identifying these tendencies for tutors to select particular aspects of the narratives over others and relate them to their own experience alerted me to the possibility that I might do the same when listening for the broad story, not giving the same attention to every aspect of each narrative. This foregrounded the need to analyse my own and other tutors’ responses to the student narratives in the first stage of the student data analysis but give equal priority to the subsequent steps of VCRM, hearing the individual and contrapuntal voices within their narratives, as well as looking for evidence of the different types of presence from the Community of Inquiry framework.

3.13.4 Exceptions

Exceptions among the tutors in terms of the tendency to select particular aspects of the narratives over others and relate them to their own experience were Eva and Ray. Whilst Eva’s posts in the MTF were not focused on particular narratives, but on microphone use (Eva, post 21, MTF, 27/04/20; Eva, post 23, MTF, 28/04/20), her email correspondence focused on Joanne’s narrative, and she subsequently offered to read any vignettes that no other tutors had mentioned (Sophia and Korina). For these narratives, she commented on every part of the vignette, providing a useful point of comparison with my own interpretations. It was
helpful to see that we understood them similarly, although I was conscious that of all the tutors in the CRF discussion, Eva’s areas of experience as an educator were most like my own. One of Ray’s contributions, on the other hand, challenged my thinking. He was one of four tutors to comment on Amie’s vignette, but the only one to do so in detail (Ray, email, 19/06/20). His interpretation: that Amie is too dependent on tutors and that her skills need to develop, came across strongly in my contrapuntal listening to his narrative (Figure 21).

Ray – contrapuntal voices

Amie is clear she wants interaction
she seems very passive and dependent.
She seems unwilling to actively pursue what
she wants
She is dependent on the tutor
Amie seems to be quick to write off what is being offered
She says her spoken English is improving
she says [something parallel] about critical writing.
She suggests what
she needs is information and examples.
She seems not to consider critical writing as a skill that must
be acquired by practice
the student feels the teaching is inadequate and
they have to “teach themselves”.
she only wants to type

I think Amie’s story illustrates the need for students to be more skilful in participating
I should say that
I shudder slightly every time
I write the word “teacher” and feel
I want to put every instance of it in inverted commas.

Figure 21: The contrapuntal voices within Ray’s narrative about Amie’s vignette

This interpretation contrasted with my own assessment: that Amie was describing a positive tutorial experience, which could have been enhanced by an understanding of her personal situation and previous experience of learning in a different cultural context, as well as more opportunities for dialogue with tutors.

Again, it is important to note that Ray only had access to the vignette, not the full narrative, but his response highlighted how individual students’ attitudes and behaviours might be perceived to influence their experiences, something that I might have otherwise neglected. I also reflected that a tutor might feel challenged by suggestions for improvement within students’ narratives, even if they relate to another tutor’s practice. Perhaps this is particularly the case if we recognise ourselves and our own practices within those narratives.
3.14 Issues identified from the tutor data

The tutor narratives foregrounded issues that were apparent from my own analysis of the students’ narratives in relation to my second research question about the needs that drive students’ preferences, including: communication in the online room and managing multiple simultaneous conversations when there were one or two tutors, being able to see the tutor, student numbers, and opportunities for activity and interaction.

The tutor narratives posed some novel interpretations too. When considering these, it was important to remember that the tutors will have been reading and re-constructing these narratives in the light of their experiences of learning and teaching, just as my own experiences will have influenced their co-construction. For the tutors in the CRF, they had experience of teaching in a broad range of contexts (in most cases, they did not say which subjects they tutor) and not just HSC. It was also important to remember that the tutors only had access to a portion of each student’s narrative in the form of a vignette, rather than the full data.

Whilst my own analysis of the students’ narratives led me to conclude that the students in the study preferred not to use the microphone but were still keen to take an active part in the tutorials and contribute their ideas in other ways, some of the tutors in the CRF came to different conclusions around this. Angela suggested that students liked the idea of interaction but did not want to interact themselves.

One thing I thought came out of the vignettes and is often said by the students I encounter is that they like the idea of interaction, but they really think it’s something others should be doing so they can just watch. (Angela, post 20, CRF, 14/05/20).

Fiona and Anne agreed with this (Fiona, post 21, CRF, 14/05/20; Anne, telephone conversation, 15/06/20), but Anne also felt that much could be done to make tutorials more active and interactive by offering ‘proper seminars’ to the students who are ‘keen to learn’ in small groups of five to 10 with webcams enabled and activities to complete beforehand.

It was surprising that only one tutor, Theresa, commented on the longing of some of the students to build closer relationships with their own tutor and other students. My analysis of her narrative, particularly when listening for the voice of the l...
(Figure 22), suggested that she regards building respectful relationships as a vital part of her practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theresa - I poem section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I'm a very friendly tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm not authoritarian at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I jolly people along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I put them in breakout rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do pop into the breakout rooms and sit there quietly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to treat them as colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tell them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm learning from you too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tell them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not the expert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer it that way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Theresa’s view, having tutorials with the same tutor and tutor group is important for building relationships and developing cohesion within the group. Interestingly, she said this in conversation with me (Theresa, telephone conversation, 12/06/20), rather than in her four CRF posts. Tutors might have felt uncomfortable commenting on this issue, particularly in the MTF, where readers always include colleagues who provide tuition for each other’s groups. Some may have been wary of criticising university policy. Instead, across both forums, six tutors took the opportunity to comment on their experience of working with colleagues and co-presenting tutorials, which was mostly positive. In her telephone conversation with me, however, Anne admitted that she has ‘mixed feelings about co-tutoring’, as whilst she has had some positive experiences, she is often paired with people who are not confident teaching online (Anne, telephone conversation, 15/06/20). In summary, however, this lack of comment on this aspect of the student data by tutors was a further aspect of the tutor data that made me question my analysis of the student data carefully.

3.15 Further contributions of the tutor data

As well as contributing to the analysis of the student narratives, the tutor data provided some evidence to suggest that engaging with vignettes of the students’ narratives prompted some tutors to reflect on their own practice and make some changes, particularly in the larger common room forum discussion and in the area of tutor webcam/picture use.
3.16 Credibility, dependability, and transferability

Within qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument, so, rather than the question of validity that is applied to positivist studies, the question is one of credibility and is concerned with my ability and effort as a researcher (Golafshani, 2003). Credibility can be enhanced by five processes (Twining et al., 2017). Table 11 shows how I have applied these processes within my study.

Table 11: Processes to enhance credibility (Twining et al., 2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Involves</th>
<th>How I have incorporated this into my study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigator triangulation</td>
<td>Having two or more researchers involved in data collection and/or analysis</td>
<td>Via supervision and involvement of tutors in interpreting the narratives collected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data triangulation</td>
<td>Using data gathered from different participants or different settings or at different times</td>
<td>Gathering data from different participants who attended different combinations of different tutorials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method triangulation</td>
<td>Using more than one method to collect the data</td>
<td>Using both diaries and interviews designed to collect data to address my research questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant checking</td>
<td>Involving participants in checking transcripts for accuracy and inviting their comments on findings of the study</td>
<td>Participants had the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview and, in the case of the students, the vignette of their own narrative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical triangulation</td>
<td>Using more than one theoretical perspective to interpret the data</td>
<td>I considered a range of theoretical frameworks and used an approach to analysis that sought out different voices within the data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whilst positivist research is also concerned with what is termed reliability or the extent to which results can be consistently achieved, this term cannot be applied to qualitative research. Within the narrative research process, there are five levels of representation or points at which meaning can shift: attending, telling, transcribing, analysing and reading (Riessman, 1993). As such, participants’ narratives, researchers’ interpretations, and readers’ understandings are all unique to them as individuals and to particular times and contexts, so my study could not be replicated, even with the same participants, researcher, and readers. As a qualitative researcher I was instead concerned with dependability, making robust records of the decisions taken around data collection and analysis processes and ensuring that my methods of analysis were consistent with the accepted standards for the approach used (Korstjens and Moser, 2018).

In a similar way, qualitative researchers cannot claim generalisability. Instead, we aim to achieve transferability, having a responsibility to share participants’ narratives in a way that makes the relevance of the stories obvious (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000) and enables readers to make judgements as to whether the study’s findings are transferable to their own contexts. The narratives may be useful to others, but it is the readers’ responsibility to decide this.

3.17 Chapter summary

This chapter has explained my ontology and epistemology and how these have influenced my choice of a narrative approach. It has shown how the learning from the initial study informed my data collection methods and processes and explained my choice of VCRM as a method for analysing the data. The chapter has explained how the tutors’ responses to the students’ narratives contributed to the analysis and how they came to be seen as data in themselves. Finally, the chapter has discussed the processes followed to enhance credibility, dependability, and transferability.
Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the findings from the individual narratives. When the Voice Centred Relational Method (VCRM) is used to analyse data, the intensive work involved in the different listenings to the narratives sensitises the researcher to the issues they raise, but there is still a conscious choice to be made about which issues to present over others (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998). My choices are framed by the research questions, which are:

1. How do the narratives of students’ experiences of synchronous online tutorials in a health and social care module vary and what factors account for this variation?
2. What can we learn about the needs which drive the preferences students express around synchronous online tuition in health and social care?
3. How does hearing about students’ experience of synchronous online tuition impact on tutors’ reports of their thinking and practice?

4.2 Variations in the narratives and the factors that account for this variation

My analysis has identified two ways in which students’ experiences vary. These relate to the two different environments within which students are situated during tutorials:

- the physical, off-screen, social and material environment of their home or wherever the student happens to be during the session
- the virtual online environment of the tutorial itself.

The variations that the students experienced in each of these environments, together with the factors that might account for this variation, will be examined in turn.

It is worth noting that whilst people can simultaneously be present in both a physical and online environment as when, for example, two members of the same household join the same tutorial, this was not the case for the students in this study, all of whom were the only body connecting their physical and virtual worlds.
4.2.1 The variation in students’ social and material environments

The narratives show how tutorial experiences are embedded in the social and cultural contexts of distance learning and students’ lives, with students fitting study around their work and caring responsibilities. Karen uses ‘you’ to show that she thinks this applies to students generally, and ‘you know’ to show that she thinks I will understand how this context works (Figure 23).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The use of ‘you’ within Karen’s narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>you know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you’re working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you’ve got a house to run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you need to be able to pick it up when</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you can</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 23: The use of ‘you’ within Karen’s narrative

Family members are sometimes physically present during tutorials, their presence invisible to the tutors and other students. Tilly’s diary shows that she usually joins tutorials from her kitchen diner, her family cooking and eating around her and once, she joined via a mobile whilst collecting her daughter from a club. Deborah’s baby is asleep next to her and her 6-year-old watching Netflix nearby for the first tutorial her diary describes. Being a single parent, Vicky ‘hopes and prays’ that her childcare arrangements can fit around her own tutor’s sessions (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20). Amie has no one to look after her children:

Having small children does make it hard. I do have to tell them to just sit down and watch TV for some time, but, you know, it’s not guaranteed that they will just sit down, not for an hour and a half, and one of my children has learning disabilities. He doesn’t take instructions very well (Amie, interview, 18/01/20).

Karen explains that she benefits from her son being nearly 16 and relatively independent. She can concentrate on tutorials with fewer interruptions than her peers, but also describes the stress of her husband’s recent severe illness (Karen, interview, 10/04/20). Her studies are ‘a bit of normality’ and ‘something to focus on for herself’, although she worries that this sounds selfish. Her husband is in her mind, despite him being in a different room during the tutorial.

So, during online tutorials, there is plenty of competition for students’ attention. Being online can mean that there are virtual distractions from outside of the tutorial too. Joanne shares,
Also, when I’m on the laptop, I’ll be thinking, ‘Oh, I wonder what happened with that in the news today’. I know towards the end that definitely happened. My mind wandered off a little bit (Joanne, interview, 17/03/20).

This means that cognitive presence, the ‘extent to which learners are able to construct meaning through sustained communication’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, p. 89) is affected not only by what is happening within the tutorial itself but what else is happening for the students and their families in their home environments and in their online environments.

There are other people who feature in students’ narratives who are not present during tutorials but who can be described as vicariously present in terms of how tutorial information is subsequently shared. For example, Lisa shares her learning with her pregnant sister and Sophia describes sharing what she learns with many family members:

I like to share what I’m learning as well, especially about the health and the learning and relationships… We learn really well when we teach (Sophia, interview, 23/01/20).

Karen uses her tutorial learning to inform her college teaching, both in terms of the module content because she teaches on similar topics, albeit at a simpler level, and in learning how to teach online during the coronavirus pandemic:

I’m at an advantage because I’m doing Open University. I can picture it laid out and I can imagine what a virtual classroom looks like but for some of my colleagues, it’s just been terrifying (Karen, interview, 10/04/20).

In these ways, the tutorials are influenced by the presence of other people but also have an influence on others far beyond those visibly present in the online room.

### 4.2.2 Variation within the tutorials

There was considerable variation in the tutorials that participants experienced, even when attending different versions of the same session. Tilly and Sophia, who attend multiple events, note this themselves. Tilly says,

The variation of tutorials is the reason why I attend two each time. I always take part in the tutorial by my tutor, so I know what they’re looking for in an assignment, but then I find another tutor who gives lots of advice and try to attend their tutorials too. Each tutorial experience is different, despite all having the same slides to work from (Tilly, email interview, 18/02/20).
There is a contradiction within Karen’s narrative around attending multiple sessions of the same tutorial. She explains that different sessions can be ‘much and such the same’, but also finds it worth looking at recordings of other sessions, although she does not do this as often as when she first started her studies, preferring to spend time on her assignments (Karen, interview, 10/04/20).

The characteristics of the tutor are highlighted by some students as key to a positive experience. Lisa comments,

I think it was the tutor. I think it was very much to do with them, linking it to their work, the assignments their students had done and saying like, ‘I noticed that a lot of you were doing such and such and here’s how to change that’ (Lisa, interview 06/12/19).

For the five co-tutored tutorials that Tilly describes in her diary, she makes a point of noting how each pair of tutors worked together and how this influenced her experiences. In most cases, this influence was positive. She felt as though the whole group was ‘working together’ (Tilly, email interview, 18/02/20). About her only negative experience she writes,

The main tutor talked over the co-tutor and dismissed her tip about writing introductions (Tilly, email interview, 18/02/20).

Deborah also mentions the importance of tutors working ‘as a team’ (Deborah, interview, 09/03/20).

There are elements of the narratives that portray the tutor-student relationship as embodying power and control. Tutors are often referred to only as ‘they’. Karen says, ‘what they wanted was it copied from the forum’ (Karen, interview, 10/04/20) and Deborah’s first reference to tutors is, ‘they brought in a whiteboard’ (Deborah, interview, 09/03/20). Both assume that I know who ‘they’ are. The language used also highlights tutors’ power. Vicky says the tutors are ‘leading’ and ‘in control’ (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20). She describes the tutors posing questions and providing the right answers. Karen comments that it is ‘controlled and organised to a certain extent’ (Karen, interview, 10/04/20). She is ‘always aware of the tutor’ because of her own lecturer role and does not blame the tutor when aspects of the tutorial do not go smoothly. Avoiding criticism is a feature of the narratives of Sophia and Korina. Korina’s narrative dances between saying what she prefers and saying that it is already there:
I would enjoy something more the picture side of it. Yeah, could be a bit more... I'm not saying they don't have it, but some more images may help cos me being visual... sort of thing and more practical. I'm quite happy, the way they are set out. I'm just only saying a bit more of the practical side of it, I mean the visual side of it. They already do it but yeah, besides that, I'm quite happy with all the tutorials what I've been through, personally, myself (Korina, interview, 22/11/19).

There is also a sense in which students’ tutorial experience is embedded within the social context of the university, which is perceived as more powerful than the tutors and acting to reduce variation in experience. Vicky mentions a ‘prescribed tutorial plan’ that set out what the tutor was ‘meant to be doing’, even though this particular tutor added in their ‘own things’. Vicky is the only student who mentions attempting to influence tutorials, asking for more concrete examples of how to structure assignments. The way that she relates this suggests she perceives tutors as having limited authority to determine tutorial content:

One thing we did speak about and I’m not… I don’t know if it’s done in the university as a whole. I know a tutor did say that she was going to ask… (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20).

Similarly, Tilly and Sophia think the slides are ‘set’ for each tutorial, whereas, for this module, they are not currently pre-determined but frequently shared between tutors. Sophia repeatedly uses the word ‘it’ for tutorial, almost as though the tutorial itself has words, rather than the people involved, and the tutorial is an entity over which people have little control.

Sophia also picks up on there being different styles of teaching. This brings me to consider the extent to which the different types of presence from the CoI framework are apparent, using my own descriptions of what the different types of presence might look like in an online tutorial (Table 2 and Figure 11).

In terms of teaching presence (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999), which is concerned with the tutor or tutors designing tutorial activities that enable dialogue and help students learn, there is considerable variation in the number of instances of teaching presence between the different narratives. Participants who describe their experience of more than one tutorial sometimes articulate a contrast in teaching presence between different sessions. (For a reminder of the different tutorials, see Table 1.) Within Lisa’s narrative, fewer instances of teaching presence are evident in the first tutorial she describes, which is tutorial 2 (Figure 24) than in the second, tutorial 3 (Figure 25). The first tutorial involved the tutors ‘talking to us’, whereas the second involved the group watching clips together and
then completing activities based on the clips. The tutors’ more frequent use of the whiteboard within this tutorial led to a stronger sense of social presence, where students could build relationships, felt comfortable interacting, and felt that their point of view was recognised. Lisa, who enjoys contributing her ideas but only uses the whiteboard and not the chat box because she has dyslexia and worries about her spelling, says that she ‘really got involved’ (Lisa, interview, 06/12/19). So, there is evidence of a relationship between teaching presence and social presence. This seems to play a key role in generating cognitive, emotional, and learning presence for Lisa too.
Figure 24: The different types of presence in Lisa’s narrative of tutorial 2

Social presence
Lisa loved the ‘anonymous add in’ via the whiteboard and contributed. The tutorial seemed overly long because ‘we were having lots of conversations’ and Lisa does not ‘get involved in the chatter very much.’

Teaching presence
There was more ‘talking to us’ with a focus on study skills. One tutor (Lisa’s own tutor) facilitated the first half and the other the second. The tutors asked students to watch particular videos before the session. Occasionally, the whiteboard was used for students to respond to tutors’ questions.

Cognitive presence
Lisa made a spider diagram but it was ‘quite factual’ and about study skills, which is information she felt she could have got herself online. The input on referencing was interesting. There was little opportunity to discuss the module topics. Lisa had already completed the assignment being discussed, which she felt might have reduced her interest in the session.

Learning presence
No instances found.

Emotional presence
Lisa enjoyed the tutorial but not as much as the next one she attended. She felt ‘better on the basics’, including referencing.
Figure 25: The different types of presence in Lisa’s narrative of tutorial 3

Social presence
Lisa “really got involved” with the interactive group activities, writing on the whiteboard. Lisa felt a connection with the tutor and felt that they gave her what she needed.

Teaching presence
One tutor facilitated the session whilst another monitored the chat box. The tutor used their experience of marking and asked a question to encourage critical thinking. Two videos were shown and both followed with interactive group activities. The tutor shared a link to the module referencing guide.

Cognitive presence
Lisa was able to make links between topics and found the group activities helpful in appreciating different perspectives and constructing explanations. She felt that she learned a lot.

Learning presence
Lisa appreciated how asking questions of herself could encourage critical thinking and identified that when watching module videos, she should make a table for herself that links the video example with her assignment question. Lisa saved the link to the module referencing guide and has used it subsequently.

Emotional presence
Lisa felt very confident and loved looking at videos together.
The negative tutorial experiences students reported are not devoid of teaching presence. Small group work was included in the tutorial that had disappointed Melissa during her study of a previous module (Melissa, interview, 10/04/20). Similarly, Deborah’s first tutorial, tutorial 2, left her feeling ‘a bit deflated’ and wishing she had requested the slides instead, but this session included whiteboard activities and small group work (Deborah, interview, 09/03/20). This suggests that tutors’ attempts at activity design and facilitation are sometimes insufficient. It may be that the tutors lacked skills in facilitation or that Deborah was prevented from participating fully, perhaps because of the distractions in her off-screen environment (see section 4.2.1).

It is not only teaching presence that seems to play a key role. There is a stark contrast between the two tutorials Deborah attended (Figure 26 and Figure 27). She found the second tutorial much more helpful, describing it as ‘one of the best ones.’ The key difference here is a focus on enabling social presence. Students learned about report writing from each other. Deborah describes how the group felt comfortable interacting and shared a sense of identity, not only as students, but as practitioners. As a result, there is evidence of cognitive presence: Deborah was motivated by the discussion and made connections between theory and practice. Not surprisingly, there is also evidence of learning presence, with Deborah using strategies triggered by the tutorial activities, including taking notes.
Figure 26: The different types of presence within Deborah’s narrative of tutorial 2

**Social presence**
Students typed on top of each other on the whiteboard. Deborah felt unable to build relationships as she has never seen the same person twice.

**Teaching presence**
One tutor was new and the other had not done a tutorial for months. They struggled with the technology. PowerPoints summarising topics were read. Tutors asked students to watch a video beforehand, which was discussed in small groups. The whiteboard was used for students to respond to questions.

**Cognitive presence**
It was a summarised version of what Deborah has been learning, which according to Deborah’s interview, added nothing new. On her diary sheet, she did say that she understood the topic better and how to set out her assignment.

**Learning presence**

**Emotional presence**
Deborah felt deflated and as though she would have got just as much from reading the PowerPoint slides.
Figure 27: The different types of presence within Deborah’s narrative of tutorial 3

**Social presence**
The chat box got full to capacity with students sharing hints and tips about writing reports. Deborah felt unable to build relationships as she has never seen the same person twice.

**Teaching presence**
Tutors summarised the recently studied topics but it was not just reading a PowerPoint. They encouraged students to share their experience using the chat box.

**Cognitive presence**
Students made a link between the reports they write in practice and their assignment task. Deborah found the discussion helpful and informative.

**Learning presence**
Deborah took notes on the session and got her best assignment mark ever, which she attributed to having attended the tutorial.

**Emotional presence**
The first part felt longer than necessary.
There are also examples of tutorials from both Sophia and Korina where plenty of instances of **social presence and cognitive presence are apparent, despite a limited number of instances of teaching presence**. Within Korina’s narrative (Figure 28), there are no examples of tutors designing activities. The role of the tutors as described is limited to a presentation, with a focus on how to approach the assignments, although they do encourage students to use the chat box. Despite this, there are many instances of social presence, with students sharing ideas and Korina strongly identifying as part of the group. There are also instances of cognitive presence in Korina’s account. She can understand the tutor’s explanations and appreciate the perspectives of other students. The session generates learning presence in terms of the strategies Korina identifies for improving her assignment and there are plenty of instances of positive emotional presence within Korina’s account, both because of having communicated with other students and being able to understand the tutor’s explanations.
Figure 28: The different types of presence within Korina’s narrative of tutorial 2

**Social presence**
One student used the mic but most, including Korina, shared ideas via the chat box. Korina felt comfortable doing this and clearly felt a sense of identity as part of a student group.

**Teaching presence**
Students were encouraged to share ideas but there was no use of interactive tools such as whiteboard or polls. There were no videos. The tutor explained things in a way that Korina could understand.

**Cognitive presence**
Korina found the tutorial helpful in understanding the assignment she had been working on and how to engage with assignments more generally. She was able to understand the tutor and found the discussions helpful in appreciating different perspectives.

**Learning presence**
Korina reviewed her assignment and made changes before submitting it, including changing her referencing. Korina emails the tutor if she needs further clarification using the address from which the slides are sent.

**Emotional presence**
Felt good, happy with tutorials and loved communicating with other students and finding out their thoughts.
4.3 The needs that drive the preferences students express

Based on what I learned from each narrative, I identified five areas in which students expressed clear preferences around synchronous online tuition:

- Communication in the online room
- Being active and hearing the perspectives of others
- Face-to-face contact
- Building relationships and community
- Numbers of students

Each of the preferences and the needs behind them will be examined in turn.

4.3.1 Communication in the online room

A feature of almost all the narratives is avoiding using the microphone. A variety of reasons are given. English is Amie’s second language, and she feels more confident writing than speaking. Joanne says that there is a slight delay on the microphone, and she cannot see who is talking. Not being able to see people is also an issue for Vicky who says,

I think people are a lot more comfortable with [typing], rather than talking in front of load of people [laughter] without being in front of them (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20).

Vicky’s laughter suggests that even the thought of using a microphone is uncomfortable, although she did use it in tutorial 1 within her own tutor group when asked to talk about her job. She says that she would ‘normally’ type and that she was not comfortable answering questions in tutorial 3 because she was behind on her reading.

Deborah does not like the sound of her own voice but wants microphone use to be encouraged by tutors. She does not say why, but elsewhere in her narrative she explains that the written conversations in the chat box take longer than she would like. A contradiction is apparent within Korina’s narrative. She speaks about the influence of family members around her, but laughter and hesitation indicate some nervousness. Her diary records that she was on her own when she joined the tutorial, so perhaps her feelings about the microphone are more complex than she is able to share. Then, towards the end of the interview, she says,
I like to give my views verbally, like I’m speaking to you now. Don’t get me wrong, I can speak, I mean write my views down, like I was on the tutorial, but… um… I couldn’t… (Korina, interview, 22/11/19).

It may be that she would like to use the microphone in tutorials but does not have the confidence to do so at the moment.

Even Karen, a lecturer using online rooms herself in that role, also prefers typing when in the student role.

I tend to just type, and I think most folk do. I wouldn’t say I’m not confident using the microphone. Maybe I’m not confident. I don’t know why I don’t use the microphone. Some people do (Karen, interview 10/04/20).

Despite having reflected on other aspects of her university tutorials and using her experience of online learning to inform her own teaching, as explained in section 4.2.1, it seems that Karen had not previously given any thought to this difference in confidence around microphone use when moving between her roles.

One student, Lisa, has particular needs around communication in the online room because of dyslexia. Her worries about misspelling words prevent her from typing in the chat box, but she does engage anonymously by typing on the whiteboard.

As other students highlight, this tool has limitations. Deborah finds it ‘messy’ as ‘you can’t see where somebody’s typing until they’ve finished’ (Deborah, interview, 09/03/20). Sophia does not know how to use it. It is not currently available to those accessing the room via mobile phones and tablets. Had this tool not been an option, however, Lisa would not have contributed her ideas at all when her narrative suggests that this is helpful.

…we were able to add anonymously into the slide, to the table, and really get involved and to see how other people…their perspective of it which I found really helpful (Lisa, interview, 06/12/19).

Using polls would also enable Lisa to contribute anonymously but Lisa does not mention these being used in the sessions that she attended.

An affordance of the online environment is being able to have multiple simultaneous conversations, some people communicating via the microphone, whilst others type. Four students have preferences around this. Joanne talks extensively about preferring one conversation at a time. For the second tutorial she describes, there was just one tutor, so she found the session easier to follow (Joanne, interview, 17/03/20). Comparing the merits of having one tutor or two,
Karen initially says that it did not make much difference but then concludes that it was easier with one tutor because there was one conversation at a time (Karen, interview 10/04/20). Avoiding multiple conversations is also a preference for Vicky, who says,

> It can be quite tricky to follow what is going on in the tutorial when one tutor is talking and the other is writing because I'm focusing on the text box waiting for an answer (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20).

In contrast, Deborah prefers having multiple conversations, rather than having to wait for questions to be answered. As a tutor, I find this preference challenging, as it is contrary to my understanding of best practice.

### 4.3.2 Being active and hearing the perspectives of others

Some tutorials contain far more instances of teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence than others and have more positive outcomes in terms of learning presence and emotional presence. These tend to be the tutorials in which students are active, rather than passive, recipients. This is also reflected in students’ preferences.

When Joanne repeats the word ‘happy’, it is in relation to joining in and contributing, suggesting that this is important for her. At this point, there is an overlap of the different types of presence within her narrative, where emotional presence is coloured red, social presence orange and teaching presence purple.

> I'm always happy to... Again, it's through the chat box. But I'm always happy to join in and contribute in answer to the questions that are phrased to us. I do quite enjoy the tutorials [slight laughter] (Joanne, interview, 17/03/20).

Tilly much prefers being involved in the session, despite describing herself as shy and not very articulate. She writes,

> The previous tutorial felt like it was delivered to us whereas the second tutorial felt more like we were working together. I felt confident, encouraged, valued, and listened to (Tilly, email interview, 18/02/20).

Similarly, Lisa, who describes herself as a ‘silent student’ likes an active session.

> Having activities and being engaged..., that was where I enjoyed the second one a bit more, whereas the first one was a lot of sort of talking to us if you know what I mean? (Lisa, interview, 06/12/19)
Deborah’s feelings I poem (Figure 29) emphasises how much Deborah values activity, repeating that she wants tutorials to be more than a summary of the material studied.

Deborah - Feelings

I do find that they’re just revised versions
I do find it can be very fragmented
I always try to do the face-to-face
I felt it was just a summarised version of the topics
I didn’t feel
I got much out of it
I was a bit deflated
I felt as if
I got a bit more out of that one
I appreciated the time being taken
I don’t like the sound of my own voice.
I wouldn’t be comfortable
I actually preferred the first one
I found that better
I wouldn’t have it as just a summary
I would want it to have more advanced information
I think the whiteboard is a good idea
I would try and encourage microphone use
I like the tagteam system
I find if they can work as a team
I’d like to do my share
I could have done with more face-to-face
I don’t think it’s good if any of the modules don’t have the opportunity for face-to-face.
I think there needs to be an element of face-to-face in all Open University courses.
I struggled with not having face-to-face.
I think you need an element of speaking to somebody

Figure 29: Deborah – feelings I poem

In different ways, all the students express a preference for hearing the perspectives of other students. Amie says,

This tutorial was better because instead of just talking themselves, the tutors encouraged the students who were attending the tutorial to participate, to present their ideas briefly. In that way, students were getting to say what they wanted to say, and a lot of ideas were being written on that whiteboard (Amie, interview, 18/01/20).

Describing her ideal tutorial, Korina would like tutorials to be less academic, more practice-focused, and more interactive. This comes through clearly in her feelings I poem (Figure 30), where the word ‘practical’ is repeated three times.
For Deborah, the importance of hearing other students’ perspectives is captured in the change of pace and more animated tone as she describes the second tutorial she attended, which she found so useful because students had shared their tips about writing reports. The relevant section of her action I poem shows how engaged she was (Figure 31).

4.3.3 Building relationships and community

For some of the students, the opportunity to build a relationship with their own tutor is an important aspect of tutorials because they know that their own tutor will be marking their work. Joanne wants to know what her tutor will be looking for when marking (Joanne, interview, 17/3/20) and this is also important for Vicky
(Vicky, interview, 06/02/20) whose identity I poem highlights her thinking that high scores are necessary to achieve her career goals (Figure 32).

Vicky – Identity I poem section

I'm going into education.
I think I've done all right
I passed with 85% plus
I've got 82 and 73 on this one
I would mark it
I'm again quite lucky.
I'm a single mum,
I work full-time in a school,
I'm doing this part time
I've got more options going into my teacher training year.
I don't think a PGCE is viable for me
I'm currently working
I think to get a first now
I need like an 85, 85 and a 90 or something ridiculous [laughter].
I would always choose tutorials with my tutor
I wouldn't choose to do one with any of the other tutors.
I work in a school.
I work in a primary school.
I'm a one-to-one TA

Figure 32: Vicky – identity I poem section

Whilst getting tutors’ help with forthcoming assignments is also a prime motivation for attending tutorials for Deborah, Amie and Korina, they are not similarly concerned about having tutorials with their own tutor. Unlike some students, Korina is confident about contacting her own tutor outside of tutorials and according to her learning network table, does this frequently (appendix 10). She also emails the tutorial tutor for additional help (Korina, interview, 22/11/19). Amie says,

I wouldn’t really say that it does make a difference whether it’s your own tutor or some other tutor. It depends on the tutor. If they are good, they are good (Amie, interview, 18/01/20).

Tilly likes having the opportunity to attend tutorials both with her own tutor and with others. She wants to know what her tutor is looking for in her assignment, but her narrative suggests that she is also seeking attention and encouragement. She gets on well with her own tutor, but also has another ‘favourite tutor’, and attends multiple sessions on the same topics with both.
Clustered tuition appears to suit Sophia in some ways. She also likes to attend multiple sessions on the same topics and feels that the only difference between tutors is that they have different teaching styles. On the other hand, looking at her identity I poem (Figure 33) and feelings I poem section (Figure 34), there is a longing to connect, talk and share, despite feeling shy, and I wonder whether attending more sessions with the same group might enable Sophia to do this. Sophia works alone as a childminder and attends multiple tutorials to feel like she ‘has colleagues’ (Sophia, interview 23/11/20).

Sophia - Identity

I am doing two modules for the first time
I seem to be having some difficulty in processing the information,
I have to read everything over and over.
I have had to ask for an extension
I am still working on it.
I’m very careful
I’m taking notes.
I have to identify what’s in my notes
I don’t copy it word for word, you know?
I work alone.
I do childminding
I work alone
I’m feeling a bit shy to say things
I’m feeling a bit shy
I don’t always contribute
I’m still a bit...
I’m coming in right at the end
I’m still having trouble with the TMA planning.
I’m going back to listen to it.
I’m learning as well.
I’ve been studying about health
I don’t have anyone’s phone number
I would like to talk to them on the forum
I think on the module wide forum people are chatting
I haven’t really,
I haven’t
I think on the module wide forum, people are getting together and chatting
I’m thinking about the social study aspect of it.
I’m already interested in a lot of the things
I learnt a lot of new things
I already knew about breastfeeding
I didn’t know about the HENRY programme,
I’m having difficulty writing the TMA
I haven’t pinned down what I want to say

Figure 33: Sophia – identity I poem
Lisa identifies as ‘a silent student’. Her narrative, particularly when viewed through the lens of her identity I poem (Figure 35), is one of struggle, not least because of her dyslexia.

**Lisa - Identity**

I’m not very good with my spelling  
I’m very much a face to face person  
I need to have a conversation with them  
I’m not very confident  
I always end up getting it wrong  
I need like facts  
I need just someone to...  
I am struggling  
I struggle with references  
I can get into my head  
I sort of panic  
I don’t speak to anyone  
I don’t talk to other students.  
I just need someone to...  
I don’t go on the forums  
I get marked on my forum contribution  
I’m a silent student  
I struggle  
I’ve got dyslexia  
I’m a youth care  
I run a youth club  
I’m due to move  
I’m moving  
I really do sort of engage in a face to face situation  
I normally use YouTube to help me understand

**Figure 35: Lisa – identity I poem**

Despite this, Lisa enjoys tutorials and is keen to connect with others. She says that this helps her to ‘get out of her own head’ and identify learning strategies (Lisa, interview, 06/12/19). Connecting with others is also important to Korina, Karen and Sophia. A comparison of the students’ learning network tables suggests that these
four students have fewer opportunities to discuss their learning with others than other study participants (appendix 10). In contrast, Melissa, whose learning network table shows that she is well supported by work colleagues, does not feel the same need to connect with other university students (Melissa, interview, 10/04/20).

Although Karen appreciates that students can attend multiple versions of the same tutorial, she would like a closer connection with her own tutor and tutor group:

If it was your own tutor group, you would feel like you would know your own tutor a bit better, or your tutor might feel they would know you a bit better. There's not really that closeness. You don't really have that face-to-face personal relationship when it's online. I think, had I been face-to-face and actually met my tutor, that makes that personal connection then. It's that putting a face to a name (Karen, interview, 10/04/20).

Whilst many university modules only offer tuition in clusters, students on the module under study have an opportunity to attend one tutorial with their own tutor group at the beginning of the module: tutorial 1. Tilly attended and commented positively about the experience, explaining how it helped her to establish relationships with her own tutor and other students:

It made me feel enthusiastic about starting the module. The tutor came across as being really friendly, so I felt comfortable that I could ask/answer any questions without worrying about getting it wrong. The tutor spoke about having set up the forum and that we should all pop by and have a look. One of the students commented that they had already started a thread introducing themselves, so some of us commented on their post introducing ourselves (Tilly, email interview, 09/02/20).

Vicky also attended tutorial 1. Interestingly, she did not include this session on her diary sheet, saying that it did not seem like a tutorial, as it was not focused on an assignment. This may have reflected Vicky’s particular focus on academic achievement; she is aiming for a first-class degree. From Vicky’s interview, however, it seems that there were opportunities to build relationships that were missing in other sessions. Her description of this tutorial is the only time a student in the study mentions using their microphone:

I did use the microphone at the first tutorial. We introduced ourselves in the chat box and the tutor asked me to explain to everyone what my job role is (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20).

Karen also spoke about her experience of tutorial 1. For her, this did not lead to a closer relationship with her tutor, as her tutor subsequently changed. Additionally,
she had not realised that the session was with her own tutor group; she assumed that anyone could attend.

**A sense of community is sometimes missing in the online tutorials** that the students describe. In most tutorials included in the students’ narratives, there are instances of social presence, at least if using one part of Garrison’s definition of social presence: ‘the ability of participants to communicate purposefully in a trusting environment’ (Garrison, 2009, p. 352). Communication was encouraged by the tutors who usually asked students to use the chat box to share their ideas. The only exception was Tilly’s first experience of tutorial 2. Tilly was able to talk via the chat box but described the students as ‘quite restrained’ (Tilly, diary). If the definition of social presence also includes the ability to ‘develop inter-personal relationships’ (Garrison, 2009, p. 352), there are few examples of tutorials that could be described as such.

Only one student mentions initiating a conversation with another student within the online room. Korina and Sophia’s narratives imply that they want to do this, but Joanne is the only student to describe doing so. She wants to check her own progress compared with other students.

> So, I think I started having a bit of chitchat with another student. I don’t really talk to a lot of the other students on my course, so it was just quite useful just to see you know ‘How are you?’ ‘How are you getting on?’ That’s quite good. I always find that quite a nice thing to check against how I’m getting on. If I’m thinking [slight laughter], ‘I don’t know what any of this is about’, I find someone there who also feels the same (Joanne, interview, 17/03/20).

It is interesting that Joanne is able to initiate this conversation. She perceives herself as someone who has little contact with others, but her learning network table (appendix 10) shows that she discusses her studies with a relatively large number of people: seven individuals and two groups.

There is also relatively little use of the word ‘we’ in some narratives, another indicator of social presence that links with a further part of Garrison’s definition in terms of the ability of participants to ‘identify with the community’ (Garrison, 2009, p. 352). When ‘we’ is used, it is in a general sense or sometimes to talk about the lack of opportunity to build relationships. For example, Sophia says,

> We can chat more, but it’s not really building the relationship really. We are just talking about… (Sophia, interview, 23/01/20).
Analysis of the contrapuntal voices within Deborah’s narrative suggest that she does not particularly feel part of a community. Using the second person, perhaps to indicate that she imagines that her own experience is similar to other students, she talks about being ‘on your own’ and having to ‘get on with it’ (Figure 36).

The use of ‘you’ within Deborah’s narrative

- you’re doing something through the Open University, you kinda are on your own. It’s not like
- you’re sitting in a room with the same bunch of people every day
- You’ve to kind of get on with it.

Figure 36: The use of ‘you’ within Deborah’s narrative

Melissa, who has not attended any tutorials during this module, uses the word ‘connection’ to describe what was missing from the online tutorial she attended earlier in her studies (Melissa, interview, 10/4/20). It is only when talking about her discussions with work colleagues and her online GCSE class that the term ‘we’ is used, suggesting that in these other groups, Melissa feels part of a community of learners. According to her learning network table (appendix 10), she has no contact with other students on the module.

For Karen, there are signs that she sometimes feels part of a student community, when listening to the contrapuntal voices in her narrative. ‘We’ is used liberally in relation to the first tutorial that she describes, but only once in relation to the second, where other students are referred to as ‘someone’ and ‘folk’. Whilst, like Deborah, Karen refers to distance learning being solitary, she also highlights how tutorials enable contact with others.

Yeah, I like the tutorials. I mean, I know you’re not really speaking to other people, but I think you kinda work away at home on your own, don’t you, and all of a sudden, other folk are there doing the same thing and asking the same questions or asking questions that you haven’t thought about (Karen, interview, 10/04/20).

Korina’s narrative is the only one where ‘we’ is used frequently and often emphasised in relation to tutorials. An example of one section of narrative considered during the third stage of analysis, which involved listening to the contrapuntal voices is shown in Figure 37.
The use of ‘we’ within Korina’s narrative

- we could acknowledge
- we could email that tutor
- we had like a sort of poll of questions
- we thought
- we all just wrote
- we gave out opinions
- we thought
- we actually typed in our own words
- we thought
- we all had different views about health
- we wanted to do it like that

Figure 37: The use of ‘we’ within Korina’s narrative

This extensive use of ‘we’ is surprising, as opportunities to interact in the tutorial Korina describes are limited. Korina is also unusual in that, despite saying how much she loves to find out the opinions of others, the only person on her learning network table is her tutor (appendix 10). I wonder if her use of ‘we’ reflects how tutorials are Korina’s only opportunity to feel a sense of connection and belonging as a student.

4.3.4 Face-to-face contact

For some participants, despite the focus of the research being online tutorials, a priority was conveying a strong preference for face-to-face tuition. Most participants had experienced face-to-face tuition at some point, even if this was as part of their study of a previous module. Lisa and Karen, who lived too far away from where face-to-face tutorials were situated, were exceptions. Vicky commented,

> With face-to-face tutorials, it’s a lot more personal. You can just get more into a conversation, rather than just listen to someone talking at you (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20).

Deborah attributes failing a previous module to all the tutorials having been online. With online tutorials, she says, it is unlikely that she will ‘meet the same people more than once’ (Deborah, interview, 9/3/20).

Lisa’s feelings I poem highlights how much Lisa wants to live close enough to a tutorial venue to attend face-to-face, returning to this topic frequently (Figure 38).
Karen would also like to attend face-to-face tutorials. As a lecturer herself who has recently moved to teaching online, she reflects on what is missing in the online room and asks if I understand:

I’ve just found it very strange, um you know, when you’re used to being in a classroom face-to-face with the interaction that you get from the students, you know, whether it’s questions being asked or comments made or a bit of a joke or a bit of banter, do you know what I mean? I really miss that (Karen, interview, 10/04/20).

Karen’s feelings I poem (Figure 39) emphasises the importance of seeing people’s faces. She plans to use webcams for her teaching, saying that the students would be ‘better if they could all see each other.’ She also refers to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, saying that ‘there’s just a lot of virtual life going on just now’.
Karen – feelings I poem section

I guess it would be nice to see faces
I really would have liked to go to some of the face-to-face ones
I really just have to go to the online tutorials.
I guess to be able to see people might be quite nice.
I guess there’s just a lot of virtual life going on just now.
I suppose the smaller the number, the more interaction
I’m guessing there are large numbers.
I guess if it was your own tutor group,
I would have really like that (face-to-face)
I think had I been face-to-face and actually met my tutor
I do think they’re really good.
I do feel that is still a support.
I’m really just quite happy working my way through the materials.
I guess that’s the beauty of the Open University.
I guess a lot of it gives me a deeper understanding.
I guess it just gives me a much deeper understanding.

Figure 39: Karen – feelings I poem section

Melissa describes a positive online tutorial experience for her English class, which has moved online as a result of the pandemic, highlighting differences with her previous negative online tutorial experience: the group already knew each other, and webcams were used.

I’ve never actually done an Open University tutorial with webcams. That would make more of a difference and you could actually see people’s faces and see their reactions. Recently, I have had a session with webcams because I’m currently retaking my English GCSE […] and that session was actually really good. I suppose that was different because I already know all of the other students, cos we see each other every Tuesday. It felt a bit more natural. With the Open University, no one actually sees each other... (Melissa, interview, 10/04/20).

None of the participants in the main study had experienced a tutor using a webcam during the online tutorials that they attended for this module.

4.3.5 Numbers of students

Just as students’ experiences of tutorials varied in terms of the people physically present in their immediate environments, there was also variation in the numbers of people virtually present in the online environment of the tutorial. There is no complete picture of the numbers of students who attended the tutorials that students experienced. Although this would have provided useful overall context, I chose to wait and see whether students raised the numbers of students in their
session as an issue, rather than asking about it specifically. It was mentioned within four of the interviews.

The narratives of Karen, Vicky, and Tilly suggest that tutorial experiences could be enhanced by considering the numbers of students attending each session. For Tilly’s least positive tutorial experience, where the session felt rushed and the students seemed ‘quite restrained’, there were 32 attendees. She suggests that 15 is ideal:

I think the tutorials work better with a smaller number of students – maybe around 15 would be ideal, otherwise you are all vying for attention, asking so many questions and responding to questions asked that the tutor doesn’t get time to answer them all. Also with lots of students you can be lazy and not have to participate as much as you do when there are less students – you can wait for someone else to ask/answer the questions! (Tilly, email interview, 18/02/20)

Vicky suggests that having smaller numbers of students would make conversations easier to follow:

…the text box on the side goes quite quickly the more people are typing. I just spend a bit longer scrolling back to see what the questions are because sometimes, you can miss what someone’s written and the tutor’s answering a question that you’ve not read (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20).

Karen mentions student numbers when explaining how she would like everyone to use webcams, suggesting that smaller numbers could facilitate interaction.

It would be nice to see faces to make it more personal. There’s quite big numbers in the tutorials though. Sometimes, there’s about 20 people. That would be a lot of faces on a screen when you’re maybe needing to work through some sort of presentation as well. I suppose the smaller the number, the more interaction you would be able to have (Karen, interview, 10/04/20).

Only Joanne mentions that the numbers of students make no difference to her experience. She has attended tutorials with 10 or 12 students, however, which is low in comparison with other students’ experiences. Overall, it seems that keeping student numbers in a tutorial reasonably low is important to facilitate a positive experience.
4.4 Impact of hearing about students’ experiences on tutors’ thinking and practice

Sharing the student narratives within the tutor forums provided a space and stimulus for conversations about online tuition within established tutor communities. Much of my analysis of the tutor data was focused on their responses to the students’ narratives to help me see the student data from alternative perspectives. In the fourth stage of listening to the tutor narratives, however, I focused on analysing the potential impacts on practice of these conversations to address the final research question:

3. How does hearing about students’ experience of synchronous online tuition impact on tutors’ reports of their thinking and practice?

Because there were two separate tutor discussions, one in the module tutor forum (MTF) and the other in the much larger common room forum (CRF) involving tutors from across the university, it is pragmatic to consider each discussion in turn.

4.4.1 Module tutor forum

In the MTF, there were several examples of tutors reflecting on practice. Prompted by Amie’s vignette, one tutor, Sean described a tutorial activity he had recently designed for a psychology module in which the students built their own case study during the online tutorial (Sean, post 8, MTF, 20/02/20). This led to responses from Jess and I (Kathy, post 9, MTF, 21/02/20; Jess, post 10 MTF, 21/02/20), discussing how Sean’s activity could be used in different contexts, including nursing tutorials. In this way, the discussion had potential impacts for practice beyond the individual module.

A further area where there was some reflection on current practice was around webcam use. Sean asked if student webcams could be routinely enabled:

I think the cameras on approach is much better - it is a wonder that Adobe Connect for the university cannot enable this facility - could we check it out? (Sean, post 24, MTF, 29/04/20)

and Kate wondered if students would expect to be able to see their tutors in the future:
I belong to a choir, and it would be seen as ‘unusual’ not to have cameras on - the new ‘norm’ is to be seen, I think (Kate, post 29, MTF, 29/05/20).

This issue was discussed much further within the larger common room forum conversation, where there was more evidence of the discussion having influenced tutors’ thinking and practice.

### 4.4.2 Common room forum

In the CRF, 16 of the 86 posts made in total indicated that tutors were reviewing their practice or making changes because of engaging with the conversation around the students’ narratives. An additional stimulus for reflection was the coronavirus pandemic, with tutors simultaneously reflecting on their own experiences of connecting with others online during the first UK lockdown that began on 23rd March 2020. Several instances of reflection on practice were tentative and used the words, ‘I wonder’, for example,

Now that we are several weeks into lockdown and many of us have experience of Zoom I wonder whether this might have benefits in terms of enabling us to communicate more effectively with our own tutor group. (Milly, post 32, CRF, 15/05/20)

Sometimes there were responses to others indicating that suggestions had been well received, such as Emily’s response to Hudson’s posts advocating tutor webcam use.

I think it’s a useful point you have made Hudson. (Emily, post 64, CRF, 30/06/20)

Others identified implications for practice in response to other tutors’ conversations whilst also reflecting on their own experience, for example:

The discussion of 1 vs 2 tutors is very interesting, as I teach in both situations. I’ve also this year been a student on a module with just 1 tutor and found it very frustrating when it's hard to interrupt but the tutor just doesn’t see my ‘chat’ question. I think it’s important the back-up tutor be willing to get important or frequent questions answered verbally, and I’ll be trying to put this into practice more rigorously. (Fiona, post 18, CRF, 14/05/20)

Of the 16 posts indicating potential or actual changes to practice in the CRF, 10 were about students being able to see their tutor. The tutor who introduced the topic (Hudson, post 49, CRF, 29/06/20) described regularly using his webcam to make his tutorials ‘more personable’ and how students thanked him for being visible. He was ‘surprised and shocked’ to hear others say that most tutors do not
switch their webcam on. Hudson initially met with some negativity in the forum discussion. Francesca, who is a student as well as a tutor, shared her experience of living in an area with a poor broadband connection (Francesca, post 51, CRF, 29/06/20). Her tutor had insisted on using a webcam. This made her feel unwelcome. Martin shared a negative experience from a tutor perspective, saying that his webcam use seemed to reduce the sound quality (Martin, post 62, CRF, 29/06/20). Hudson posted again, however, (Hudson, post 56, CRF, 29/06/20) and his post strongly influenced the discussion; all 38 subsequent posts in the conversation focused on this topic. When analysing the data, I considered why Hudson’s contributions might have generated this level of response. It may simply have been because the topic was controversial or because Hudson already had well established relationships with those who responded to him, possibly in other contexts outside of the forum, but looking at the identity I poem formed from Hudson’s posts (Figure 40) gives additional possibilities. Hudson’s first post (stanza 1 in the I poem) shares something about his sense of identity as a tutor. He suggests that tutors are more than a voice and tutoring is an embodied activity. His second post (stanza 2) asserts his experience that qualifies him to advise on this issue but acknowledges others’ ideas, implying that he values his relationship with colleagues. These aspects of his posts may have resonated with others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hudson – Identity I poem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I’m not just a disembodied voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am forever using my face, shoulders, and my hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m saying,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m saying,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can think of several excellent reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m sure there’s plenty of other good ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know all about poor and dodgy broadband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was merely trying to contribute my experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The discussion quickly became more light-hearted, with stories about times when tutors might have been embarrassed by what students saw via their webcam (Emma, post 54, CRF, 29/06/20; Hudson, post 56, CRF, 29/06/20; Simon, post 57, CRF, 29/06/20). Emily shared a meme about getting dressed for an online meeting.
(Emily, post 55, CRF, 29/06/20). Tutors started to share their experience of using webcams in different contexts and to query what they had previously heard about bandwidth.

I have been very struck by the difference between zoom (with webcams) and Adobe Connect (without). The biggest difference for me is that it’s much easier to join in the conversation when you can see whether someone else is about to speak. I’d understood that the guidance was not to use webcams in Adobe Connect because of bandwidth issues. I’m wondering whether when there are small numbers involved, it would be possible to check whether everyone’s bandwidth copes. (Rebecca, post 60, CRF, 29/06/20)

Colette commented that she had successfully used her webcam to support a student who lipreads (Colette, post 66, CRF, 30/06/20). Rosie reflected on the benefits of her daughter’s teacher using a webcam in online school lessons during lockdown (Rosie, post 63, CRF, 30/06/20).

The students’ narratives were not mentioned in this part of the discussion until I drew attention to the vignettes of Karen and Melissa, as well as recent university guidance around webcam use, which encouraged tutors to only use video at the start of tutorials or when they were not also trying to share presentations (Kathy, post 69, CRF, 30/06/20). The conversation continued without further reference to the students’ narratives but with continued discussion of practice.

Emma and Ishmael, whose posts generated a larger response than those of other tutors (Figure 19) posted their plans to try out their webcam in tutorials for the first time (Emma, post 58, CRF, 29/06/20; Ishmael, post 67, CRF, 30/06/20). Ishmael reported back the following day:

I tried using the AC webcam in tonight’s tutorial - technically it worked well with no apparent problems. The Tutorial itself was typical - 29 booked and 18 participated, no students used a microphone and very few responded (in monosyllables) to my questions in the chat. On the occasions I glanced at my image I noted that I was looking away from the camera (whiteboard, chat, notes, etc.) and not appear to be making “eye contact” with my students while my hand gestures were something of a blur ...I seemed to get more effusive thanks than usual at the end, but this was subjective and unverifiable. All in all I remain unconvinced as to whether this is worthy of further investigation. I will be keen to hear of any ways colleagues have found to improve their visual ‘performance' ...Stay safe and keep well (Ishmael, post 80, CRF, 1/7/20)

Tony then offered advice based on research he had carried out 30 years ago when working in telecommunications:
Use the live camera to start the session and talk to camera during your introduction. Then say you are going to turn the camera off to concentrate on slides, either turn it off completely, or (if it's not difficult) substitute a still of yourself in the same screen. This gets the “human” introduction but avoids some of the “not looking at screen” and “time lag” issue discussed by Ishmael and Angela. Optionally restore the camera from time to time, perhaps towards the end. (Tony, post 82, CRF, 1/7/20)

Two tutors said that they would implement this advice (Margaret, post 83, CRF, 3/7/20; Simon, post 85, CRF, 3/7/20), whilst Emma shared the picture of herself and her cat that she planned to use (Emma, post 87, CRF, 3/7/20).

There was, therefore, evidence to suggest that the CRF discussion initiated by sharing the vignettes instigated some changes to this aspect of practice. It is likely that the discussion was followed by others who did not take part but there is no data available about how many people read the discussion.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has detailed the findings of my study in relation to my research questions, explaining how narratives of students’ experiences of online tutorials vary in terms of differences in their social and material environments, as well as differences in the tutorials themselves. It has identified five areas of need that drive the preferences students express around synchronous online tuition in HSC. These relate to communication in the online room, being active and hearing other students’ perspectives, building relationships and community, face-to-face contact, and numbers of students. It has also identified ways in which the students’ narratives have influenced some tutors’ thinking and practice. These findings will now be discussed in relation to the literature.
Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of my research in relation to the literature around synchronous online tuition. It is organised in relation to my research questions, which are:

1. How do the narratives of students' experiences of synchronous online tutorials in a health and social care module vary and what factors account for this variation?
2. What can we learn about the needs which drive the preferences students express around synchronous online tuition in health and social care?
3. How does hearing about students' experience of synchronous online tuition impact on tutors’ reports of their thinking and practice?

5.2 Variations in the narratives and the factors that account for this variation

My analysis identified two ways in which students’ experiences vary: variations in students’ social and material environments; and variation in the tuition, both in terms of the tutors and tutorial design. Each of these will be discussed.

5.2.1 The variation in students’ social and material environments

The narratives show how tutorial experiences are embedded in the social and cultural contexts of distance learning and students’ lives, students fitting study around caring responsibilities and what was happening in their household at the time. Family members, particularly children, were often physically present, although invisible to the tutor and other students. Where not present, they were very much in mind. This reflects how students’ online identities are informed by their offline identity (Smith and Smith, 2014). There are similarities with another study here, where 17 female students, who, like the students in my study, were following pathways in youth, community, health or social work, explained in semi-structured interviews that they had to negotiate space and time for study on an emotional level, as well as physically and socially (Moss, 2004). As Karen’s narrative illustrates, students and their families can equate students’ study time with ‘time for themselves’ and this induces guilt (Karen, interview, 10/04/20).
Just as the family members were often present but unseen, also invisible were the spaces from which students joined tutorials: makeshift study areas in intimate spaces, including kitchens, family dining rooms and bedrooms. This invisibility and the associated affordance of being able to care for family members whilst learning has been highlighted as valuable for students (Green, 2020) but it can also hide the challenging nature of reality: students trying to participate whilst there are multiple distractions (Stewart and Cormier, 2020). The significance of these caring relationships may have been heightened by all the study participants being female. In a study that included both male and female participants, only 2% of male students mentioned children or family when writing about what affected learning, achievement and participation in online classrooms, whereas 11% of women did so (Sullivan, 2001).

The influence of these social relationships is bi-directional. Students' tutorial experiences are influenced by others but also influence other people beyond those visibly present in the online room, the students sharing their learning with family members, friends and colleagues and using it to inform their practice in their work with children and young people. Drawing on ideas around sociomateriality, which is concerned with the way in which the social and material are ‘constitutively entangled in everyday life’ (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1437), some argue that online learning has become inappropriately conceptualised as separated from many aspects of students’ everyday lives, existing in a closed and separate ‘magical realm’ and incorporeal, whilst, in reality, it is entangled or interconnected with people’s bodies, their physical spaces and social sphere (Jones, 2005; Gourlay and Oliver, 2018). Unlike face-to-face learning, which often takes students away from their home and work environments, online learning takes place wherever students happen to be. Taking a posthumanist view, subjectivity is no longer accomplished individually but ecologically. All matter is seen as diffracted and the binary is disrupted (Barad, 2014). The students’ narratives show how they are positioned in multiple roles simultaneously. Their experiences in their student roles overlap with their roles as parents, family members and practitioners. This overlap is not only in terms of time and geography as they try to perform multiple roles together, but also in terms of the knowledge that they can take from the context of one role and apply in another. Rather than perceiving students as free-floating autonomous human subjects (Gourlay and Oliver, 2018), educators need to see learning as embedded in students’ contexts, relational and embodied.
The narratives showed variations in how students’ online tutorial experiences were entangled with the material world too. The notion of assemblages conceptualises the interactions between agentive situated people and material objects, which include digital devices and artefacts related to writing (Gourlay and Oliver, 2018). For example, Tilly explained in her diary how she printed the tutorial slides if made available in advance and made notes on them, whilst Lisa drew spider diagrams during tutorials (Lisa, interview, 06/12/19).

Online tutorial experiences are also always entangled with technology, including the module website, the online room, the tools within it, and the session recordings. It is important to recognise the socially situated nature of the technologies used for online learning (O’Rourke, 2008). These technologies should be considered as mediators, not intermediaries, because they translate, moderate and distort meaning, rather than merely carrying it (Gourlay and Oliver, 2018). Students and their participation are positively shaped by technologies, as when the use of a video clip and its subsequent discussion expanded Vicky’s understanding of a case study (Vicky, interview, 06/02/20) or when Lisa, who was too worried about her spelling to use the chat box, contributed via the whiteboard (Lisa, interview, 06/12/19). These technologies can also be barriers to learning. As other studies have identified, an aspect of technology that is an enabler for one student, such as not being able to see who is listening, may inhibit the participation of another (de los Arcos, Coleman and Hampel, 2009; Junod Perron et al., 2020). Students noted when there were ‘technical issues’ or a tool did not work as expected. In effect, the human and nonhuman actors converge to produce multiple possibilities and each actor is a key part of the experience (Sobko et al., 2020).

In the main study, only one student narrated a learning experience in which she became distracted; Joanne’s experience became entangled with an external digital object: a news website (Joanne, interview, 17/03/20). All three students in the initial study, on the other hand, explained how they had to find ways of coping with multiple distractions when participating in online tutorials and there are similarities with a recent studies of Swiss medical students and postgraduate medical students in the USA (Junod Perron et al., 2020; Weber and Ahn, 2021). In my initial study, the openness of the students talking about the distractions they often experience may have reflected the phrasing of my questions or perhaps the closer relationship that I had with these students from my own tutor group compared with
those from other groups in the main study. It may also reflect social differences between the two groups. Like Joanne, all three students in the initial study had no childcare responsibilities during the tutorial, whereas three students in the main study were responsible for children or were interacting with family members throughout their sessions. For them, multiple distractions are the norm. Strategies for managing distractions could make a difference to students’ learning, particularly online, where students are easily distracted by digital objects, such as social media or online shopping websites (Chandler, 2016; Schmidt, 2020). Students using a computer to take notes during face-to-face tutorials have also been shown to be easily distracted by other applications open on their computer and whilst there is no difference in their understanding of the session compared with those using pen and paper, they are less likely to retain what they have learned (Jamet et al., 2020). The findings of my initial study, where students said their being active participants and fully engaged reduced distraction, are supported by the work of others (Schmidt, 2020; Stewart and Cormier, 2020), and indicate that it is possible to limit students’ uptake of this sort of distraction. What is more challenging, however, is how to support the students whose experience is dependent on lack of external distractions, such as small children not interrupting.

5.2.2 Variation within the tutorials

Students had diverse experiences, even when attending different versions of the same session or when the tutors were using the same slides or activities. This diversity is not surprising, since the actors within a tutorial converge to produce multiple possibilities (Sobko et al., 2020) and any change in group composition changes the tutorial experience. The characteristics of the tutor(s) were highlighted as key differentiators. As found elsewhere (McDougall, 2019; Oyarzun et al., 2021), the care and attention of the tutors was perceived as key to a positive experience. Within the CoI model, teaching presence is concerned with what the tutor does in terms of their behaviour and actions. It is about designing activities that enable dialogue and help students learn, support students to sustain focus, give direction and provide feedback to clarify students’ understanding (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999). As illustrated by the students’ narratives, however, teaching presence can also be about the person that the tutor is, their persona and characteristics. It involves taking some action, and I will return to this later, but is also about being the person needed by the students (Jaggars and Xu, 2016;
Thomas and Thorpe, 2019). This reflects a different definition of teaching presence:

...the specific actions and behaviours taken by the [teacher] that projects him/herself as a real person (Thomas and Thorpe, 2019, p. 66)

The students in my study valued tutors who were friendly and understanding of the challenges learners face, who enabled students to contribute, responded to each student with encouragement and offered helpful tips based on their experience of marking students’ work. So, tutors need social skills and empathy, not just technical skills (Palloff and Pratt, 2007). These skills include being ‘human’ and openly acknowledging differences in power (Morris, 2018).

There were elements of the narratives that portrayed the tutor-student relationship within tutorials as embodying power and control. Those who apply Freire’s ideas around critical pedagogy to online education argue that educators should not control student voices but rather design spaces where everyone, including the tutor, can create, experiment and learn from each other (Morris and Friend, 2020). The classroom belongs to the students, not just the educator. Elsewhere, student narratives have suggested that tutors have less authority in synchronous online spaces than in physical classrooms and within them seem like ‘just other students’ (Charlie, cited in Bayne, 2005, p. 37) but within my study, a power differential was apparent. Both the learning experiences of the students and the teaching experiences of the tutors are entangled with the material in terms of the platforms and tools made available by the university. Thinking about how online classrooms are configured within this university, by default it is the tutor who enters the room as the host and the students as participants. Students have to be given communication privileges by the tutor. They can be promoted to presenter status and allowed to share content, including webcam images, but this experience was not described by any students in the study. The tutor also usually determines the tutorial activities and the layout of the room. The position and size of the chat box relative to the tutors’ slides, which are usually much larger and centre stage, reflects this power differential (Breeze and Holford, 2021). The narratives gathered in my study conveyed other ways in which students’ tutorial experiences are embedded within the social context of the university, which was perceived by the students as more powerful than the tutors, determining what the tutors were allowed to do. This includes determining the platform used and how it is accessed.
The university also determines the default room settings, but this influence can be mediated by the tutor who can adjust them.

These insights might surprise university staff who perceive their pedagogy as student-centred and their relationships as equitable. Those who critique Daniel’s vision of the mega-university (Daniel, 1998), have argued that hidden within what is termed a student-centred pedagogy, large-scale distance universities have become one of Foucault’s modern day panopticons (Foucault, 1995), where every learning activity is closely monitored by those who watch unseen (Pelletier, 2005; Ovetz, 2017). Such surveillance does happen in the online learning environment. The tutors can seem impersonal because we are not always known to the students and are unseen unless we use our webcams. We plan and lead tutorial sessions and monitor students’ responses to the activities, whilst managers in turn monitor attendance and the quality of tuition. There is a purpose to this non-reciprocal surveillance, it could be argued, however, with those who watch doing so in order to make changes that might improve the learning experience and acting to reduce variation.

Within the panopticon, teachers are replaced with facilitators (Pelletier, 2005). It is interesting to examine how the tutors are described within the narratives of my study. Within some narratives, the words ‘teach’, and ‘teacher’ are absent when describing the tutors and their actions. This includes Karen’s narrative, except when she talks about her own work in further education, where these words are used frequently (Karen, interview, 10/04/20). The only time that Tilly uses them is when describing what happens in the secondary school where she works, contrasting what happens in online tutorials with what happens ‘in the classroom’ (Tilly, email interview, 18/02/20). In contrast, Sophia uses ‘teaching’ to describe not only the actions of the tutors, explaining how each tutor has a different teaching style, but also to describe the actions of students, explaining that students learn well when they teach each other (Sophia, interview, 23/01/20). Amie uses these words extensively throughout her narrative (Amie, interview, 18/01/20). Indeed, a tutor who contributed to the CRF discussion commented on her use of the term ‘teacher’, which made him ‘shudder’ (Ray, email, 19/06/20). There was a tension between how Amie described the tutor’s role and how Ray saw himself. In contrast, other tutors who contributed to the forum threads discussing the narratives described themselves as teachers or their work as
teaching, including myself (Sean, post 8, 20/2/20; Kathy, post 20, MTF, 22/3/20; MTF Fiona, post 18, CMF, 14/5/20; Anne, post 46, CMF, 27/6/20; Emma, post 70, CMF, 30/6/20).

This tension around how the tutor role is seen is apparent elsewhere within my institution. Research suggests that tutors in another faculty of the university see themselves as facilitators (Campbell et al., 2019) and yet many of them use the words ‘teacher’ or ‘teaching’ to describe their role in some recently produced tutor recruitment material (Walshe, 2020). Whilst person specifications for tutor roles include teaching experience and sometimes a teaching qualification, the most recently produced induction material currently available to new tutors in all faculties does not mention teaching at all. Neither does the student-facing description of the tutor role, where the tutor’s role is described as ‘guiding, advising and supporting’ students. The role of tutor as facilitator is consistent with ideas around student-centredness and learning-orientated approaches (Kember, 1999), which in recent years have been promoted over teacher-centredness and content-oriented approaches, as the emphasis has moved from the tutor being viewed as the ‘sage on the stage’ to the ‘guide on the side’ (King, 1993). As a guide, the tutor does not provide knowledge, but information about the discipline and the learner constructs the knowledge by acting on the information, knowing how to make sense of it and deciding on its relevance (Morrison, 2014). An alternative view opposes this refocusing on learners or ‘learnification’ that has arisen through the marketisation of education and relegated the teacher to the role of guide or facilitator (Bayne et al., 2020). Instead, it is suggested that the ‘self of the student’ should not be central to learning but rather, teaching should be central and viewed as a gift (Biesta, 2010). The teacher gives three types of gift: knowledge, the ability to recognise the knowledge as valuable, and also subject-ness or in other words, the student becoming and being recognised as a different person (Bayne et al., 2020). There is a suggestion that subject-ness is not something that a student constructs themselves and a reclamation of the centrality of the teacher.

To return to the issue of what tutors are doing in tutorials, there was considerable variation between tutorials in terms of evidence of teaching presence as defined within the CoI model, where the tutor designs tutorial activities that enable dialogue and help students learn, supports students to sustain focus on the
activities, gives direction and provides feedback to clarify students’ understanding (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, pp. 89–90). The term ‘tutorial’ implies two-way communication (Bowler and Raiker, 2011). Sometimes, there was no evidence of tutors designing activities to promote dialogue or learning and tutorials were limited to a presentation from the tutors, with a focus on assignments. Students were not always disappointed by these experiences, however. There may have been several reasons for this.

Firstly, students’ lack of disappointment may be an outcome which may reflect their limited expectations. Tutors in the CRF highlighted how different students have different expectations of tutorials (Fiona, post 19, CRF, 14/05/20; Anne, post 46, CRF, 27/06/20). Some tutors suggested that what are currently termed ‘tutorials’ are actually ‘lectures’ and sometimes, a lecture is exactly what students expect (Fiona, post 28, CRF, 15/05/20; Milly, post 32, CRF, 15/05/20). Tutors prepare tutorials with their perception of what students expect in mind (Campbell et al., 2019) and their perception that students prefer lectures over participatory approaches has some basis in research (Deslauriers et al., 2019). Twenty-nine science students within my own institution were found to have similar perceptions and six of their tutors who took part in the same study also felt that a didactic session was what students valued and expected (Butler, 2018). This was not true within my study, however, with students all attaching importance to tutorials being active experiences and hearing the perspectives of others (see section 4.3.2).

A second reason why students were not disappointed may have been that student satisfaction with tutorials is not entirely dependent on the tutors’ contributions in terms of teaching presence. What made a difference in the tutorials described was having not only teaching presence but a focus on enabling social presence. In my description of what social presence might look like in an online tutorial based on Garrison’s work (Garrison, 2009), students build relationships with others, feel comfortable interacting, and feel that their point of view is recognised. They share a sense of identity as students within the same field of study. In the most positive tutorial experiences that students narrated, students reported that they felt able to interact with others and that all students’ ideas were acknowledged. Students learned from each other, not just from the tutors. It was this combination of both teaching presence and social presence that helped to generate cognitive presence, where students constructed meaning (Garrison, Anderson and Archer,
1999, p. 89), and learning presence, where students showed self or co-regulation triggered by the activities (Shea et al., 2012), as well as a positive emotional response, as illustrated by the diagram of the different types of presence seen within Amie’s narrative (Figure 41).
Figure 41: The different types of presence identified in Amie's narrative of tutorial 3
Students did not feel that they had opportunities to build relationships, however, and I shall return to this in section 5.3.3.

To adopt an inquiry-based approach to education, what is needed is not a performance from the tutor but a ‘disciplined improvisation’, where the tutor does some planning and offers some guidance to structure the conversation but then allows new ideas to emerge from the group through a collaborative discussion within a set framework (Sawyer, 2004). In studies conducted with education and psychology students, the students tended to remain passive if the tutor gave a lecture, but participated much more when their tutor invited questions and comments or encouraged them to take an active role (Weiser, Blau and Eshet-Alkalai, 2018). It can be more challenging to involve students online than in a face-to-face setting. A phenomenological study of four tutors’ lived tutorial experiences identified that they found the online environment more demanding than a face-to-face environment (Cornelius, 2014). As highlighted within the MTF, even very experienced tutors can feel anxious in the context of online tuition and feel the need to overly determine the content of the tutorial or ‘stay on script’ (Jess, post 3, MTF, 07/02/20). This issue has been identified elsewhere within my institution (Breeze and Holford, 2021). Sawyer (2004) suggests that educators need high levels of pedagogical content knowledge to feel comfortable with disciplined improvisation. Pedagogical content knowledge is the knowledge that enables teachers to present ideas about their subject in such a way as to make them possible for students to understand, alongside an appreciation of what makes this learning easy or difficult (Shulman, 2013). An implication of this is the need for tutors to be given access to staff development opportunities that allow them to build both subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogical knowledge, including use of effective teaching approaches.

Alongside high levels of pedagogical content knowledge, tutors need other skills to be able to teach in synchronous online environments compared to those we might need in a physical classroom. We need technological knowledge that goes beyond general levels of computer literacy and not only enables us to use technology productively in our teaching but to also continually adapt as technologies develop (Koehler, Mishra and Cain, 2013). For synchronous tuition, we must be confident in our use of the university’s chosen software and enable students to gain this confidence too. Furthermore, we need an in-depth understanding of how these
types of knowledge relate to each other in our own teaching context. The TPACK framework (Koehler et al., 2004; Koehler, Mishra and Cain, 2013) considers how these understandings interact to produce effective teaching. This includes an appreciation of how technology and content influence or constrain each other (technological content knowledge), the affordances and constraints of the particular medium (technological pedagogical knowledge), but then also a knowledge that goes further to incorporate all three elements: content, pedagogical, and technological. This involves knowing about students’ prior knowledge, how concepts can be represented via technologies, how pedagogical techniques that use technologies can be constructively used to convey content, what makes learning concepts difficult or easy and how technology might help build students’ understandings.

In the context of online language tuition, there has been a longstanding recognition of the need for both technological and pedagogical training for tutors and the importance of integration of the two, as well as the value of the tutor experiencing first-hand what it is like to be a student (Hubbard and Levy, 2006). Because the development of a sense of community and an atmosphere of trust cannot be taken for granted in the synchronous online context, but must be created, tutors also require skills in enabling social presence. Within this context, there has been some debate about the order in which tutors acquire the knowledge and skills we need. A pyramid model proposes lower level general skills must be acquired before a tutor can progress to higher level skills and facilitate what is described as ‘communicative competence and socialisation’, eventually becoming creative and achieving their own online teaching style (Hampel and Stickler, 2005; Stickler and Hampel, 2015). An alternative model proposes that language teachers acquire skills relating to technology, pedagogy and evaluation concurrently, progressing through three levels in each area from novice to proficient teacher to expert (Compton, 2009). There has been less discussion about the process by which tutors acquire the skills for synchronous online tuition in other contexts. Salmon’s five stage model of teaching and learning online (Salmon, 2003), whilst designed for asynchronous contexts, has also been applied to synchronous learning and like Hampel and Stickler’s model (2005, 2015) seems to suggest that skill acquisition is linear. Based on their experiences of providing just one online tutorial for undergraduate sports students, Bowler and Raiker propose a model that focuses on the roles that tutors must undertake to provide a synchronous online tutorial.
They suggest that these are social, intellectual and managerial roles, all of which combine to produce pedagogy, which they argue should be at the heart of a socio-constructivist approach to teaching and learning (Bowler and Raiker, 2011). The fact that these roles are seen as overlapping implies that the associated skills should be developed concurrently.

What all these models have in common, however, is the sole focus on the tutor’s skills and roles and the assumption that students are always the recipients of the tutor’s expertise, whether in terms of knowledge, technical expertise or facilitating socialisation. In contrast, Bower (2011), who proposes that tutors need skills in four areas: operational (the ability to use tools), interactional (exchanging information, collaborating and co-creating), managerial (explaining activities and keeping the class or group on task), and design (choosing and arranging the tools needed), acknowledges that students need skills in these areas too. In the role of a teacher-researcher who was new to online teaching with a group of students learning computer programming over three semesters, Bower discovered that both tutors and students required more operational and interactional skills as the pedagogy developed and the activities required more active participation. The benefits of students, as well as tutors, developing both operational and interactional skills, have been previously identified within the content of language learning at my own institution (Heiser, Stickler and Furnborough, 2013).

Both tutors and universities need to invest to enable tutors and students to develop their skills, making sure that there are training opportunities, as well as time to practise and reflect with colleagues. When developing tuition strategy, tutors have a great deal of experience to offer and can provide a wealth of information but few may contribute unless the time to do so is included in tutors’ contracted hours (Walshe, 2018).

When there were two tutors in the tutorials described in my study, students often noted how they worked together and how this relationship affected the learning experience. There is a continuum of different approaches to team teaching or co-teaching in a face-to-face environment (Pancsofar and Petroff, 2016). At one end of the continuum, one tutor might lead whilst the other is passive. At the other end, there is shared responsibility for planning and facilitating throughout. In my own online context, the tutors for each session, who may or may not have worked together before, can decide which approach we will take. In some of the tutorials
described in the narratives, tutors chose to divide the session and lead one part each. Additional time for shared planning and reflection are essential when tutors work together (Fluijt, Bakker and Struyf, 2016; Minett-Smith and Davis, 2020) and lack of explicit time for this aspect of the work in tutors’ contracted hours was one of many concerns in my own context when online team teaching was first introduced (Brewer and Chandler, 2016). Lack of training around how to approach team teaching can also be an issue and there can be problems when team members do not do their fair share or keep to agreed plans (Minett-Smith and Davis, 2020). Whilst the literature about co-teaching or team teaching tends to assume that university staff are located in the same place, this is not always the case in an online context, such as that discussed here, and being in different locations can make planning more difficult. Team teaching is an area that could be researched further, investigating how different approaches affect experiences of learning and teaching and what strategies educators could implement to enhance online tutorial experiences.

5.3 The needs that drive the preferences students express

Researchers cannot expect to uncover single truths but rather to see the world from the perspective of the participants and find multiple perspectives that sometimes overlap (Rubin and Rubin, 2012) and that is the case here. Students in my study had different needs and expectations in relation to the tutorials that they attended. They were hoping for different outcomes, ranging from a first-class degree to support with specific areas of academic writing, opportunities to connect with other students or time to ask questions of their own tutor and find out what they would be looking for when marking their next assignment. The students all attended different tutorials and their narratives suggested that their perceived needs were usually met to some extent, but it is likely that they each shared the tutorials that they attended with other students with similarly diverse needs.

My analysis of the students’ narratives identified five areas of preference around students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition: communicating in the online room; being active and hearing the perspectives of others; having face-to-face contact; opportunities to build relationships and community; and student numbers in each session.
5.3.1 Communication in the online room

A feature of almost all the students’ narratives was avoiding using the microphone. A variety of reasons were given, including family members being around, not being able to see who is talking, having English as a second language, not liking the sound of one’s own voice, being behind on the reading, and the awkwardness of the microphone. This reluctance to use the microphone has similarities with the findings of other studies of social science students and life and health science students at the same institution (Middleton and Smith, 2013; Smith and Smith, 2014; Butler, 2018). Even students listening to tutorial recordings describe online verbal communication as stilted and unnatural compared with face-to-face (Pleines, 2020). Online environments have been conceptualised as ‘uncanny spaces’ (Bayne, 2008), where students experience uncertainty in terms of people seeming ghostly or disembodied. There are echoes of ghostliness and disembodiment in students’ accounts, such as Joanne’s description of the microphone:

The microphone is weird because you can’t see anyone, and I just feel like there’s a delay and it can be quite awkward. (Joanne, interview, 17/03/20)

and Karen’s description of teaching online as being ‘a lone voice in the middle’ (Karen, interview, 10/04/20), which was similar to the experience of one of the tutors in the common room forum (Anne, post 46, CRF, 27/06/20). In response, Hudson (post 49, CRF, 29/06/20) drew attention to the embodied nature of his online teaching, giving voice to something that would often be hidden and unrecognised.

Learning spaces can also be ‘uncanny’ in an intellectual sense, students experiencing liminality as they grapple with ideas around criticality and learn to hold different perspectives in tension (Bayne, 2008). The distance learners in my study sought to address added elements of uncertainty around gauging their tutors’ expectations and checking their own progress compared with other students. There was also evidence that students lacked confidence to share their ideas. They had anxieties about ‘getting things wrong’, similar to feelings expressed by science students at the same institution in relation to asynchronous collaborative activities (Dyke, 2016). Lisa’s experience provides further evidence around the ways in which the online environment can be particularly challenging for students with dyslexia as identified elsewhere (Lowe, Mestel and Williams, 2020).
We need to go beyond ensuring that the content of what is presented in the online room is accessible and offer different ways of participating in tutorials. Tutors need to minimise students' anxiety, tuition having affective goals, as well as cognitive ones.

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (1999) suggest that social presence can play a key role in minimising students’ anxiety, so that students enjoy learning and are more likely to continue with their studies. Social presence is understood in various ways, including ‘the ability of participants in the CoI to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as “real people”’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, p. 89) and ‘to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment and develop inter-personal relationships by way of projecting their individual personalities’ (Garrison, 2009, p352). Strategies to promote social presence might include sharing ideas in small groups, which the students in my initial study describe as helpful. Opportunities for students to acknowledge and express the anxiety they feel during tutorials may also be beneficial. Garrison, (2017) would see this expression as evidence of social presence, whilst Cleveland-Innes and Campbell, (2012) would term it as emotional presence.

Despite the lack of microphone use, however, students still described how they communicated with others via a variety of methods to construct meaning. This has led me to question whether microphone use is always necessary for learning. There is a danger that discourses around student engagement in online spaces can unhelpfully define what students ‘should’ be doing, with particular observable behaviours coming to be seen as proxies for learning itself (Gourlay and Oliver, 2018). This discourse was apparent between tutors in my study, with the behaviours of the rare students who are willing to vocalise their ideas via the microphone winning approval in contrast to those who think interaction is ‘something others should be doing so they can just watch’ (Angela, post 20, CRF, 14/05/20). Garrison argues that writing is not a poor substitute for speech but another fundamental medium of expression with its own properties and powers (Garrison, 2016, p. 49).

A focus on enabling communication in any way that enables students to test out their ideas with others might be more beneficial to learning than insisting on microphone use.
Even so, students’ personalities affect the degree to which they contribute in online tutorials, with extroverts contributing more frequently in all types of online interactions (Weiser, Blau and Eshet-Alkalai, 2018). Some students, such as Lisa within my study, identify as ‘silent students’. Whilst those who subscribe to constructivist principles might suggest that students who engage in direct participation in learning communities will be more successful learners, it is not a necessary requirement and many remain on the periphery but continue to learn (Dobao, 2016; Honeychurch et al., 2017; Li, Kim and Xiong, 2020). Feedback from students within my institution suggests that 10% of students prefer to avoid interacting (Tait, 2003) but as Honeychurch et al. (2017) uncover in relation to asynchronous online communities, the reasons for this avoidance are complex and students can learn whilst listening to others. Participating in synchronous online learning has, in itself, been identified as a stronger predictor of student success in terms of exam scores than use of particular tools, including the microphone and chat box (Giesbers et al., 2013). It is engaging, not contributing, that is important. Even listening to recordings of online tutorials can help students to appreciate different perspectives and consolidate their understandings (Pleines, 2020).

A further tool available in the online room is the facility to write on a slide or whiteboard. Whilst this tool had limitations for some students within my study because they struggled to use it or found it messy, it transformed Lisa’s experience of tuition, enabling her to contribute her ideas anonymously when she would not have been able to do so otherwise. The tendency of online educators to turn to tools when seeking to improve communication with students has been criticised (Morris, 2018) but Lisa’s narrative suggests that a tool made a difference to her experience. It is often written that the technology needs to follow the pedagogy, rather than the reverse, a situation that has become all too common due to overstated claims by technology companies (Salmon, 2014). Pedagogy and technology are not, however, two separate entities, as this suggestion implies, but mutually determined (Cousin, 2005) and Lisa’s experience provides an example of this mutual determination. Sophia did not know how to use the tool, so there may be a need to consider how best to ensure students can acquire the skills that they need in online rooms, as explored in another faculty (Heiser, Stickler and Furnborough, 2013).
A feature of the synchronous online environment is being able to have multiple simultaneous conversations, some people communicating via the microphone, whilst others type. A study of the multimodal aspect of synchronous online learning identified three different ways in which microphones and text chat were used simultaneously to develop new patterns of communication: complementation, compensation, and competition (Hampel and Stickler, 2012). It is the competition function which was identified as an issue within my study. When there was more than one tutor, it meant that there could be two sets of tutor-student interactions happening in the online room simultaneously. One student identified this possibility for simultaneous communications as an affordance of the online environment because it sped up conversations, but in others’ experience it made conversations more difficult to follow to the extent that they preferred having one tutor to two. This supports the findings of previous studies where students reported that too many simultaneous interactions can lead to confusion and difficulty concentrating (McBrien, Cheng and Jones, 2009; McDaniels, Pfund and Barnicle, 2016). It is important that tutors who are working together adapt their communication to support students effectively.

5.3.2 Being active and hearing the perspectives of others

The students in my study had strong preferences for taking an active part in tutorials and hearing the perspectives of other students, similar to students’ preferences gathered in a consultative forum about synchronous online tutorials on other HSC modules in April 2018. These preferences were evident even for students who described themselves as shy, inarticulate or, in Lisa’s case, ‘silent’ (Lisa, interview, 06/12/19). The tutorials in which students were active, rather than passive recipients, were those with far more instances of evidence of teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence than others and had more positive outcomes in terms of learning presence and emotional presence. For students within HSC and particularly within the module under study, which is studied by students on multiple degree pathways with a wide variety of professional backgrounds, there is a lot of opportunity to learn from others. The most effective learning activities can often be those that focus on practical issues and enable productive cross-boundary encounters (B. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015), such as the tutorial Deborah described in which those who worked in school settings and had experience of writing reports were able to
give valuable hints and tips to those like herself without such experience (Deborah, interview, 09/03/20).

These findings contrast with those of other studies, where students, including those within the STEM faculty of the same institution, have expressed reluctance to collaborate with their peers (Dyke, 2016; Butler, 2018). Whilst there is a correlation between the amount of collaborative activity students undertake and the successful completion of their studies (Jaggars and Xu, 2016; van Ameijde, Weller and Cross, 2016; Li, Kim and Xiong, 2020), many are successful without interacting with other students at all (Smith and Smith, 2014). Although theories of social and situated learning became popular in the 1980s and 90s, informal learning from peers is not universally valued. There is still a sense in which informal learning is seen as ‘stolen knowledge’, likened to theft because the learning process is almost invisible and seems to happen with minimal effort, whilst accredited learning is more highly respected (Jones, 2005) and there may be some students who might express a preference for a lecture over an interactive session, including those who did not volunteer to take part in my research. A study with undergraduate physics students at a campus-based university found that the cognitive effort associated with active learning can make students perceive the learning to be less effective than sitting listening to lectures when the reverse is the case (Deslauriers et al., 2019). For students without an appreciation of the value of learning from peers, it is important tutors explain the rationale behind active learning to them; once the students in Deslauriers et al.’s study understood this rationale, they were keen to participate in more active sessions.

Significant concerns for students in my study included having focused discussions and making sure that everyone’s contributions were acknowledged. As within other studies (Hrastinski et al., 2019; Jung and Brady, 2020), there were examples in the tutorials of ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions being used, where students had to justify their answers, engaging the students and producing detailed responses. This use of focused and inclusive discussion links to the development of cognitive presence, ‘the extent to which learners are able to construct meaning through sustained communication’ (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999, p. 89). Critical thinking needs to happen alongside other people so that misconceptions can be challenged (Garrison, 2017). Garrison proposes that students construct meaning and generate hypotheses individually and then must test them with others, moving
in a continuous cycle between their individual world of meaning and the shared world of knowledge. This testing of hypotheses has implications for the design of tutorial activities and teaching presence, particularly in terms of creating opportunities for interaction. Only one student, Joanne, described being able to initiate a conversation with another student herself and she was, according to her learning network table, one the best-connected students. Tutors need to plan times and spaces for such discussions to happen. Assigning particular roles to students during discussions and asking them to undertake group reflections has been found to enhance students’ interaction with each other and with course content (Truhlar, Williams and Walter, 2018). As much face-to-face education has moved online during the coronavirus pandemic, educators have been experimenting with different ways of using technology to enhance student dialogue. In some online classrooms, it is the students who are sharing their screens, rather than the tutors (Jung and Brady, 2020) and other educators can learn from these approaches.

5.3.3 Building relationships and community

Some students felt they needed a stronger relationship with their own tutor, either because they wanted to know what the tutor was looking for in their assignments or because they wanted more of a connection. Concern about the erosion of the tutor-student relationship within my institution has also been expressed by tutors, with the suggestion that this erosion could be addressed by ‘nurturing the tutor community of practice’ (Walshe, 2018, p. 260) although it is not clear how this might enhance the relationship between students and their own tutors.

For other students, contact with their own tutor in tutorials was not important. They were happy to attend tutorials with any tutor. Another study found similarly diverse perceptions of need in language students at the same university (Pleines, 2020). Pleines attributed this diversity to variation in when students started their studies, those not having experienced tuition before the implementation of the Group Tuition Policy (see section 1.1.2.1) seeming happier with tuition arrangements and speaking freely about finding the tutor that suited them. That was not the case here, however, as my study participants started their studies after the policy was implemented.

The rationale for tuition being organised across multiple tutor groups is to give students more flexibility around tutorial attendance. Flexibility is often presented by
universities as a valued attribute for students within higher education. The term can be used to give an illusion of choice and the associated governmentality process leads to new subjectivities in which certain choices are normalised (Houlden and Veletsianos, 2020). In the online environment, monitored by digital systems, each student self-regulates their learning in the ‘ultimate realisation of Foucault’s panopticon’ (Ovetz, 2017, p. 64). At my institution, discourse around ‘flexible learning’ can lead to misconceptions among students who conclude that they should be able to ‘go it alone’ without any support (Bentinck, 2020). There is a danger of ignoring how students’ diverse contexts determine whether they can make choices reflecting the desired characteristics of the ‘flexible learner’ who is autonomous, independent, and self-regulatory. The students’ narratives showed how their tutorial attendance and participation were often constrained by social factors outside of their control, students’ caring responsibilities playing an important role. Whilst some students, such as Tilly, are able to attend multiple versions of the same tutorials, Vicky ‘hoped and prayed’ that her own tutor would be running sessions when she was not at work and childcare was available. The participation of Deborah and Amie was dependant on their children remaining asleep or distracted by the television. It is important, therefore, that educators ask which students are currently benefitting from the policies that determine how tuition is organised and who is negatively affected. Each university has an identity and character of its own through its policies and ways of working that impact on student experiences. Using a relational approach to teaching and learning requires universities to consider the impact of the broader social and cultural context, including policy, on students’ experience (Jones, 2005).

Even for the students who were happy to work with any tutor, a sense of community was missing in online tutorials. Having considered earlier whether tuition should be student-centred or teacher-centred (see section 5.2.2), perhaps instead it should be community-centred. Garrison’s definition of social presence emphasises the significance of shared group identity and its importance for collaboration (Garrison, 2009), and another study has raised concerns about the value of tutorials that happen as ‘one off’ events (Bowler and Raiker, 2011). There are many indications that the opportunity to meet with the same group of students each time and build relationships is something that would be valued by these distance learners who feel ‘on their own’ and currently cannot meet another student more than once unless they attend face-to-face tutorials. There may also
be positive benefits of promoting a sense of community in terms of encouraging students to take an active part in tutorials (see section 5.3.2) since interactions in online rooms have been shown to increase over time as groups of students and tutors have got to know each other, as long as the tutorial design permits this (Weiser, Blau and Eshet-Alkalai, 2018).

A sense of community promotes retention in face-to-face settings and the same is thought to be the case online (Tinto, 1993). Students in my study longed to connect with other students, to feel a sense of belonging. This finding was similar to a large-scale survey of students’ perceptions of barriers to online learning, where social interaction or lack of it had the strongest relationship with enjoyment and effectiveness of learning (Muilenburg and Berge, 2005). Not all students perceive community similarly. Feeling connected to other students was less of a concern for some of the participants in the study than others. This difference was not necessarily because these students were, as suggested elsewhere, self-sufficient ‘lone wolves’ (McDougall, 2019) but because, as shown by their learning network tables (appendix 10), they had more friends, family and colleagues with whom they could discuss their learning. Their descriptions of the learning communities they belong to at home and at work, as well as within the university, provide a good illustration of a ‘landscape of practice’ where knowledge is defined and applied within multiple communities of practice (Kubiak et al., 2015). Students shape and are shaped by their experiences within these communities.

Perceptions of community may also be related to gender. A previous quantitative study of perceptions of social community, learning community and perceived learning on 12 online courses in one university in the United States found that compared to their male peers, female students felt more connected to each other, perceived their online experiences to be more strongly aligned with educational values and goals and thought that they learnt more (Rovai and Baker, 2005). A large-scale study of differences in performance between face-to-face and online learning environments of students in institutions across Washington State also found that female students’ performance is relatively better than their male peers’ in the online environment (Xu and Jaggars, 2014). Based on the results of these two North American studies, it is possible that, had I succeeded in gathering narratives from male students, a lack of community may have been even more
apparent, although cultural differences may also play a role. In summary, however, some students may perceive online community differently to others.

An important aspect of tutorials for some students was gauging their own progress compared with others. These findings are similar to a study of students’ use of recorded language tutorials at the same institution (Pleines, 2020), where, although students did not always feel part of the group when listening to the recording, they still talked about those who participated in the live event as ‘students like me’. There are benefits of learners being able to position themselves within a group of peers (Mills, 2014). If someone like themselves can study successfully, then they believe that they will too. The reverse is also true. A student discovering that they are unlike their peers could have negative consequences and might lead them to think that they are unlikely to succeed. This finding has implications for organising tuition. A tutor who works with small numbers of students and knows them well might better predict which students might benefit most from working together.

Educators who have had to move their teaching online due to the coronavirus pandemic are discovering that it is much harder to have serendipitous, informal conversations within an online tutorial than it is face-to-face (Bryson and Andres, 2020). Whilst technology has enabled students to continue their learning and maintain supportive relationships with university staff, students’ interactions with their peers have been diminished, leading to reduced perceived student satisfaction in relation to developing and maintaining relationships with classmates and enjoyment of group projects or activities (Lee et al., 2021). In a building, students arriving together might strike up conversation. They might sit together or chat during a break. Online, however, opportunities for informal interaction are limited. Everyone in the room can hear the conversation and, unless private chat is enabled, can see written messages, which will also be visible on any recording. Within my institution, some modules (but not the module studied) provide student online rooms that students can access independently of tutors. These allow students to meet up with peers, but they first have to make a connection and arrange a meeting. Whilst this might be done via informal social media channels, such as WhatsApp or Facebook, this negotiation makes initiating an informal conversation overly complex and it may well be easier to remain within the informal social media spaces.
In online tutorial sessions, tutors can give students opportunities to talk in smaller groups in breakout rooms. This sometimes happened for the students in the main study, but others did not experience small group work at all. Deborah, Tilly, and Karen did experience it but did not feel comfortable or well supported. They certainly did not have the transformative breakout room experience that Steve, one of the participants in my initial study, enjoyed, or the positive experience that students in another study reported (Jung and Brady, 2020). This difference might reflect a lack of tutor skill and confidence around use of breakout rooms (Chandler, 2016; Breeze and Holford, 2021). Additionally, students had no choice about who they worked with; Karen said, ‘You’re just sort of put in these rooms and expected to communicate’ (Karen, interview, 10/04/20). Within some videoconferencing platforms, participants can be invited to move themselves into the room of their choice. This feature is not currently available in Adobe Connect™ but it might be useful in terms of creating user-friendly conversation spaces. The alternative of asking students who they would like to work with and allocating them to breakout rooms accordingly could make students anxious and is unfeasible for large groups. The opportunity to work with the same group on a regular basis is also a significant factor in determining the success of breakout room activities (Byrne, 2021) and the group tuition policy (see section 1.1.2.1) does not enable this currently.

5.3.4 Face-to-face contact

Despite the focus of the study being online tutorials, a priority for students was conveying how much they would prefer face-to-face tuition, even where students had not actually had this experience. The suggestion that distance can be ‘a positive principle, not a deficit’ (Bayne et al., 2020, p. 133) contrasts strongly with the dominant discourse that nothing can be as good as ‘live, face-to-face interaction’ (Nussbaum, 2016, p. xx). This yearning for face-to-face goes deeper than student preferences and has a basis in the higher education sector’s dependence on sedentarism (Bayne et al., 2020). Loosely derived from Heidegger, sedentarism is about contentment to dwell in one place, treating distance and lack of place as abnormal (Sheller and Urry, 2006). This sedentarism, it is suggested, results in the fetishization of the campus, even among distance learners who have no experience of visiting their university campus or plans to do so (Bayne, Gallagher and Lamb, 2014). Face-to-face relationships with places, events and people have been described as particularly
significant because eye contact facilitates both giving and receiving, whilst facial expressions give special knowledge (Sheller and Urry, 2006). It may have been an awareness of this lack of face-to-face contact, heightened by the COVID-19 lockdown, that prompted the extensive discussion about webcam use among tutors in my study, as the CRF discussion took place around the time of the first lockdown. Indeed, the coronavirus pandemic and the associated move of much of life online has broadly challenged conceptions of place with all universities currently situated in what might be termed ‘dispersed and sequestered bodies’, rather than in a building (Gourlay, 2020, p. 19). This may have implications for learners’ preferences and needs in the future.

What is not clear, however, is the extent to which webcams can facilitate a similar experience to sharing the same physical space. None of the students in the main study experienced webcams being enabled or used during the tutorials they attended, but some had experienced using them in other contexts and talked about the difference that they might make. Students’ narratives in the initial study suggested that my own use of a webcam, even briefly, seemed to make a difference that fits the description of teaching presence, the tutor using design and facilitation in a way that enhances social presence to achieve educational outcomes (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999) and this effect has been observed elsewhere (Sobko et al., 2020). Some of the tutors who participated in my study experimented with using webcams and tutor pictures. I have continued to do the same and have received positive feedback. It might also enhance perceptions of social presence for tutors to see students and students to see each other, but there are issues around webcams using excessive bandwidth, particularly with the Adobe Connect™ platform, and causing students to lose their connections to the online room. The perception of lecturers working in an Australian institution where student webcams are routinely available is that online tutorials can recreate a feeling of being ‘face-to-face’ but that this technology can both enhance learning by creating stronger connections between students and their peers and detract from learning if there are technical difficulties, such as those posed by low bandwidth (Chen, Dobinson and Kent, 2020). There have also been reports of students electing to turn their cameras off (Castelli and Sarvary, 2021; Smith and Kaya, 2021). Some people may want to keep the family members and intimate spaces in their backgrounds hidden. There may be tensions between
the yearning to see others’ faces that the students in my main study describe and whether they might feel able to make their own faces visible to others.

There may be variation in webcam preferences between people. An observational study of 2851 participants in an eight-week massive open online sociology course found that although the majority of students (59%) preferred to see the person speaking to them in video lectures, commenting that it helped them to feel connected and to focus, some felt that seeing the speaker’s face added extra cognitive load, whilst others had no preference or liked to switch between the two options (Kizilcec, Bailenson and Gomez, 2015). There may also be variation in preferences around being seen, with one study of 276 biology undergraduate students at a North American university finding that students from minority groups are more likely than others to be concerned about other people or their surroundings being visible (Castelli and Sarvary, 2021).

Going forward, when it comes to universities’ choice of platforms for online delivery and tutors’ choices around setting up online rooms, options that allow everyone to individually control whether to switch incoming and outgoing webcams on or off might enhance students’ experiences.

**5.3.5 Numbers of students**

The narratives suggest that tutorial experiences could be improved by considering the numbers of students attending each session, keeping them low enough that there is time for tutors to interact with every student and so that all students’ questions can be identified and answered. A group of 15 is suggested by Tilly as ‘ideal’ (Tilly, email interview, 18/02/20). This was the same number suggested for the earliest online tutorials for learning languages at the institution under study, but the rationale for this was that, allowing for absenteeism, there would be sufficient numbers attending the session for students to interact with their peers (Rosell-Aguilar, 2005). In a recent study of Swiss medical students’ preferences around synchronous online learning, even smaller groups of six or seven were suggested (Junod Perron et al., 2020).

This student preference for smaller groups has been identified previously (Bowler and Raiker, 2011; Lowe, Mestel and Williams, 2016; McDaniels, Pfund and Barnicle, 2016). Tutor feedback also suggests that it is easier to facilitate interaction in smaller groups of less than 10, although very small groups can limit interaction (Butler, 2018). A study of online learning at a community college in the
United States, which collected data through observation and interviews of students studying 35 different courses identified that the frequency and quality of interactions between students and their tutors related positively to academic performance (Jaggars and Xu, 2016). Having small groups where students can discuss their ideas with each other is also thought to be important for learning how to think critically (Nussbaum, 2016) and students have been found to participate more in a class of eight compared with a class of 19 (Hrastinski, 2007). Stommel, (2018) argues that whilst universities have financial incentives to make classes bigger, there are no pedagogical ones. Large classes make it challenging to provide enriching, interactive experiences (Thomas and Thorpe, 2019).

This preference for smaller groups has implications for practice in terms of the maximum numbers of students for which each tutorial is scheduled. When it is not feasible to limit the numbers, thought needs to be given to strategies which allow everyone’s contributions to be acknowledged, such as using polls or quizzes (Young and Nichols, 2017). Breakout rooms are a further option but using these requires more tutor skill and confidence than most of the other online room tools available. They were rarely experienced by the students in my study and there is some hesitancy about using them amongst tutors within my institution (Chandler, 2016; Butler, 2018; Breeze and Holford, 2021). Small group work can be effective, giving students the opportunity to discuss their ideas but only if well-planned, taking account of where students are up to in their studies and promoting confidence in their ability to contribute. The design of the collaborative activity is also significant; those which allow for plenty of student-tutor interaction, as well as student-student interaction, and thus have enhanced teacher presence, are more likely to contribute to students’ improved understanding of a topic (Yang, Ghislandi and Dellantonio, 2018). Using breakout rooms has implications for tutor skills and training. It also has implications for the amount of time allocated for planning sessions and setting up the online room, both of which take longer if the session is to include work in small groups.

5.4 Impact of hearing about students’ experiences on tutors’ thinking and practice

There are four aspects of how hearing about students’ experiences impacted on tutors’ thinking and practice that will be discussed here: the increased recognition of the significance of these experiences, the way in which they provide a different
way of reflecting on practice, the importance of tutor choice about engaging with narratives, and the impact on my own thinking and practice.

5.4.1 The significance of students’ experience in influencing practice

Educators are increasingly recognising the significance of students’ experience in improving their practice (Sherwood, 2020). When educators reflect on their students’ feedback in relation to their own teaching, positive changes in their teaching practice can be observed in subsequent feedback (Winchester and Winchester, 2014). Within many universities, tuition feedback is gathered formally through summative student evaluations. There are, however, barriers to learning from students’ experiences when framed in this way, including challenges to educators’ perceived autonomy, concerns around the difficulties of measuring teaching, and anxiety about the potential consequences of negative feedback (Surgenor, 2013). Within my own institution, these anxieties have led to a change in the way that tuition is evaluated, and since 2017, students’ comments about tuition are no longer available to individual tutors, only to managers and module teams. Whilst this change reduces tutor anxiety, it also means that tutors receive little feedback to reflect on, having only informal feedback which students volunteer unsolicited or which tutors request independently, perhaps by asking for feedback at the end of a tutorial, for example. These changes have resulted in reduced opportunities for tutors to reflect on practice.

5.4.2 A different way of reflecting on practice

My study provided an opportunity for tutor colleagues to reflect on practice in a different way. The vignettes of the students’ narratives were shared with tutors via a module tutor forum (MTF) and the common room forum (CRF) and my research website (Chandler, 2021). Then, a variety of spaces, principally the forums, but also email and telephone interviews, allowed tutors to share their responses. Instead of reflecting on feedback about students’ experiences of their own practice, as they might have done in the past, the tutors were reflecting on students’ experiences of other tutors’ tutorials. As the students’ narratives were anonymised, they may have seemed less threatening and easier to engage with than feedback from students attending the tutors’ own tutorials. In the case of the CRF discussion, the tutors knew that the narratives came from students studying a module that they did not tutor themselves, perhaps making the context feel even
safer. In contrast, some tutors may have felt wary of joining the conversation in case they inadvertently criticised others’ practice without understanding the context of the module.

It can be more effective for reflection on practice to take place in the company of others, rather than alone (Winchester and Winchester, 2014), and this was possibly the case within my study, tutors reflecting on students’ experiences together with colleagues in the familiar, online space of tutor forums. Although the forum is not a closed group and tutors must remain mindful that their posts are visible to others, including their managers, the environment is informal. The conversations evolved organically at tutors’ own pace and over a period of some weeks. In the common room forum, there were some humorous posts that created a relaxed atmosphere and may have facilitated the discussion (Emma, post 54, CRF, 29/06/20; Hudson, post 56, CRF, 29/06/20; Simon, post 57, CRF, 29/06/20; Emily, post 55, CRF, 29/06/20). Some tutors shared ideas (Sean, post 8, MTF, 20/02/20) or offered advice (Tony, post 82, CRF, 01/07/20), which were taken up by others. Tutors reflected extensively on their own experiences both as tutors and students and sometimes on their experiences in other roles too, such as a parent of a child having lessons online (Rosie, post 63, CRF, 30/06/20) and an online choir member (Kate, post 29, MTF, 29/05/20). This forum seemed to provide a supportive environment for those who participated to reflect on practice.

5.4.3 Tutor choice about engaging

There was a choice for tutors about whether to engage, firstly with the experiences conveyed in the students’ narratives, then with the forum conversations, and subsequently, whether to engage with my study. A limitation of this approach to sharing students’ experiences is that it is not possible to know whether there were tutors who read the narratives and/or the forum posts without contributing anything themselves. For the tutors who contributed, there was no requirement to commit to making changes to practice and yet four tutors reported doing so (Ishmael, post 80, CRF, 1/7/20; Margaret, post 83, CRF, 3/7/20; Simon, post 85, CRF, 3/7/20; Emma, post 87, CRF, 3/7/20). There is no way of knowing what impact these changes had from the perspective of the students in these tutors’ tutorials, however, or whether these changes were sustained in the long-term.

Thinking about the tutors who did engage with the discussion, there was also a choice about how to engage with the students’ experiences. Each person who
participates in the sharing of a narrative has agency in the telling of their story, expanding or reducing the story as they play their role, and this includes the readers (Riessman, 2008). Within my study, it was intended that the tutors who contributed would take the readers’ role, but I identified a tendency to use the discussion as a springboard to share their own narratives of experiences in online tutorials, either as tutors or students. Of the 11 tutors who commented on specific narratives, the majority picked up on just one aspect of one student’s experience that resonated with them. Eva and Theresa, who offered additional information outside of the forum discussions, were notable exceptions, engaging with multiple aspects of the experiences narrated by multiple students. Whilst the majority of tutors did not engage with the narratives in any depth, the study did provide an opportunity for those who contributed to reflect on and discuss aspects of their practice in teaching online, which they may not have done otherwise. Such opportunities can be significant in the context of higher education. Whilst many universities’ organisational strategies prioritise the development of skills for digital learning and teaching, only 13% of staff at 26 UK universities surveyed feel supported by their employers in this area (Langer-Crane et al., 2019).

5.4.4 The influence on my own thinking and practice

My study also provided an opportunity for me to reflect on my own practice in new ways and in depth. As with other educators who have used students’ narratives to gain an alternative perspective (Samah, 2013; Sherwood, 2020), I found that engaging with students’ experiences through narrative research helped me to appreciate aspects of their experiences that I would not have noticed otherwise, such as the impact of students’ multiple caring roles and identities on their learning experiences and the importance that students attach to learning in a group, both in terms of hearing the perspectives of others and in identifying themselves as learners who are able to succeed because they have realised that there are other students ‘just like me’. An in-depth analysis of the narratives enabled me to identify practical changes that I could make to my practice, which had not previously been highlighted in the feedback I have gathered at the end of tutorials. These changes had the potential to make an immediate difference to students’ experiences. Examples included always making tutorial slides available to students in advance, discouraging multiple simultaneous conversations in the online room when working together with another tutor and the importance of checking whether students in breakout rooms need more time to address the questions set. I have
found myself sharing snippets of the narratives of participants’ experiences when speaking with others, whether these are tutor colleagues within my own institution when we are co-teaching or other educators at conferences or via Twitter.

5.5 Limitations

I identified factors that limited my research in terms of the sample of student participants available, the limitations of the tutor data and in terms of the approach to research used.

5.5.1 Limitations of the sample

The sample of 10 student narratives studied came from a group that was varied in terms of geography, qualification pathway, study motivation, employment, and ability/disability. The sample was limited in other ways, however, all 10 of the students being female, all identifying as either white or Asian and all studying one module. Narratives collected from a more diverse group in terms of gender, ethnicity and across a wider range of modules at different levels of study may have helped to identify further important aspects of students’ experiences that educators can learn from.

The data gathered was also limited in that only three of the 10 study participants attended tutorial 1, the only tutorial session that was held in tutor groups, instead of clusters. Narratives collected from more students who had the opportunity of attending both types of tutorials and comparing their experiences would have been valuable.

5.5.2 The limitations of the tutor data

There are limitations to the extent to which the analysis of tutors’ posts can contribute to understanding students’ experiences of tutorials. The tutors did not make their contributions with research in mind and for many of the tutors, particularly in the CRF, the forum thread discussion was an opportunity to briefly share their own thoughts and experiences, rather than listen to those of the students. The tutors only had access to the vignettes of the narratives, rather than the full transcripts, and the method of analysis was not shared with them. An alternative approach where the researcher made a conscious decision to invite tutors to take the role of co-researchers and specified this intention when starting the forum discussion threads might have generated quite different data with a stronger focus on the students’ experiences.
5.5.3 The limitations of a narrative approach

There are limitations of a narrative approach to research, which are around the extent to which findings can be generalised when the sample is self-selecting, and a single researcher is responsible for analysing the data. The narratives may be useful and transferrable to readers' contexts, but it is readers' responsibility to make a judgment about this. Narratives represent unconscious emotions as well as conscious ones and, since experience and subjectivity cannot be completely realised in language, a further limitation is that stories are never complete (Andrews, 2013). The limitations can be minimised by choosing appropriate research methods and applying processes to enhance research credibility, as described in section 3.16 and I have endeavoured to do this.

5.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the findings of my study in relation to my research questions and the literature around synchronous online tuition, considering how narratives of students' experiences of online tutorials vary in terms of differences in their social and material environments, as well as differences in the tutorials themselves. It has discussed five areas of perceived need that drive the preferences students express around synchronous online tuition in HSC. These relate to communication in the online room, being active and hearing other students' perspectives, building relationships and community, face-to-face contact, and numbers of students. It has also discussed the ways in which the students' narratives have influenced some tutors' thinking and practice, including my own, by providing a different way of engaging with students' feedback, in which there were choices around engaging. The conclusions and recommendations from the discussion will be the focus of chapter 6. As explained in section 1.2.1, I recognise my positionality as a researcher practitioner and use the term 'we' when writing about the implications for tutors' practice.
Chapter 6 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter begins by considering how this study has addressed the research questions:

1. How do the narratives of students’ experiences of synchronous online tutorials in a health and social care module vary and what factors account for this variation?
2. What can we learn about the needs which drive the preferences students express around synchronous online tuition in health and social care?
3. How does hearing about students’ experience of synchronous online tuition impact on tutors’ reports of their thinking and practice?

In doing so, the chapter identifies implications, both in terms of my own professional practice and the wider implications for those for whom my research findings hold potential significance for their areas of work or study (Figure 2).

The chapter goes on to reflect on the contribution of this study and makes suggestions for future research in the area of synchronous online learning in HSC.

6.1 Learning as embedded in students’ contexts

A primary conclusion to be drawn from my analysis of the students’ narratives is that educators need an awareness of learning as embedded in students’ contexts, that it is relational and embodied, entangled with the material world, as well as with technology. When tutors see a list of students’ names in an online tutorial room, we need to remember what we cannot see: that the students present have multiple identities and roles and might be attending a tutorial whilst also simultaneously caring for children or other family members. Students are joining the session from intimate spaces with multiple distractions and may be feeling guilty about having negotiated time for themselves. The students’ individual contexts affect how they participate in the session. Providing interactive sessions, where students are regularly asked to participate, might limit the impact of internal distractions for students, such as news websites or other digital objects, and help students to focus. What is more challenging for tutors is to support the students who are unable to participate fully in sessions because they are caring for family members at the same time. Support might include offering different ways of participating, via writing as well as speaking, and retaining an awareness that there may be some parts of a tutorial where all a student can do is to listen because their baby has
woken up or they are collecting their child from a club, for example. We can also accept that some students might not be able to be present for the whole session. Providing information about the availability of recordings can help. Making slides available in advance of tutorials is also helpful and not only for students with disabilities, but for all students, as they might make notes on them during the tutorial session.

Educators also need an awareness that the learning that happens in tutorials does not stop with the student but is frequently shared with family members, colleagues, and friends. For HSC tutors there are important implications of this, as the information shared has the potential to change practice within families and services beyond those attending the tutorial, thereby affecting people’s lives and the care that they both give and receive. We have a responsibility as tutors to ensure that information is both accurate and balanced in nature. We also have a duty of care to ensure that ideas are not only well understood by the students themselves but that they develop the skills needed to share this learning unequivocally with others.

6.2 Tutorials that meet students’ needs

For the students in my study, there were strong preferences which I interpreted as expressing underlying needs for tutorials to be active experiences and to hear the perspectives of other students. Students had multiple reasons for not wanting to use their microphone, but they all wanted opportunities to contribute to tutorials in other ways and for everyone’s contributions to be valued and acknowledged. There were benefits identified to learning in smaller groups and there was a longing for a face-to-face connection. Face-to-face tutorials were perceived, even for the students who had not had the opportunity of attending one, as better meeting the need to build closer relationships, both with tutors and with other students.

Tutors can try to meet these needs in two ways, by being and by doing. Firstly, the tutor can be the person that the students need by being friendly, understanding of the challenges that distance learners face, and by being helpful and encouraging. This helps students to feel that they can contribute and that their contributions will be valued and acknowledged. It may also help co-tutors to feel similarly positive about working together. Furthermore, tutors can adapt our pedagogy to be comfortable with disciplined improvisation (Sawyer, 2004), where
the tutor does some planning and offers some guidance to structure the conversation but then allows new ideas to emerge through a collaborative discussion. Knowing that students notice how well tutors work together, we can make efforts to be a tutor who establishes good relationships with co-tutors and plans sessions effectively. We can develop our confidence in our use of the university’s chosen online tutorial software and consider how we might enable students to gain this confidence too. We can develop an appreciation of how technology and content influence or constrain each other (technological content knowledge), as well as the affordances and constraints of the particular medium (technological pedagogical knowledge). We can develop knowledge that integrates content, pedagogy, and technology (technological pedagogical content knowledge). This includes knowing about students’ prior knowledge, how concepts can be represented via technologies, how pedagogical techniques that use technologies can be constructively used to convey content, what makes learning concepts difficult or easy and how technology might help build students’ understandings (Koehler et al., 2004; Koehler, Mishra and Cain, 2013).

Secondly, there are practical things that a tutor can do to take account of the needs that drive the preferences students express. To take account of students’ preference for active sessions, where everyone has an opportunity to contribute, tutors can acknowledge differences in power and consider these when setting up the online room and granting privileges. We can provide students with the slides in advance of the session and design activities that minimise student anxiety, but which allow ideas to emerge and everyone to contribute comfortably, including the use of polls, posing ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, and avoiding multiple simultaneous conversations. Whilst tutors have no direct control over group sizes, we can respond to students’ preference to learn in smaller groups through the use of breakout rooms and provide opportunities for students to connect with other ‘students like me’. As extensively discussed by the tutor participants in this study, we can respond to students’ preference for face-to-face connection by using a webcam (briefly) or a picture of ourselves. We can also take the time to expand our understanding of what might work well in terms of activities to support synchronous online learning through training and discussion with HSC tutor colleagues and other educators.
This leads to thinking about implications for managers and policy makers within universities. It is important to remember that technology and pedagogy are not separate entities but mutually determined. The approaches that tutors can use in online rooms are facilitated or limited by the technology available to us. Policy makers have power around the choice of platforms provided, how technology is used through policy and training, and the default settings in online rooms. Continuing to provide technology that enables students to contribute their ideas in a variety of ways, including anonymously, needs to be a priority. As discussed by the tutors within this study, the provision of platforms that allow more extensive webcam use and for students to individually control their view of tutor and student webcams might also enhance students’ experiences.

Providing high quality training and support for tutors to develop their knowledge and skills around online learning and teaching is also a priority. This involves giving tutors opportunities to develop the levels of pedagogical content knowledge to feel comfortable with the disciplined improvisation required to make online tuition effective (Sawyer, 2004) and the technological knowledge needed to use technology productively in our teaching and continually adapt as technologies develop (Koehler, Mishra and Cain, 2013). We also need an in-depth understanding of how three types of knowledge – content, pedagogical, and technological – relate to each other in our own teaching context (Koehler, Mishra and Cain, 2013). This suggests that there need to be subject specific opportunities to do this, rather than staff development opportunities always being cross-faculty. The provision of financial incentives to make use of the training available might increase uptake.

Both tutors and students require more operational and interactional skills as the provision of synchronous online learning develops. For tutors, these skills can be developed in separate training sessions but for students, their skills need to be developed in ways that make the best use of their limited time. One way of doing this is to introduce and practice new skills at the point where they are required but the time to do so needs to be built into the tutorial session and tutors need the relevant skills to be able to facilitate this.

A further priority is to consider the impact of tuition policies on students’ experiences. For the students in this study, a sense of community was missing in online tutorials because of the tutorial policy in place. Currently, most students
within my institution do not have most tutorials within their tutor group but can attend tutorials with any tutor (see section 1.1.2.1). In May 2021, the university announced a review of the Group Tuition Policy, recognising the level of concern that tutors and managers have expressed about its impact on the tutor-student relationship. I conclude that this is not the only rationale for reviewing this policy. Also of concern is its impact on opportunities for students to build relationships with each other and feel part of a community. With so many choices of tutorial session, students rarely meet the same peer twice. My interpretation of my study’s findings is that students would like the opportunity to build relationships with other students and that their learning would benefit from the opportunity to meet the same students more often. This need aligns with a current strategic priority of the university, which is to build community and enable students to develop a greater sense of belonging. The tuition policy needs to be reviewed with a focus on who benefits and who is disadvantaged. The current policy may suit the university because it makes large numbers of tutorials easier to manage and cover easy to arrange if one tutor is unavailable, but it does not enable the development of enduring communities that would best support learning. When determining policy, it is also important to ensure that student numbers in each tutorial are low enough so that every student has the opportunity to interact with the tutor.

Team teaching or co-teaching, which is also part of the university’s tutorial strategy, was a feature of many of the tutorials that students experienced but it was not always perceived as helpful from the students’ perspective. It led to multiple simultaneous conversations that could be hard to follow, and some pairs of tutors were perceived to work together more successfully than others. How well tutors work together is something that students notice, and which impacts on their tutorial experience. Where co-teaching is deemed necessary, managers could improve students’ experiences by thinking about which tutors might work well together. Training around the pedagogy of team teaching could be beneficial, as could building explicit time for shared planning and reflection between co-tutors into tutors’ contracts.

In summary, my understanding of the preferences students expressed in their narratives suggests that tutorials might better meet students’ needs by tutors both being and doing and by the university supporting tuition effectively through provision of appropriate technology, policy, and training.
6.3 Hearing about students’ experience of synchronous online tuition

In relation to my third research question about how hearing about students’ experience of synchronous online tuition impacts on tutors’ reports of their thinking and practice, I have concluded that reflecting on students’ experiences of other tutors’ tutorials provides a valuable opportunity to consider practice. I identified a tendency for many of the tutors to use the discussion as a springboard to share their own narratives of experiences in online tutorials, rather than engaging with the students’ narratives in any depth, but these discussions in the company of others in the familiar, online environment of tutor forums helped tutors to identify new possibilities. In this case, tutors focused particularly on the benefits of students seeing tutors’ faces via either briefly using a webcam or using a picture of themselves and they discussed the practicalities of doing so at length. Aside from these informal conversations, tutors can also learn from students’ narratives in other ways. For example, within my own institution, examples from the narratives in my study have already been used in staff development materials.

6.4 Reflections on contributions to theory and practice

This section will explain how my study contributes to theory and practice by providing a detailed insight into students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition that was not available previously and rectifying an imbalance in terms of the research available around synchronous online learning in different subject areas. It will also explain how my study contributes to the theory and practice of research through its adaption of Voice Centred Relational Method and the unconventional use of the Community of Inquiry framework as an additional deductive lens within a qualitative study.

6.4.1 Detailed insight into students’ experiences

My first contribution to theory and practice has been to provide insight into students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition in more depth than some previous studies, which predominately focus on surveying students’ preferences or observing their interactions. The significance of student voices has sometimes been overlooked in research in technology enhanced learning (Levy, 2015) and my study has focused on redressing this. Data from the students’ learning network tables, diaries and interviews have provided detailed descriptions of what students are thinking, feeling, and doing during and after tutorials, as well as information
about their social and material environments, giving a rich, alternative lens with which to view what is happening in online rooms.

This is not the first time that a narrative approach has been used to explore students’ experiences of higher education, but when I first reviewed the literature at the start of my study, there seemed to be few instances of a narrative approach being used in relation to experiences of synchronous online tuition. I found just one study which analysed narratives, but it used a discursive psychological approach and focused on emotion in language learning, rather than students’ experiences more broadly (de los Arcos, Coleman and Hampel, 2009). Coinciding with the shift to online learning since 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, some educators have realised the rich potential of learning from students’ lived experiences, such as the Students as Partners movement at an Australian university (WSU Students as Partners, 2020) and the Enhanced Digital Teaching and Learning in Irish Universities project (Byrne, 2021). With a survey of higher education staff across the UK reporting far more concerns than affordances related to this move to online teaching (Watermeyer et al., 2020), my findings and those of similar studies are of interest beyond my own institution.

Many studies have used survey or interview data to establish students’ preferences around synchronous online tuition, but my study has been able to explore the multiple reasons behind some of these preferences, as well as exploring the detail of how students’ experiences vary. Gaining insights into research participants’ behaviours is one of the benefits of using qualitative methods aligned with an interpretative approach (Scotland, 2012). For example, whilst other studies have identified that students often prefer to avoid using the microphone (Middleton and Smith, 2013; Smith and Smith, 2014), they did not identify the reasons for this preference, whereas my study has uncovered multiple and diverse explanations, giving educators a more detailed picture of what is happening to inform our practice.

6.4.2 The focus on students studying health and social care

A further contribution of my study is to focus particularly on students studying an HSC module. Few previous studies have considered synchronous online learning in HSC or nursing (Foronda and Lippincott, 2014; O’Flaherty and Laws, 2014; Chandler, 2016) or studied them in depth. This means that my findings have particular significance for this subject area. For example, my study has highlighted
how students studying HSC feel that they particularly benefit from opportunities to interact with their peers and to hear the perspectives of other students during synchronous online tutorials. This may be related to the strong relationship between this area of study and professional practice and may not be so important for students from other disciplines where this is not the case. The caring professions, particularly professionals working with children and young people, have a focus on working collaboratively and have codes of practice which promote listening to different perspectives. Knowing that the students in my study benefit from opportunities to interact with their peers and from hearing the perspectives of other students has important implications. Firstly, HSC tutors need to design appropriate tutorial activities that allow interaction and enable students to share their ideas. Secondly, universities need to allow sufficient time for HSC tutors to plan and prepare such tutorials. They also need to ensure the availability of tutor training to provide HSC tutors with the necessary skills to prepare and facilitate interactive tutorials.

6.4.3 Use of the Community of Inquiry framework as a theoretical model

A further contribution of my study is my use of the CoI model as a framework for narrative research. When deciding on a theoretical framework, I considered different possibilities. I considered two in depth: Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) and the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 1999). Whilst many students studying HSC at my institution are potential members of communities of practice in relation to their practice of HSC, all are potential members of communities of inquiry in relation to their studies. Sometimes, these communities will overlap, as students often discuss their practice within their studies, making connections between theory and practice. In respect of my study of synchronous online tuition, however, tutorial communities seemed best viewed as communities of inquiry because of the framework’s focus on learning processes, including critical thinking, the significance of identifying with the group, and its recognition of interconnectedness between different elements of social, teaching, and cognitive presence. To my knowledge, however, this model has not previously been used as a framework for research conducted with a narrative approach. It has its own survey instrument (Athabasca University, no date), which has often been used by researchers to quantify evidence of the different types of presence detailed in the framework.
My study has shown that the framework can be usefully applied in a qualitative study, both to conceptualise what is happening in the online room when students describe their experiences and to provide an additional lens through which to analyse the narratives shared. Searching for evidence of social, teaching, and cognitive presence proved insightful. I also chose to look for evidence of emotional presence (Cleveland-Innes and Campbell, 2012) and learning presence (Shea et al., 2012; Kilis and Yildirim, 2018; Blaine, 2019), even though Garrison, one of the framework’s original authors, disagrees with these proposed additions to the framework. Garrison argues that any separation between teaching and learning is artificial, and there is insufficient evidence to warrant the inclusion of emotional presence separate from social presence (Garrison, 2017). Whilst following the rationale for this disagreement, I found it helpful to identify these presences separately for the purposes of my analysis. The instances of emotional presence identified could be usefully compared with the feelings I poems generated by the second listening in the VCRM process, whilst instances of learning presence could be usefully compared with the action I poems. These comparisons enabled me to build more detailed overall pictures of students’ experiences.

6.4.4 Adapting Voice Centred Relational Method

My choice of Voice Centred Relational Method as a method for analysing the data has facilitated a different approach to studying students’ experiences, which has added to the insight available from previous research. Through the different listenings, including the I poems created and listening to the contrapuntal voices of the personal, the communal and the institutional context, aspects of students’ experiences could be heard that might otherwise be hidden or inaccessible, even from the students themselves. I have contributed to the theory around VCRM by adapting it in two ways.

My first adaptation was to create I poems that spoke of three different parts of the student self in terms of identity, feelings, and actions. These highlighted some key aspects of students’ experiences and heightened their visibility.

My second adaptation of this method was to add an additional listening to identify the different presences from the CoI framework within the narratives. The addition of this deductive lens proved to be a valuable way of understanding each student’s experience and the relationships between the different types of presence in the
online tutorial sessions that they attended. It added an additional layer of evidence for the analysis that would not have been available otherwise.

Through choosing VCRM and adapting and adding to its different stages, I was able to interrogate the data from different perspectives and then bring these perspectives together, comparing and reflecting on the information gained to give a detailed picture of each students’ experience and confidently arrive at robust conclusions.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

I have identified five areas in which additional research into students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition might be valuable: comparing the experiences of students of HSC with those studying other subjects, considering the experiences of a broader group of HSC students in terms of gender and ethnicity, examining the impact of tuition policy on student experience, further research that considers how tutors respond to hearing students’ experiences, and the impact of changing times and technologies.

6.5.1 Research around different subject areas

My study has focused on the experiences of students studying HSC. It has found that the students who took part had a strong preference for taking an active part in tutorials and hearing their peers’ perspectives. There is potential for further research to explore whether the expectations of those attending tutorials in HSC differ from students in other faculties. As explained in section 6.4.2, practitioners in caring professions have a strong focus on working collaboratively and codes of practice which promote listening to different perspectives. This may not always be the case in other subject areas.

6.5.2 Variation according to gender and ethnicity

All the participants in this study were women who, on registering with the university, identified as either white or Asian. There is potential for further research to explore whether a more diverse group in terms of gender and ethnicity experience synchronous online tuition any differently. In HSC tutorials, students who identify with other groups are usually in the minority and this may affect how they perceive communication in the online room and how they feel about interacting with other students. It would be valuable to learn from their experiences and incorporate their voices.
6.5.3 Variation according to tuition policy and practice

This study has considered students’ experiences within the context of a very particular approach to organising tuition within my own institution, where students do not have most tutorials within their tutor group but can attend tutorials with any tutor (see section 1.1.2.1). As discussed in section 5.3.3, this Group Tuition Policy has implications in terms of limiting the extent to which students can build relationships and feel part of a community. In May 2021, the university announced that it would undertake an assessment of this policy and this review is underway.

Whilst the policy that frames this approach to tuition is applied across much of the university, there are exceptions, including for some postgraduate students studying education, where students attend tutorials in consistent groups of 12-15. Within the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care some new nursing modules are exempt from this policy. Starting in October 2020, students have regular enquiry-based learning tutorials in the same group of eight students with one consistent tutor. It will be important to evaluate this change in policy and the associated experience of tuition in smaller, enduring groups for undergraduate students. Previous studies of students’ evaluations of their experiences of enquiry or problem-based synchronous online learning in health-related professions suggest that this mode of learning can be effective, although working through the same problems online can take longer than it does face-to-face (Dennis, 2003) and students perceive that it is harder to build relationships online, which can limit the depth of discussion (Erickson et al., 2020). It would be valuable to learn from the experiences of the nursing students at my institution because, whilst they have regular enquiry-based learning tutorials with their own tutor group, these happen alongside tutorials for other modules that are organised in the way described in this thesis. They could compare both approaches.

Co-teaching or team teaching is another area that could be researched further in the context of synchronous online tuition. Some students in this study were able to compare their experiences of one or two tutors running the tutorials, sometimes identifying benefits to having just one tutor because this avoided the possibility of multiple simultaneous conversations. Where there were two tutors, students noted that they took different approaches to co-teaching and sometimes students’ experiences were affected by how well tutors worked together. It would be valuable to investigate further what co-teaching strategies universities could
implement to enhance online tutorial experiences and how such strategies might best be shared with tutors.

6.5.4 Tutors as co-researchers
There is potential for further research that considers how tutors respond to hearing students’ experiences. This study was limited because tutors did not make their contributions with research in mind and for many, the forum discussion was an opportunity to briefly share their own thoughts and experiences, rather than listen to those of the students. The tutors only had access to a small proportion of the data and the method of analysis was not shared with them. An alternative approach where tutors take a more extensive role as full co-researchers might generate quite different data and have further potential for embedding an understanding of students’ experiences in tutors’ practice.

6.5.5 Changing times and technologies
The arrival of the coronavirus pandemic in the UK in March 2020 ushered in a new era for synchronous online learning. What had been for many years considered an inferior alternative for those unable to attend classes in person suddenly became the medium through which every university had to operate, even whilst many students and educators struggled with this loss of place. All academics had to creatively improvise workspaces within their homes and the screen became a ‘portal’ through which academic professional identity must be performed (Gourlay, 2020). This change has had a range of consequences for students’ online tutorial experiences, both positive and negative. Greatly increased use of the Internet has led to many users of online platforms experiencing connectivity issues. Software companies providing platforms for online web conferencing have new customers and more money to invest in rapidly improving their products. Distance educators’ expertise is now sought after, and courses and webinars have been set up to advise those working in other universities. Perhaps most significant of all, synchronous online communication has become a much more ordinary part of life and distance learning is no longer always considered second-best. With all these changes happening apace, it follows that students’ experiences of synchronous online learning will change too and there is scope for further research that charts these developments and their impact.
6.6 Chapter summary

Essentially, this enquiry was about finding new ways of listening to students’ learning experiences to inform practice in higher education. The use of an experience-centred narrative approach and analysis of narratives using VCRM have proved valuable in providing new insights into students’ experiences.

My analysis of students’ stories of their own experience of synchronous online tuition in HSC has emphasised the importance of seeing learning as relational and embodied, entangled with the material world and students’ own social and familial environments, as well as with technology. This thesis has provided suggestions about the ways in which tutors can enhance students’ tutorial experiences, both by being the sort of tutor that students need them to be and by taking some practical steps to make students feel welcome, included, and valued. It has made recommendations for educators around considering the technology used, the policies in place to organize and support tuition and the training and support required by tutors and students. It has also made suggestions for future research around synchronous online tuition in HSC.
References


Oyarzun, B., Hancock, C., Salas, S. and Martin, F. (2021) ‘Synchronous meetings, community of inquiry, COVID-19, and online graduate teacher education’, *Journal*


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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Student participant information sheet

Human Research Ethics Committee

Research study participant information sheet

An investigation into health and social care students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

General information about the research study and collected research data

The purpose of the research is to gain students’ views on their experiences of online tutorials. These will be shared anonymously with tutors to help them explore the ways to best support students’ learning. The study looks particularly at how taking part in tutorials can help students to feel part of a learning community, how tutorials can support students to understand the ideas within the module and the role of the tutor(s) within the tutorial.

Kathy Chandler, who is a research student with the Open University, is running the study and some students studying [module name] are being invited to take part. Students who studied the module last year took part in the pilot study and helped to shape the research.

As part of your study of [module name], you will have the opportunity to attend regular tutorials, most of which are held in online rooms. These are designed to help you understand the module materials, prepare for assignments, and feel part of the learning community. The study involves students sharing their experiences of the learning networks they are part of and of one or more online [module name] tutorials.

If you have any questions regarding participation in the research, please contact Kathy. Her email address is [email address] and her phone number is [phone number]. Kathy’s research is supervised by Dr Alison Fox and you may also contact Alison if you have any questions. Her email address is: [email address].

The study has been approved by the OU Human Research Ethics Committee and Student Research Project Panel.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part?

Taking part involves attending at least one online tutorial during your study of the module (these are the tutorials that all students normally attend, so you do not need to attend any extra tutorials) and making some notes on a diary sheet about your learning networks and tutorial experiences afterwards to share with Kathy via email. This should take no more than 20 minutes per tutorial. Kathy will then contact you to arrange a convenient time for a follow up interview by phone. The interview will last no more than 45 minutes and will be recorded.

Participation is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. Your decision will not influence any aspect of your tuition, including tutorials and the marking of your assignments.
If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time up until the data is anonymised at the end of June 2020 and without giving a reason.

Taking part in the research will help you to reflect on what you have gained from tutorials personally and how it links with your learning. It will also help The Open University know what students need from tutorials, supporting future [module name] students, as well as helping students of different modules within the School of Health, Wellbeing and Social Care.

How will the data I provide be used?
The information you provide will be stored in password protected, encrypted documents on a secure server. The interview recording will be transcribed and checked with you. It will not be shared with any third parties. Once you have checked the transcript, the recording will be destroyed. At this point, all your data will be anonymised.

Your words may be anonymously directly quoted in material produced from the research, including a doctoral thesis and a website about the research. They may also be used to develop online tuition within The Open University and for journal articles to inform practice in higher education more widely.

The diary content and transcript of the interview will be deposited in a specialist data centre after they have been anonymised, so they can be used for future research and learning in accordance with the OU Research Data Management Policy.

Your right to withdraw from the study
You have the right to withdraw from the study and ask for any data you have provided to be removed up until the end of June 2020 when all the data will be anonymised by contacting Kathy at [email address].

Data Protection
You have a number of rights as a data subject:

- To request a copy of the personal data we have about you.
- To rectify any personal data which is inaccurate or incomplete.
- To restrict the processing of your data.
- To receive a copy of your data in an easily transferrable format (if relevant).
- To erase your data.
- To object to us processing your data.

If you are concerned about the way we have processed your personal information, you can contact the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). Please visit the ICO’s website for further details.

How do I agree to take part?
If you would like to volunteer to take part, please complete the attached consent form and email it to [email address].
Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet.

http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/
01/08/19
HREC/2997/Chandler
Appendix 2 – Student participant consent form

Informed consent for an investigation into health and social care students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition

Kathy Chandler, research student, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies

1. Taking part in the study
I have read and understood the study information dated 01/08/19 or it has been read to me. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time up until the data has been anonymised, without having to give a reason.

I understand that taking part in the study involves attending at least one [module name] tutorial and making some written notes on a diary sheet about my learning networks and tutorial experiences to share with Kathy via email, followed by a telephone interview. I agree to the interview being recorded.

2. Use of the information in the study
I understand that information I provide will be used for the following purposes: a doctoral thesis; a website about the study; to develop online tuition within The Open University; and for journal articles to inform practice in higher education more widely.

I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or my contact details, will not be shared beyond the study team.

I understand that my data, including my consent form, will be stored in password protected, encrypted documents. The interview recording will be destroyed by the end of June 2020 once the transcript of the recording has been checked with me and I have confirmed it is accurate. At this point, all data will be anonymised.

I agree to joint copyright of the written diary material to Kathy Chandler.

3. Future use and reuse of the information by others
I give permission for the diary content and transcripts of the interview data that I provide to be deposited in a specialist data centre after they have been anonymised by removing my name and any identifying details, so they can be used for future research and learning in accordance with the OU Data Research Management Policy.

4. Signature

_________________________ _________________________ _______________________
Name of participant [IN CAPITALS] Signature Date

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: HREC/2997/Chandler

http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/
Appendix 3 – Diary sheet example from Tilly

Learning network table and diary sheet

Please complete the sections below to show your own learning network and share your experiences of online tutorials. When you have completed as much of this sheet as you can, please save it and email it to Kathy Chandler at [email address]. As explained in the information sheet, Kathy will then contact you to arrange a time for a follow up interview.

1. **Who do you talk with about your studies?**

Please complete the table below to show who you talk with about the ideas you are learning from your study of [module name] and how often you do this by putting a mark e.g. X for each person. So, for example, if you talk about your studies with two friends sometimes, put two marks in the personal contacts/sometimes box. Add a number e.g. X1 and X2 and make your own separate note of the names of the people, so that you can remember them later at the follow up interview. If you have discussions with a whole group of people e.g. using a forum or Facebook, use a G to represent the group e.g. G1.

If you do not discuss what you are learning with any of the types of contact listed below, leave that row of the table blank. If you can think of another category of people with whom you discuss your studies, please add this to the final row(s) of the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of contact</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal contacts e.g. family, friends</td>
<td>X1 X2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work colleagues</td>
<td>X1 X2 X3 X4 X5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other OU students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. **Your experiences of [module name] online tutorial(s)**

Please type your notes about your [module name] online tutorial(s) in the tables below. There is no ‘right’ way to do this; just write your story of what happened in your own words. It is fine to write just a few sentences in response to the questions or as much text as captures your reflections. If there are any questions you prefer not to answer, please feel free to leave them out. Please do not refer to individuals in the tutorial by name. Instead, refer to tutor 1, tutor 2 and student 1, student 2, for example, and make your own separate note of the names of the people so that you can remember them at the follow up interview.
### Tutorial 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of session:</th>
<th>Everything you need to know about [module name]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of session:</td>
<td>[Exact date redacted].10.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where were you when you joined the tutorial and what was going on around you?</td>
<td>In kitchen/diner on laptop. Family had just had dinner so was quiet for once!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sort of activities happened during the tutorial and what did the tutor(s) do?</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How easy or hard was it to contribute your ideas and build relationships with others?</td>
<td>Easy, during and after the tutorial there were some interactions on the tutor group forum between me and some of the tutor group present at the tutorial. Encouraged to ask questions in the comments box during the tutorial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you learn or understand better as a result of the tutorial?</td>
<td>How to get in contact with tutor if I needed to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel during the tutorial?</td>
<td>Enthusiastic towards the module content, impressed with the tutors – very welcoming and approachable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did/will you do differently as a result of attending the tutorial?</td>
<td>I commented on the forum to interact with some of the people on the tutorial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other comments?</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tutorial 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of session:</th>
<th>Success with assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of session:</td>
<td>[Exact date redacted].11.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where were you when you joined the tutorial and what was going on around you?</td>
<td>At home on laptop in kitchen/diner. Family getting and eating dinner around me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sort of activities happened during the tutorial and what did the tutor(s) do?</td>
<td>No activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How easy or hard was it to contribute your ideas and build relationships with others?</td>
<td>Was able to talk in comments box but there were 32 attendees. Session was quite rushed. Everyone seemed to be quite restrained – maybe because for some it was their first tutorial for this module.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you learn or understand better as a result of the tutorial?</td>
<td>To use tables. 5% leeway on word count rather than 10% on my other modules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel during the tutorial?</td>
<td>Didn’t feel very engaged. A lot of it was about how to write essays – intros, conclusions, referencing etc; all things that I have done for the last 3 modules!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did/will you do differently as a result of attending the tutorial?</td>
<td>The tutor introduced an idea of using tables to fill in whilst working through the weeks to help with notes and talked through a planner which I found quite useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other comments?</td>
<td>Was expecting the tutorial to last for two hours but it was 1 hour and 15 minutes. It felt a bit rushed. The main tutor didn’t always appear to value the input the second tutor gave.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Tutorial 3

**Title of session:** Success with assignments  
**Date of session:** [Exact date redacted], 11.19

**Where were you when you joined the tutorial and what was going on around you?**  
At home on laptop in kitchen/diner. No interruptions from family!

**What sort of activities happened during the tutorial and what did the tutor(s) do?**  
Give idea on activities on defining wellbeing, what makes a good assignment, leaving comments anonymously on the slide or identifiable in the chat box.

**How easy or hard was it to contribute your ideas and build relationships with others?**  
Easy to write in the chat box without feeling judged. Not afraid to write a wrong answer or one that not to sure on.

**What did you learn or understand better as a result of the tutorial?**  
The need to think of the pro’s and con’s for each point, that there is a library course on critical thought and writing available on the OU site which they recommended doing.

**How did you feel during the tutorial?**  
Confident, encouraged, valued, listened to.

**What did/will you do differently as a result of attending the tutorial?**  
Print off the marking grid to see if I have answered each area. Use linking sentences to add cohesion to my paragraphs.

**Any other comments?**  
The tutors suggested goggling linking words to add a variety, having a word bank and making a word file contain all the references so far on this module which can be used in further essays.

### Tutorial 4

**Title of session:** Society and Health  
**Date of session:** [Exact date redacted], 12.19

**Where were you when you joined the tutorial and what was going on around you?**  
At home on laptop in kitchen/diner. No interruptions from family!

**What sort of activities happened during the tutorial and what did the tutor(s) do?**  
We anonymously wrote what we would do differently for the next tma and an activity concerning a video we watched. The tutor talked about some of the things we wrote and gave tips and examples. (there were 11 students so they were able to comment on each)

**How easy or hard was it to contribute your ideas and build relationships with others?**  
We were encouraged to write in the chat box and join in with the activities.

**What did you learn or understand better as a result of the tutorial?**  
More information about the online activity that needs to be completed for the tma and how it should be attached to the file.

**How did you feel during the tutorial?**  
Encouraged. Confident that I can do the next tma well.

**What did/will you do differently as a result of attending the tutorial?**  
Try to plan by making notes about arguments and go with the two better arguments that grab me and try to provide a clear link with part one to part two.

**Any other comments?**  
This tutorial had the main tutor talking through the slides, with the co-tutor manning the chat box and when they did pass a comment it was respected.
## Tutorial 5

**Title of session:** Society and Health  
**Date of session:** [Exact date redacted].1.20  
Where were you when you joined the tutorial and what was going on around you?  
At home on laptop in kitchen/diner. Family having dinner around me  
What sort of activities happened during the tutorial and what did the tutor(s) do?  
Same as previous tutorial (same slides)  
How easy or hard was it to contribute your ideas and build relationships with others?  
Really easy. The tutors commented on almost all the messages in the chat box and activities so made it feel like our comments were appreciated.  
What did you learn or understand better as a result of the tutorial?  
How to choose which areas I will focus on in my TMA by making mind map style notes on a few issues and then focus on the one with the most.  
How did you feel during the tutorial?  
Encouraged – I do like both these tutors as they work well together and are both friendly and understanding of the challenges OU students face due to other commitments.  
What did/will you do differently as a result of attending the tutorial?  
Try to write critically in the TMA and focus on a couple of points rather than try to cover everything I have learnt in the module so far.  
Any other comments?  
Having the slides from the previous tutorial helped make my note taking easier. I like to be able to have a printout of the slides while the tutorial takes places which makes my notes easier to understand. The tutor on this tutorial sent the link for the slides just before the tutorial had started. It would be handy for the slides to be sent before tutorials so all students can make notes next to the relevant slide.

## Tutorial 6

**Title of session:** Writing your report  
**Date of session:** [Exact date redacted].2.20  
Where were you when you joined the tutorial and what was going on around you?  
Initially on my mobile whilst collecting my daughter from her club (internet kept cutting out and the sound stopped when my phone went into ‘sleep’ mode) and then at home on laptop in kitchen/diner.  
What sort of activities happened during the tutorial and what did the tutor(s) do?  
We shared our ideas on our understanding of key phrases like formal/informal learning, inclusive practice etc. The tutors encouraged us to take part in the activities and in the chat box.  
How easy or hard was it to contribute your ideas and build relationships with others?  
Both tutors were very friendly and positive about all the comments/contributions in the chat box. They asked us to vote on whether we wanted our comments visible in the recording.  
What did you learn or understand better as a result of the tutorial?  
The difference between writing a report and  
How did you feel during the tutorial?  
Encouraged by what the tutors were saying and their responses I posted in the chat box to their questions.  
What did/will you do differently as a result of attending the tutorial?  
Stick to the module materials rather than trying to back up my ideas with outside sources.  
Any other comments? I like how the two tutors work together, that they frequently asked for our opinions and for us to interact with them rather than just talking at us. They always check that us students are ready for them to move on to a new slide.
Appendix 4 - Interview schedule

Participant interview questions for students

The interviews will be stimulated recall interviews based on the written diary information, so questions will be different for each participant. Interviews will also be responsive, exploring ideas that emerge through the process. The interviews will start with:

- introductions
- explaining the purpose of the research
- checking the participant is happy for the interview to be recorded
- thanking the participant for completing the diary sheet and checking that they have a copy in front of them
- saying there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer and the participant’s perspective is very valuable.

The initial question:

- Tell me about the tutorial(s) that you took part in

Where a participant has taken part in more than one tutorial, I will ask them to tell me about one tutorial at a time.

The interview will end with:

- thanking the participant for their time
- explaining that they will have an opportunity to review the transcript
- reminding them that they can withdraw from the study at any point up until the data is anonymised.
Appendix 5 - A section of the transcript of Lisa’s interview with my comments

Lisa: I’m just going over what I’ve written. I just pulled up a copy of what I sent you.

Kathy: Mmm hmmm

Lisa: Um yeah there was lots to do in that one. There was lots of... I loved the anonymous add in coz I don’t really write in the chat box. I do get involved when they put the anonymous add in on the... like, they ask a question and then you just post it on the actual tab for everyone to see.

Kathy: Mmm hmmm

Lisa: Um we had to watch videos before on this one because the videos were quite long. If I remember rightly, um but yeah, no, it was good, but I enjoyed my second one a bit better [laughed].

Kathy: What was it about that one that you particularly enjoyed?

Lisa: Um I think it was the tutor. I think it was very much to do with her, like she linked it to her, her own, her work, the TMA’s her students had done and sort of said like: ‘I noticed that’. I noticed that a lot of you were doing such and such and here’s how to change that’ um... yeah, she was... I don’t know there was just something about her that sort of... I think it was bit faster than the first one. It it was sort of needed, so like a lot about the social, etc and how to link them, and how to think critically, literally just by asking one question um yeah... very different from the first one [pause].

Kathy: So, if you could design your ideal tutorial, um what would that be like?

Lisa: It would be a lot more about the course cos I can find a lot um a lot of the stuff that in the first tutorial, I can find that all online, like all of the um ‘the help on how to set out your TMA’s and things like that’. Um I personally, would love more of the actual course, like going over what um I’ve already covered in the um in the questions and in the chapter. I’m just pulling up what they’re called, in the... topics. Yeah, I’d love to just, I’d love more tutorials to be honest, just to sort of help focus all the notes and everything that’s going through my head, it sort of really sort of brings them together. I’d be able to listen to someone else talk about it, if you know what I mean?

Kathy: Mmm hmmm

Lisa: And also, the second one was an hour and a half and it... I found that I was more sort of concentrated because it was like bang bang bang bang, you know, I think I mean like it was constant whereas the first one was two hours and we had a break in the middle and... which is fine cos obviously it was longer but it was very sort of spread out... there was no real rush, like we were having lots of conversations and... obviously, for someone who doesn’t get involved in the chat very much it was um... quite long the first one.

Kathy: Mmm [pause]. So, what is it about um the chat that you sort of hold back from, do you think?

Lisa: Um... I think it’s my spelling but don’t, I’ve always feared putting stuff out there without it being checked um but obviously, I know they’re not going to be sitting there going ‘oh look at that person’ but it’s that and as well and I just, I don’t know. I prefer being the silent listener to the tutor kind of... I don’t really go into tutorials with too many questions. It’s more I need like facts and I need just someone too literally guide me into like what I’m already thinking is right, just that sort of backup.
Appendix 6 - The vignette of Karen’s narrative

Karen* works full-time teaching childcare in a further education college. She is well supported by colleagues, some of whom have studied similar modules. She also discusses what she is learning with her friend and her mum, and she has a supportive partner. She has not needed to contact her tutor during the module, but she receives emails from them and feels comfortable getting in touch if she needs to. She is part of a Facebook group and WhatsApp group and whilst she never posts, she does not want to leave the groups in case she misses anything. She was interviewed about the third and fourth tutorials in the module. Here are her thoughts about them in her own words.

* This is a pseudonym.

I like the tutorials. I know you’re not really speaking to other people, but you work away at home on your own and all of a sudden, other folk are there doing the same thing and asking the same questions or asking questions that you haven’t thought about. Last year, I did hunt out the ones that my tutor did because that made sense, but it didn’t seem to fit as well this year. My tutor seemed to do the face-to-face tutorials that I couldn’t go to.

Last year, I felt familiar and comfortable with the tutorials. Tutorial 3 was quite different. We had to think about the social factors that can impact on health, but part of the assignment related to a forum. What I really wanted out of that tutorial was to find exactly how we had to do that. I just couldn’t get my head round it. It became apparent in the tutorial that other folk were wondering about that as well. Prior to that, my partner was really ill. My studies gave me something to focus on for myself. He was home by then and it gave me a bit of normality. I think that tutorial just got my head switched back into it all.

On a couple of occasions the tutors used the whiteboard, and everybody had to chip in and write down their thoughts. It was quite straightforward. I think that was the first tutorial I’d been on that used the breakout room and it felt a bit strange initially. You’re just sort of put into these rooms and expected to communicate with people. But everybody’s in the same boat, aren’t they? Everybody just started typing and we got some kind of conversation going. It’s difficult typing though because as you’re typing, somebody else puts something else on and sometimes it doesn’t flow. I tend to just type, and I think most folk do. I wouldn’t say I’m not confident using the microphone. Maybe I’m not confident. I don’t know why I don’t use the microphone. Some people do.

There was two tutors there, so one was talking, and they took turns doing different sections. The other one was keeping an eye on the chat box, answering questions, whereas for tutorial 4, there was only one tutor there who asked us to talk because it’s difficult to facilitate plus keeping an eye on the chat box. There were odd questions going on at the side because somebody was on the tutorial from work, so they said they couldn’t use the microphone, but certainly not the same volume of chat box as the first one. I think it probably made it easier to follow what was happening. I’m normally listening, but I’m also reading the chat box the same time cos you’re scared in case you miss anything. Because the tutor was encouraging folk to use the microphone, they seemed to be more reluctant to do that. There’s a symbol where you can put your hand up. So, it’s well organised and controlled to a certain extent.

There were some technical issues with the sound. One minute the tutor was loud. The next minute they were quiet and a couple of times, somebody put in the chat box that they were having difficulty hearing. Actually, once you got used to it, you zoned in.
For this essay, you had to either pick one of two options. It was an hour and half and I think probably an hour was spent on the topic for first option. Although I did get a lot of information from it, most of it wasn’t relevant to the topic that I had picked. If there’s two options, you’ve always got to listen to the other stuff as well. It’s still important that I know the stuff about the other topic. You’re encouraged to link to the other topics in the module, so there was a couple of things actually that came up and I thought, ‘Ooh, I’ll just scribble a note of that’.

I haven’t joined any of the other sessions for that tutorial, but I’ll go back and look at the recordings. I don’t always cos I think they’re all much and such the same. Certainly, last year, when I was new to this, I was going back and looking at all the recordings and I’m not saying it muddled me even more but sometimes, you’re better just watching a couple and then getting your head down. One tutor is happy to accept one thing and another’s more flexible about it. If the tutorials were in the tutor groups, it would keep it more focused.

Generally, students always join in. I really would have liked to go to some of the face-to-face ones, but they would be a four-hour drive for me for a round-trip, probably having to stay over, so I really just have to go to the online tutorials. It would be nice to see faces to make it more personal. There’s quite big numbers in the tutorials though. Sometimes, there’s about 20 people. That would be a lot of faces on a screen when you’re maybe needing to work through some sort of presentation as well. I suppose the smaller the number, the more interaction you would be able to have. If it was your own tutor group, you would feel like you would know your own tutor a bit better or your tutor might feel they would know you a bit better. There’s not really that closeness. You don’t really have that face-to-face personal relationship when it’s online. I think, had I been face-to-face and actually met my tutor, that makes that personal connection then. It’s that putting a face to a name.

I would like to have more tutorials. They always seem to just be around when an assignment is due. They’re really good because you are just sitting at home in front of your computer, just working your way through it, feeling very on your own and even though you know your tutor’s there and there’s other students doing the same thing, it’s that connection, even if folk don’t want to use the microphones. It just puts you all in the same place for one common reason. You could choose to go for one or you could choose to go to three. If there was one of the assignments that you were finding really difficult, you would maybe go to them all.

There’s just a lot of virtual life going on just now. Even just on the telly and you’re seeing the guy that reads the weather from his back garden. You’re seeing people in their personal space and although it was quite strange initially, there is something quite nice about it. It makes it all personal. It makes it a bit more real.

I’m always aware of the tutor just because of my job and thinking, ‘Gosh, that’s a lot for them’. It’s a long time when it’s just you that’s talking. I’m now facilitating these virtual classrooms and its very strange cos I’m on the other side. I can totally see that folk don’t want to use the microphones [laughter]. At some of them, I will use webcams. I think the students would be better if they could all see each other. When you’re used to being in a classroom face-to-face with the interaction, whether it’s questions or comments or a bit of a joke or banter, I really miss that. You’re just very aware that it’s just your lone voice in the middle. It’s just a new way of working. But I guess, the university tutors, that’s what they do all the time. We’ve almost got to redesign our whole units. I’m at an advantage because I’m doing distance learning. I can picture it laid out and I can imagine what a virtual classroom looks like but for some of my colleagues, it’s just been terrifying.
Appendix 7 - An original I poem section from Amie’s interview

I haven’t attended too many tutorials.
I mean
I attended one tutorial
I did not bother attending any more
I mean
I attended this year
I mentioned
I attended
I think
I have felt
I mean these tutorials are really important
I think that there…
I can think
I have four young kids
I mean
I attended
I attended
I think they just recycled the slides
I think
I was pretty much engaged,
I was like enjoying
I was learning at the same time
I was excited
I was happy
I attended the tutorial
I think
I did my TMA,
I went to that tutorial two or three times.
I think
I just wrote,
I did not use the microphone.
I just did not use the microphone.
I am more considerable when
I am writing.
I’m from [country].
I think
I think it’s really hard
I am talking
I am listening to English,
I am constantly translating it in my mind
I have to say them in [my first language]
I do understand most of it
I’m okay
I feel motivated
I feel thankful
I would say.
I’ve got four children
I do have to tell them to just sit down and watch TV
I can interact with my tutors
I had
I… had an online tutorial
I went to attend a face-to-face tutorial
I could ask what I needed to ask
Appendix 8 - A section of the contrapuntal voices within Joanne’s narrative

I think there were two times we were asked to do that.
I think on the first time it did work.
I just wrote it in the chat box.
    we’ll have...
    we’ll have a tutor
    we’ll normally have somebody else who monitors the questions
        one tutor is normally talking to you verbally
        the second tutor is normally responding through the chat
        they might speak
I think most of the time
    they’re just trying to keep on top of any questions
    the first tutor is doing the presentation
        you’re face-to-face
        you might wait until the end
        people generally just ask their question as and when
        they think of it
I think that’s why
    you then have that second tutor
    you’re the other tutor
    you probably can lose quite a few of the questions.
I do find where, if
    you’re paying attention
    you can miss those
I said
    you’re in a face-to-face
    you might say
I’m gonna go through this and then ask me questions at the end
    we still have that
        They’ll still be,
        you know
        you got any more questions?’
I think it could be a bit more structured
I’d find really useful
I’ve just glanced away
I’ve missed it
I said
I was going in the right direction
I was thinking
I don’t really want to continue yet until
I know.
        they are useful.
I gained more
    we did have a video
    we watched
    we pretty much should have already seen
    we watched a video.
I think it was about five minutes long
    we were asked to…
I think it was just in the chat box.
Appendix 9 - An example of listening for different types of presence in Deborah’s narrative

I colour coded the presences identified within the diary sheet and interview transcript, using a different colour for each type:

- Social presence orange
- cognitive presence blue
- teaching presence purple
- emotional presence red
- learning presence green.

Kathy: So what was it about that one that was better, do you think?

Deborah: Well, it wasn’t so much a… There was a bit of summarising the two topics that we had been working on in the module um but we did take time out to advise you on report writing, which… It depended on your course. The course that I’m on, this is the first time that I’ve ever had to write a report. Everything else has been essay-based TMAs.

Kathy: Mmm hmm

Deborah: So, I appreciated the time being taken to explain the fundamentals of report writing and not just about the subject of the course that I was doing.

[Pause]

Kathy: So what happened in terms of activities during this tutorial? You mentioned on your diary sheet about one whiteboard session…

Deborah: Yeah. I mean again, there was a whiteboard. Most of the stuff was done through the chat box. You know, the questions were asked. The answer was given through the chat box and it was again a PowerPoint presentation but there was discussion out with the PowerPoints. I don’t think if I had just been sent the PowerPoint presentation I would have got as much information from that tutorial as if I had attended, so I think there was a bit more. It wasn’t just reading a PowerPoint that was put in front of us. And again, it wasn’t so much a verbal discussion because my feeling with tutorials is people don’t really want to talk much but the chat box on the right-hand side at one point got to its full capacity and some of the first messages had to be deleted.

Kathy: Mmm hmm

Deborah: So, there was, you know, people were entering into the discussion about the tutorial.

Kathy: And was it helpful to hear particular things that other students suggested?

Deborah: It was because there were some people… I’m not in an education setting. I work… I’ve got another job. I’m using this OU course to help me change my career. It was good to hear from those that are in an education setting that do write these reports.

Kathy: Mmm hmm

Deborah: on a regular basis as part of their job, just giving little hints and tips as to how reports, you know, should be laid out, you know, any keywords that should be included in the report, which you wouldn’t have got from the PowerPoint presentation had it just been sent out to you.
Kathy: So most of that discussion happened in the chat box?

Deborah: The text yeah, most of it was. There was a lot of discussion done in the chat box to the point where it got to full capacity, so it was quite good.

Kathy: So what is it, do you think that stops people from using the microphone?

Deborah: I don’t know. I know myself, I don’t like the sound of my own voice. I don’t know if it’s something as simple as that or…. The tutorials that I’ve been in, it’s not been encouraged. It’s been suggested, but it’s not been actively encouraged

Kathy: Mmm hmm

Deborah: by the tutors that are leading the tutorials. And I just… It’s not something that I would find…. not so much that I wouldn’t be comfortable with but it’s not something I’ve done a lot of… to be the person to start the verbal conversation

Kathy: Mmm hmm

Deborah: so I tend to just stick to the typing in the chat box

Kathy: So is there anything else about that tutorial that you think it is important to mention?

Deborah: It was one of the best ones. I’m three years into the Open University and I’ve done lots of tutorials online and face-to-face. It was one of the ones where I came out… came away from it, actually taking notes on the tutorial. Sometimes, the tutorials have been where I just started doing my TMA and just kind of half listening because all they’re doing is reading out a PowerPoint that I’ve got access to anyhow

Kathy: Mmm hmm

Deborah: but that one, I looked at my notes, looking at it… I’d actually taken notes on the tutorial, so I was actively listening to it.

[Pause]
## Appendix 10 - Students’ learning network tables

These learning network tables are arranged in order of volume and then frequency of perceived contact with others from lowest to highest.

### Korina

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of contact</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. family, friends</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work colleagues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University staff</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X1 My tutor</td>
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### Lisa

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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work colleagues</td>
<td></td>
<td>X2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X3 Very occasionally to hardly ever</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other OU students</td>
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### Amie

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</tr>
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<tr>
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### Sophia

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<td>X4 student from different module</td>
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216
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<td>Work colleagues</td>
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<th>Occasionally</th>
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<th>Sometimes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Work colleagues</td>
<td>X3 X4 X5 X6 X7</td>
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<td>Type of contact</td>
<td>Often</td>
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<td>e.g. family, friends</td>
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<td>Work colleagues</td>
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### Appendix 11 - Conceptually clustered matrix to show the findings from individual narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Individual factors affecting experiences</th>
<th>Tutorials experienced</th>
<th>What the ideal tutorial would be like</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Korina    | Registered on the Childhood and Youth Studies Degree, Korina is an Asian student in the 36-45 age group, working part-time in a nursery. She attends tutorials to **work with other students and share perspectives**. She has registered a disability with the university but did not mention this during her interview. Being able to understand what the tutor is explaining in her own way is very important to her. | **Tutorial 2** focused on the assignment and assignments generally. It included a poll and opportunities for students to share their views, which Korina did via the text chat, but no videos or other activities. Being able to understand this tutor meant that this tutorial experience was positive. | • More images, rather than words  
• Emailed slides, so that there is an email address to contact the tutorial tutor with questions afterwards  
• Opportunities to focus on practice and share views with other students in writing, rather than using the microphone. |
| Lisa      | Lisa is white, under 25 and studying for the Open Degree. She is a part-time youth worker but a little hesitant about this aspect of her identity. She would like to be a teacher but had not thought this was possible due to being dyslexic. Lisa only contributes via the whiteboard because she worries about her spelling. She attends tutorials because **she enjoys them and connecting with others helps her to ‘get out of her own head’ and identify strategies that help her learn**. She would love to have more tutorials and be close enough to attend face-to-face tutorials. | **Tutorial 2** was ‘talking to us’, longer, and study skills orientated, whilst **Tutorial 3** was shorter, topic-based and more engaging. It included videos and activities and a tutor who used their marking experience to help students see what they needed to do differently. Her relationship with her own tutor is ‘tricky’ but Lisa clearly felt an affinity with this tutor. | • Frequent, short, full of activities, including videos  
• Topic-based, rather than study skills orientated  
• Opportunities to find out the perspectives of others and opportunities to contribute via the whiteboard  
• Receiving copies of slides and a link to the recording. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Background and Goals</th>
<th>Tutorials and Experiences</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Amie  | Registered on the Childhood and Youth Studies Degree, Amie is aged 36-45 and at home with young children, one of whom has a learning disability. She has previously studied to postgraduate level in her Asian country of origin, where learning was fact-based and tested with exams but finds the demands of UK-based study different and challenging, particularly writing critically. English is Amie’s second language and she feels more confident writing than speaking. She is only studying one module this year, so she has more time to attend tutorials with a view to improving her assignment scores. | **Tutorial 3** was the best tutorial that Amie has ever attended and much better than the tutorials she attended for another module last year. It included video clips and discussions and whiteboard activities. Amie felt fully engaged, happy and excited. | • Opportunities for question-and-answer time with tutors  
• Videos and discussions  
• Opportunities to present own views and share ideas with other students via writing  
• Examples of how to structure essays and write critically  
• Tutorials during the daytime when children are at school  
• Recording always available |
| Sophia | Sophia is a childminder who works alone. She is Asian, over 56 and studying for an Open Degree. She attends tutorials and watches recordings frequently to feel like she has colleagues but notes that whilst students can chat more in the live session, they are responding to tutors’ questions, rather than building the relationship. Sophia does not always contribute, as she worries about getting things wrong. | **Tutorial 2** was ‘very good’ and included whiteboard activities and ‘brainstorming’. **Tutorial 3** was ‘good’ but whilst Sophia is positive about all her tutorial experiences, this one sounded like more of a presentation with less opportunity to contribute. Sophia has experienced group work in tutorials on other modules. | • Opportunities to share, discuss and build relationships as Sophia works alone.  
• Small group work  
• Clear instructions for writing on the whiteboard, as Sophia has not managed this  
• Access to slides and multiple tutorials and recordings |
| Vicky  | Vicky is white and in the 26-35 age group. She attends tutorials to maximise her assignment marks; she is studying education and wants to get a first-class degree to facilitate | **Tutorial 3** was led by two tutors, one of whom was Vicky’s own tutor and included activities and conversations, including a helpful video-based activity. **Tutorial 1** did not feel like a tutorial, as it was more of an | • Led by own tutor and focused on the essay question  
• Opportunities to watch videos and share different perspectives |
| **Tilly** | Tilly is white, in the 36-45 age group and is studying education. She works part-time as a learning mentor and her studies have given her confidence at work. When she attends tutorials, she is looking for attention, encouragement, and affirmation from tutors. Despite having a good relationship with her own tutor, she does not contact them outside of tutorials, as she is unsure how much interaction is expected. She prefers typing to using the microphone, as she feels inarticulate and shy and does not feel that students have built relationships. | Tutorial 1 was more about ‘housekeeping’ than content but made Tilly enthusiastic about starting the module. Her tutor was friendly, and students posted on the forum during the session. Tilly attended five other tutorials: tutorial 2 (twice), tutorial 3 (twice) and tutorial 4. Four of these were positive experiences, with opportunities to contribute valued by tutors. In the other tutorial, with 32 students present, students were ‘talked to’ by tutors and one tutor did not value the contributions of the other. |

| **Deborah** | Deborah is on maternity leave from the civil service and is studying with a view to a career change. She is white and in the 36-45 age group. She prefers face-to-face tutorials, as she sees the same students there. Without face-to-face, she feels that Tutorial 3 included interaction on the whiteboard and small group work but, although Deborah got involved, the session left her ‘a bit deflated’ and she felt she would have been as well just requesting the tutorial slides and not taking the time away from her family to |

| **Not necessarily include referencing, as Vicky is confident about this** |
| **Written contributions are encouraged but multiple simultaneous conversations avoided** |
| **Smaller numbers of students would make conversations easier to follow, as does the tutor naming the person whose question they are answering** |
| **Examples of how to structure essays that students can annotate** |
| **Small group work if well organised** | **Opportunity to attend more than one tutorial for each learning event, at least one of which should be with own tutor** |
| **Smaller numbers e.g. 15, so tutors can interact with all individually** |
| **If co-presenting, tutors work well together.** |
| **Receiving slides before the tutorial** |
| **Tailoring the tutorial to the needs of those present** |
| **Opportunities to share ideas and work together via written communication** |
| **Sufficient time to complete breakout room activities** |
| **Being able to write in the chat box whilst videos are playing.** | **To see the same students at tutorials each time, so that they can build relationships with each other** |
| **Opportunities to learn from other students who are working in practice settings** |
| **Use of the microphone is encouraged** |
| Melissa | Melissa is white and in the 26-35 age group. She works in a primary school and is studying education to qualify as a teacher. She does not attend tutorials but accesses the slides and recordings looking for **help with her assignments**, including examples of how to write. | A single online tutorial at the start of her first module convinced Melissa that they are ‘not for her’, as she was unable to connect with anyone and communicating via the text chat slowed things down. She has recently had a positive experience when attending an online tutorial for her GCSE English resit during the coronavirus pandemic. The key differences here were that the group knew each other beforehand and were able to see each other via webcams. | • The same group at each tutorial  
• Opportunities to meet face-to-face before meeting online  
• Webcams in use  
• Orientated towards help with assignments and straight to the point  
• Inclusion of examples of how to write  
• Well-paced. |
| Joanne | Joanne is white, in the 36-45 age group and studying education. She works full time with children and young people but chose not to talk about her role. She attends tutorials **to gauge what her tutor expects** her to do in her assignments and to **gauge her own progress** in relation to other students and **check that she is on the right track**. Joanne enjoys contributing to tutorials and prefers to use the chat box, as she finds a slight delay on the microphone, and she cannot see who is talking. | For **tutorial 3**, Joanne was happy when she could contribute on the whiteboard or via the text chat but the session ‘dragged on a bit’ and Joanne found herself checking the news on her laptop towards the end. For **tutorial 4**, there was an opportunity to discuss a video and there was just one tutor instead of two. This meant that the session was more structured, which Joanne appreciated. | • Led by own tutor and positioned well before the assignment cut-off date on a convenient evening  
• Short session with opportunities for breaks  
• Avoidance of multiple simultaneous conversations, with questions being saved for set points  
• Opportunities to contribute via writing |
| Deborah | she struggles. When she attends an online tutorial, she is looking for information that will **help with her assignments**. She types, rather than using the microphone, as she does not like the sound of her own voice and microphone use has not been actively encouraged. | **Tutorial 4** was ‘one of the best ones.’ Deborah appreciated the opportunity to learn how to write a report and found it helpful to learn from other students who write reports in their workplace. | • Having dual conversations going on via microphone and chat box, rather than having to wait for questions to be answered |
Karen teaches childcare in a FE college. She is white, in the 46-55 age group and already has a degree. Her study is not linked to a qualification; she just likes to have some study ‘on the go’. When attending tutorials, she was looking for information to help her understand the requirements of her assignments, but also found that tutorial 3 gave her a ‘bit of normality’ and got her ‘head switched back into it all’ after her husband was seriously ill. She enjoys being with other students who are asking the same questions or questions that she has not thought of. Karen avoids using the microphone but is not sure why. She would really like to be able to attend face-to-face tutorials that are facilitated by her own tutor, but they are too far away. She would like to have more tutorials.

Tutorial 1 was mentioned but not included on the diary sheet. Karen did not realise that this was with her own tutor group. Tutorial 3 was facilitated by two tutors who made use of the whiteboard and also breakout rooms, which felt strange initially, but a typed conversation got going. Tutorial 5 was facilitated by one tutor who was unexpectedly on their own and asked students to use the microphones, rather than typing. Although students were reluctant to do this, this made the conversation easier to follow. Karen also has recent experience of facilitating online tutorials due to the coronavirus pandemic. She finds it hard to be the ‘lone voice’ and misses the jokes and banter of the physical classroom.

- Frequent tutorials at regular intervals and not just when assignments are due
- Tutorials in own tutor group with own tutor
- Small numbers (20 seems ‘quite big’)
- Use of webcams, so that everyone can see each other’s faces
- Avoidance of multiple simultaneous conversations.
Appendix 12 – Tutor participant information sheet

Human Research Ethics Committee

Research study participant information sheet

Students' experiences of synchronous online tuition in health and social care

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

General information about the research study and collected research data

The purpose of the research, which is being carried out by associate lecturer and EdD student, Kathy Chandler, is to gain students’ views on their experiences of online tutorials. Students of one health and social care module have provided narratives of their experiences of online tutorials via completing diaries and interviews. These narratives are being shared anonymously with associate lecturers via tutor forums and a research website to help explore the ways to best support students’ learning.

When commenting on the students’ narratives, as well as the posts of other associate lecturers, the associate lecturers who have posted to the discussions have made helpful observations, sometimes sharing further stories of online tuition. Kathy is seeking your permission to use the information you have posted to inform the analysis of the narratives she has gathered and to use your post(s) as an additional source of data. This will enable the study to generate findings of relevance to colleagues and other educators.

If you have any questions regarding participation in the research, please contact Kathy Chandler. Her email address is [email address] and her phone number is [phone number]. Kathy's research is supervised by Dr Alison Fox and you may also contact Alison if you have any questions. Her email address is: [email address].

The study has been approved by the OU Human Research Ethics Committee and Student Research Project Panel.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part?

If you agree to take part, you are giving permission for the forum posts that you have contributed to discussions about the study in the tutors’ forum to be used in the analysis of the primary data and to be considered as an additional source of data in the research study.

How will the data I provide be used?

Your words may be anonymously directly quoted in material produced from the research, including a doctoral thesis and a website about the research. They may also be used to develop online tuition within The Open University and for journal articles to inform practice in higher education more widely.

The content of the forum posts will be deposited in a specialist data centre after they have been anonymised, so they can be used for future research and learning in accordance with the OU Research Data Management Policy.

Whilst the default is for the data to be anonymised, if you would prefer for your contribution to be attributed to you, this can be discussed with Kathy Chandler whose email address and phone number are given above. If, after discussing the implications of you choosing to waive your rights to privacy and confidentiality, it still feels appropriate to
make use of your contribution to the forum discussion, you will be asked to sign an amended consent form and the forum post will be attributed to you.

Data Protection
You have a number of rights as a data subject:

- To request a copy of the personal data i.e. your forum post(s)
- To rectify any personal data which is inaccurate or incomplete
- To restrict the processing of your data
- To receive a copy of your data in an easily transferrable format (if relevant)
- To erase your data
- To object to the processing of your data

If you are concerned about the way we have processed your personal information, you can contact the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). Please visit the ICO’s website for further details.

How do I agree to take part?

If you are willing to take part in the study, please reply to Kathy’s email and attach a completed consent form [email address]

Thank you for taking the time to read the information sheet.

http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/

17/05/20
HREC/2997/Chandler
Appendix 13 – Tutor consent form

Human Research Ethics Committee

Informed consent for students’ experiences of synchronous online tuition in health and social care

Kathy Chandler, EdD research student, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies

1. Taking part in the study

I have read and understood the study information dated 17/05/20. I have been able to ask questions about the study and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent voluntarily for the forum contributions I have made about this study to be used by Kathy Chandler in the analysis of the primary data and for my posts to be considered as a source of data in themselves.

2. Use of the information in the study

I understand that information from the forum contributions I have made about this study may be used for the following purposes: a doctoral thesis; a website about the study; to develop online tuition within The Open University; and for journal articles to inform practice in higher education more widely.

I understand that personal information in the forum posts that can identify me, such as my name or my contact details, will not be shared.

I understand that my anonymised forum contribution(s) about this study and this consent form will be stored in a password protected, encrypted document.

3. Future use and reuse of the information by others

I give permission for content of the forum posts that I have made about the study to be deposited in a specialist data centre after they have been anonymised by removing my name and any identifying details, so they can be used for future research and learning in accordance with the OU Data Research Management Policy.

4. Signature

__________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________

Name of participant [IN CAPITALS]  Signature  Date

This research project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion, from the OU Human Research Ethics Committee - HREC reference number: HREC/2997/Chandler

http://www.open.ac.uk/research/ethics/