

**Video as a tool in the development of oral presentation competence among  
undergraduate law students: An activity theory based analysis**

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May 2021

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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Lancaster University, UK

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undergraduate law students: An activity theory based analysis**

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma. The word-length conforms to the permitted maximum (49,789 words).

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## **Abstract**

This is a single site study in a post-1992 university law school in England using activity theory and phenomenographic methods to explore how video recordings of students' oral presentations can be used as a feedback tool to support the development of oral presentation competence. Although oral presentation competence development often forms part of the undergraduate law curriculum, it is not always taught well. While there is extensive literature on both the role of feedback in higher education and oral presentation competence development, the link between the two areas has had only limited attention. More particularly, there is very little literature exploring how themes in the feedback literature, such as self-evaluation, may offer a useful insight into the role of video recording in the development of oral presentation competence. Phenomenographic methods are used to analyse students' perception of the video material (19 participants were interviewed at three points during the academic year). Activity theory is used to reconceptualise the oral presentation competence development activity and to consider how video can best be used as a feedback tool to support the learning activity. The research analysis demonstrates that video can help students to evaluate their own performances and make adjustments to future performances. However, the research also indicates that there are potential barriers to video being used effectively. These barriers can best be overcome by emphasising the social aspects of the activity. In particular, video recordings of student performances should not be focused upon until students have gained experience of evaluation and developed subject specific notions of quality

through giving and receiving peer feedback. By reconceptualising the activity to emphasise its social aspects and foregrounding the role of self-evaluation, this research offers an insight into how video can most effectively be used as a feedback tool to support oral presentation competence development.

## **Publications**

Barker, C. (2019). To convince, to delight, to persuade: rethinking teaching oral communication skills to undergraduate law students using Cicero and activity theory. *Journal of Commonwealth Law and Legal Education*, 13(1), 1-21.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

[A]fter the establishment of our world-wide empire...there was hardly a young man of any ambition who did not think that he ought to put forth all his energy to make himself an orator. At first, indeed, our countrymen in total ignorance of the theory, and believing neither in the virtue of training, nor in the existence of any particular rule of art, attained...what success they could by the help of native wit and invention; subsequently, after they had heard the Greek orators, studied Greek literature, and called in the aid of Greek teachers, they were fired with a really marvellous zeal for learning the art. They were encouraged by the importance, the variety, and the number of causes of every description, to supplement the learning, which they had...gained from private study, by constant practice, and found this better than the instructions of all the professors.

Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Oratore*

(Cicero, 1892, pp. 6–7)

This thesis explores the role of video as a feedback tool in oral presentation competence development among undergraduate law students and views this process in its social, cultural and historical context. In particular, this thesis investigates how video recordings of students' own performances, including the feedback they receive from tutors and peers, can be used to help students to evaluate their own oral presentation competence development.

By the nature of the technology being explored, this investigation is one that is firmly in the twenty-first century and more than two millennia from the time Cicero wrote *De Oratore* (or *On the Orator*). Cicero's writing and his legal and political career occupy a rather ambivalent place in modern legal and political discourse. Although lauded by many during the enlightenment, Cicero's reputation as a philosopher has since become "deflated" (Wood, 1991, p. 1). Nevertheless, when political manoeuvrings and legal or political rhetoric are discussed Cicero's career and writing offer tempting tropes to commentators. Reference to Cicero continues to be a prominent feature in political rhetoric with classicist Boris Johnson reportedly favouring Cicero's rhetorical techniques (Moore, 2012) and Donald Trump being labelled the 'Cicero of 2016' by the Washington Post (albeit, according to the article, without Cicero's courtesy) (Zauzmer, 2016). Despite his middle-class origins, Cicero's view of public speaking was, like his modern political associations, focused on a small elite. In *De Oratore* he observed that it is very easy to "realise what a great paucity of orators there is, and always has been" (Cicero, 1892, p. 4). This is a view observed in modern legal practice where the idea, to quote a former member of the Court of Appeal of England and Wales, "that the greatest advocates are simply born that way" (Brooke, 2015) is a commonly held position.

While Cicero's views on the exclusivity of public speaking skills might offer neat classical parallels for broadsheet journalists, it is not why he is cited in this thesis. Cicero is quoted because his writing is that of a keen observer of the oral presentation competence development process. The passage from *De Oratore* quoted above offers a useful insight into how a society that valued eloquence in public life perceived the development of those skills. Encoded within Cicero's opinion about young orators in Republican Rome are themes about the social, cultural and historical aspects of public speaking competence acquisition along with the role of the learner in that process. Both of these themes will be developed in this research.

This thesis starts from the view that, to quote Cicero out of context, “the whole province of oratory is within reach of everyone” (Cicero, 1892, p. 5), based as it is on the everyday tools of oral communication. It is argued that proficient public speaking is not the innate preserve of a privileged few but can be taught and learned.

However, in order to understand how oral presentation competence is developed one must understand both the individual learner and the social, cultural and historical context in which the learner operates. While the technology explored in this research reflects the more than two thousand year gap since Cicero wrote about ambitious young oratory students, the theme of self-improving individuals changing and being changed by their context resonates with this study. Indeed, looking back on the quotation at the start of this chapter, only the suggestion that competence in public speaking is an exclusively male activity grates with twenty-first century experience.

## **1.2 Skills and competence**

For Cicero, eloquence was not simply verbal fluency but depended “on a combination of accomplishments, in each one of which it is no slight matter to achieve success” (Cicero, 1892, p. 8). To be eloquent, in Cicero’s view, the orator required knowledge of law and history, an understanding of the audience and the ability to present effectively using tone, word placement and body language (Cicero, 1892). For us today, an effective public speaker requires more than verbal fluency in order to effectively persuade or inform their audience. However, reference to oral communication as a *skill* or *skills* risks reducing the activity to the verbal fluency of the performance rather than reflecting the “combination of accomplishments” (Cicero, 1892, p. 8) bound up in an effective presentation. Much of the academic and professional literature refers to “oral communication skills” (e.g. Webb et al., 2013, p. 15) and “oral presentation skills” (e.g. Tsang, 2018, p. 760). Indeed, I have published

papers referring to “oral presentation skills” with the intention of including within that description the combination of accomplishments that Cicero envisaged (Barker, 2019; Barker & Sparrow, 2016).

For this thesis, reference to *skills* seems an inadequate way to refer to the range of elements required for an effective oral presentation. The term *competence* will be preferred. De Grez defines “oral presentation competence as the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to speak in public in order to inform, to self-express, to relate and to persuade” (2009, p. 5). This definition of competence offers a useful term to cover the multifaceted nature of effective public speaking.

It should also be noted that *competence* and *competencies* are terms that carry a range of meanings in higher education and professional training. In the context of professional legal education, competence “has two key dimensions: the specification of a range of tasks or capabilities (the *competencies* or *outcomes* required) and the expected *standard* of performance” (italics in the original) (Webb et al., 2013, p. 118). This definition relates to high level standards of performance and professionalism rather than a collective term for a multifaceted activity as employed by De Grez (2009). The legal education literature tends to use the term *skills* to distinguish practical activities, such as oral presentations, from core legal knowledge (e.g. in Webb et al., 2013). While the term oral presentation competence will be preferred in discussion in this thesis, it should be noted that the term *skills* will be used when appropriate to the context (e.g. when looking at the legal education literature).



## 1.3 Context

### 1.3.1 Oral communication competence and legal education

The place of legal skills development within legal education and training has recently been considered as the legal professions in England and Wales have looked at the creation of less restricted and less structured routes into legal practice (Hand & Sparrow, 2016). In November 2018 the Solicitors Regulation Authority announced that a single Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) would be introduced in September 2021 (Solicitors Regulation Authority, 2018). Currently the main route to becoming a solicitor or a barrister in England and Wales is that which was established after the 1971 Report of the Committee on Legal Education (Committee on Legal Education, 1971) or Ormrod Report after its chair. The Ormrod Report formed the basis for having an academic stage of training followed by a linked but separate professional or vocational stage. The academic stage being a qualifying undergraduate law degree or an equivalent conversion degree for graduates with a degree without qualifying law degree status. The focus of the academic stage is on substantive academic legal knowledge rather than practical skills. In particular, a qualifying law degree is based on seven foundation of legal knowledge subjects which focus on substantive law topics (Hand & Sparrow, 2016). Although the makeup of these foundation subjects has changed since 1971, at no point have they included vocational skills such as explaining, oral presentation, negotiation or courtroom advocacy.

Although the context and role of litigation in a modern judicial system has changed since Cicero argued “causes of every description” (Cicero, 1892, p. 7) in the Roman courts, there remain similarities in practice. Court proceedings in England and Wales remain essentially oral and adversarial. Parties to a dispute are left to prepare their own cases ready to present before an impartial tribunal (whether judge, jury or other

authority). Although evidence may take many forms, the process of hearing the case will ordinarily be oral in nature. An advocate representing a party in court may be able to rely on elements of written argument but will ultimately need to use oral advocacy to attempt to marshal the evidence and persuade the tribunal of the merits of their client's case.

The focus on oral advocacy within court hearings in England and Wales has meant that it has been a prominent feature in legal education, particularly during graduate vocational training for barristers (the branch of the legal profession specialising in advocacy). Up until 2020, the Bar Standards Board (barristers' regulatory body) had required that vocational training for barristers should "introduce students to a range of advocacy training methods including an approach which recognises the value of methods approved by the Inns of Court College of Advocacy (ICCA), e.g. the Hampel Method" (Bar Standards Board, 2019a, p. 59). The introduction in 2020 of a more flexible approach to vocational training and Authorised Education and Training Providers (institutions authorised to offer vocation training) has led to a less prescriptive advocacy curriculum (Bar Standards Board. 2019b). However, the Hampel Method remains the favoured training method of the profession (Inns of Court College of Advocacy, n.d.). The Hampel Method is a "systematic six-stage method devised by Professor George Hampel QC of the Australian Bar" (Inns of Court College of Advocacy, n.d.). The Hampel Method involves critiquing and correcting individual points of advocacy performance through the following stages:

- **Headline:** Identifying one particular aspect of the performance to be addressed.
- **Playback:** Reproducing verbatim that identified aspect of the performance.
- **Reason:** Explaining why this issue needs to be addressed.
- **Remedy:** Explaining how to improve this aspect of the performance.

- Demonstration: Demonstrating how to apply the remedy to the specific problem.
- Replay: The pupil performs again, applying the remedy.

(Inns of Court College of Advocacy, n.d.)

The Hampel Method is designed to correct discrete points of technique and therefore requires the student to have some existing public speaking competence. However, the opportunities for students to develop that competence before joining the vocational stage of training are likely to be limited.

The absence of practical oral presentation competence development from the core subjects at the academic stage of legal training does not mean that practical activities do not feature in undergraduate law programmes. The importance of being able to communicate legal knowledge “both orally and in writing, appropriately to the needs of a variety of audiences” (Bar Standards Board & Solicitors Regulation Authority, 2014, p. 18) has expressly formed part of the requirements of the academic stage of legal training since 1999. This is echoed in the subject benchmark statement for law which requires law graduates to demonstrate the “ability to communicate both orally and in writing, in relation to legal matters” (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2019, p. 5) and anticipates “oral/video presentations; moots; skills-based assessments” (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2019, p. 6) potentially forming part of the assessment strategy at the academic stage. The direct reference to oral communication development as part of the benchmark statement is not intended to be read as an indication that a law degree is designed solely to train future lawyers. Rather it is intended as recognition that “abilities and qualities of mind are acquired through the study of law that are readily transferable to many occupations and careers” (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2019, p. 5). Indeed, employer demand for graduates better able to deliver effective oral

presentations is a theme recognised internationally (Bolívar-Cruz & Verano-Tacoronte, 2018; Jackson, 2014). The role of oral communication as part of overall legal education is also reflected in the report of the Legal Education and Training Review (LETR), a project set up by the legal profession's regulatory bodies to review legal education and training in England and Wales. Recommendation 6 of the report states that legal services education and training schemes should include “oral communication skills” (Webb et al., 2013, p. 287) and that there should be a greater emphasis on these skills throughout the training process (Webb et al., 2013). The LETR recommendation and the QAA Benchmark Statement for Law suggest that the development of oral communication competence should be seen as an important activity throughout the legal education process. Oral communication covers a broader range of activities than the oral presentation competence being investigated in this thesis. Nevertheless, there needs to be some understanding of what oral communication competencies (including presentation competence) students will have learned before they join the academic stage.

### 1.3.2 Oral communication competence and secondary education

“...in total ignorance of the theory”

Cicero, *De Oratore* (1892, p. 6)

Students joining an undergraduate law programme from the English and Welsh education system are unlikely to have extensive experience of formal oral communication education. Indeed, in England and Wales from the summer of 2014 speaking and listening no longer formed a part of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) English assessment (Mercer et al., 2017). While it remains a requirement that English Language GCSE students must be able to “use spoken Standard English effectively” (Department for Education, 2013, p. 3), spoken

language ability will be “reported on as part of the qualification, but it will not form part of the final mark and grade” (Department for Education, 2013, p. 3). The climate of accountability of schools and teachers is not one “which encourages teachers to deviate from curriculum emphases which are tested and prescribed” (Jones, 2017, p. 506). However, the paucity of formal qualifications reflects a deeper lack of oracy development (the oral equivalent to literacy and numeracy development (Wilkinson, 1965)). Teachers report a lack of confidence in teaching the range of oracy skills (Jones, 2017). This is reflected in a think tank report which found (based on a YouGov PLC survey of 906 teachers) that 57% of teachers said that they had not received any training in oracy in the last three years and that 53% would not know where to go to find information about oracy (Millard & Menzies, 2015). While there remains debate about the value of oracy, including oral presentation skills, in secondary education in England and Wales, the picture is of an education system where such activities are not given a high priority either in terms of assessment or teaching within the broader curriculum. The same cannot be said of other jurisdictions (such as Scotland, Australia and the USA) where oral communication skills form part of the curriculum (Mercer et al., 2017).

### 1.3.3 Oral presentation competence for future lawyers

Cicero well understood that learning public speaking took more than “native wit and invention” (Cicero, 1892, p. 6) and that part of that process involved a teacher. However, the question of whether and how oral presentation competence should be taught has remained problematic. In vocational training, courtroom advocacy has been developed using the Hampel Method. However, it was only in 1993 that the author of the Hampel Method, Professor George Hampel, felt able to declare that “the myth that advocacy cannot be taught has been finally put to rest” (Mauet & McCrimmon, 1993, p. xii). Similarly, at the same time as acknowledging that the

broader subject of oral communication skills is often taught on undergraduate law programmes, the LETR concluded that “they may not be taught well enough” (Webb et al., 2013, p. 135). Despite the oral and adversarial nature of the English and Welsh legal system and “despite the obvious importance of explaining in law” (Brown 2006, p. 218), students joining the vocational stage of legal training may have had only limited secondary grounding in oral communication development and may or may not have had some oral communication or oral presentation instruction at tertiary level. The phased introduction of the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) from 2021 may well result in pushing oral communication skills into a late stage of the qualification process, after trainees have completed work experience (Jones, 2019). It remains to be seen whether providers of law degrees will increase practical skills content in their courses to prepare their students for the SQE (Jones, 2019).

The persistence of the myth that advocacy cannot be taught may be due to the belief that oral presentation competence in a legal context can only truly be developed through practical experience; what Brown calls “craft-knowledge” (2006, p. 218). Such experience based development has been recognised as a significant feature of legal practice (Le Brun & Johnstone, 1994) and would have been familiar to Cicero. Indeed, one of the successful orators depicted in *De Oratore* declares that “the laws and institutions and ancestral customs of the Roman people were my teacher” (Fantham, 2004, p. 80).

A further factor in the lack of oral presentation competence teaching before the vocational stage of legal training may be the wider debate about the shift from a content-focused approach to a competency-focused approach to legal education (Webb et al., 2013, p. 123). The LETR reported that the views of both academics and practitioners were divided on whether skills teaching (as distinct from legal

knowledge) has a place on the undergraduate curriculum as it “threatened to divert attention away from the core job of the law degree” (Webb et al., 2013, p. 46).

When reviewing the aims of legal education and training as expressed by the relevant professional bodies and QAA it would seem that oral communication competences (including oral presentations) are important elements in that process even before the vocational stage of training. As professional bodies seek more flexible routes into the legal profession, oral competence development is likely to permeate further into the academic stage. However, it would seem that students are unlikely to have had significant formal teaching or assessment in oral presentation skills upon starting the academic stage of legal education. Further, it is by no means certain that they will have such training during the course of the academic stage of legal qualification. Indeed, if they do receive such training, it may well be that the standard is not high. This thesis will explore the use of video as a tool to help support undergraduate law students in the development of oral presentation competence and the relationship that video has with existing approaches such as the Hampel Method. In particular, the thesis will investigate how video might be used to equip students to manage their own development as they go through their training and their careers.

#### 1.3.4 Research context

“...called in the aid of Greek teachers.”

Cicero, *De Oratore* (1892, p. 6)

The focus of this study is on the interventions used to develop oral presentation competence among undergraduate law students in a range of mainly formal settings. The subjects of the study were all level 4 students studying law at a post-1992 university in England.

The law school in which the subjects studied was established in 2008. When designing the curriculum for the new law courses, there was a desire to include oral presentation competence as part of the undergraduate law programme and to make use of purpose built courtroom facilities. As a result, a level 4 unit (The Art of Persuasion) was introduced to help give students confidence to participate in courtroom simulations and legal moot competitions (mock appeal cases). Although the unit created was legal in context and included elements of courtroom advocacy, it was not exclusively focused on the specific skills required to present and argue a case in court.

I led the development of the unit with the support of a small teaching team. The range of oral communication activities that could potentially be included in an undergraduate law programme and the absence of any settled syllabus meant that I used my own experience as a starting point. In broad terms, the unit was modelled around the Hampel Method of advocacy training that I and the other members of the teaching team had experienced at the vocational stage of legal education and in early legal practice.

After the first year of delivering the unit, it became apparent that adopting a vocational model of advocacy training for first-year undergraduate law students, with little or no background in formal oracy education, was not addressing what the students needed in terms of competence development. Essentially, I felt that many students did not have the confidence or competence to achieve significant development from an approach designed to refine technique rather than build confidence and core skills. In the second year of the unit I introduced a syllabus based on peer review and reflection, where the students were encouraged to plan their own development. However, the ephemeral nature of the performances meant



that it was difficult for the students to reflect on their performances and for tutors to offer feedback on students' reflections.

From 2012 video was used to record the student performances. These recordings also included the tutor and peer feedback delivered immediately after each performance. The students were given access to video recordings of their individual performances and the associated feedback. This could be accessed outside of class on their chosen personal electronic device. Alongside the introduction of this video technology, a new assessment regime was introduced. Under the new assessment strategy only 30% of the unit marks were awarded directly for presentation performances. The remaining 70% of the marks were based on a reflective exercise that required the students to write a reflective portfolio that explored their own development through the year by reference to embedded links to specific presentation recordings. The purpose of this approach was to attempt to shift the emphasis away from tutor judgements about presentation performance and instead focus on the students' ability to evaluate their own performances and plan their future development.

My intention had been to create an activity that supported student reflection and peer learning. I undertook research to explore this hypothesis. However, the results of the research suggested that, despite my intentions, the unit design tended to reinforce the role and importance of tutor transmitted feedback (Barker & Sparrow, 2016). Further, there were no points within the unit which required students to actually engage with their video recordings other than when writing the portfolio at the end of the year. I concluded that the unit required adjustment in design to foster engagement with the video material at an earlier stage and allow wider discussion of competence development and reflection.

For the academic year 2016-17 I introduced changes to address the issues highlighted by the earlier research project. In particular, I included points in the year where the students were required to review their video recordings in an attempt to encourage engagement with the material. Opportunities for peer review and for discussion of performances were expanded to reduce the concern that the teaching was too focused on the transmission of feedback by the tutor.

I was the coordinator of The Art of Persuasion unit from its start in 2008 up to 2019. Through this period, I was also responsible for the design of the unit and elements of its teaching. I taught all of the students interviewed for this research in large group lecture classes delivered as part of the unit. I also taught some of the students in seminar activities where the video being investigated for this study was used. I was involved in the assessment of all students and, therefore, all the students interviewed for this study. The implications of this relationship and how they affect the research design are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 (see Chapters 3.5 and 4.8.5 in particular).

#### 1.3.5 The Art of Persuasion unit outline 2016/17

The research in this thesis was undertaken in the academic year 2016/17. The Art of Persuasion unit was taught through the whole academic year (24 teaching weeks) with a one hour lecture (100 students) and a one hour seminar (12 students) per week. In the lectures students were introduced to various theories and techniques relating to the effective presentation of argument. In the seminars students were given the opportunity to use the techniques they had discussed in lectures and learned about through their reading. This involved students delivering live performances in the mock courtroom used for seminars and then receiving tutor and peer feedback immediately after each performance. All performances and the associated feedback were video recorded on an iPad. After each class the students

were sent a link to video recording of their individual performance and feedback. The class activities varied from short persuasive speeches on topics of each student's choosing at the start of the course to legal speeches and cross-examination later in the unit. The activities built to a final oral presentation on a legal topic at the end of the year.

The unit included two elements of summative assessment:

A legal moot (essentially a mock appeal hearing), worth 30% of the unit mark; and

A portfolio of oral presentations (links to six videos) and reflection, worth 70% of the unit mark.

The moot took place in the autumn teaching block (12 weeks). The portfolio was submitted at the end of the academic year. For the portfolio assessment the students were required to reflect on their own development. That reflection took the form of a short guide to persuasive speaking aimed at students without experience of public presentations. Essentially they were asked to reflect by thinking about what advice they would give themselves if they could go back to the start of the unit. The guide needed to be illustrated with examples of videos of students' own performances through the year. The portfolio contained two elements:

1. Links to oral presentations undertaken by the students throughout the course of the unit. The portfolio needed to include at least six links to performances.

However, most students completed many more than this.

2. Commentary and reflection on the presentations (in the form of a guide to persuasive speaking).

To help support the development of the portfolio students were advised to maintain a reflective diary of their class performances. Students had an opportunity to discuss their videos and their reflections in a dedicated seminar at the start of the second

teaching block (after the winter vacation). Students were also given an opportunity to submit and get feedback on a formative version of their portfolio part way through the second teaching block (12 weeks).

## **1.4 Overall aims and research questions**

### 1.4.1 Introduction

The focus of this thesis is narrow. It looks at a single type of intervention (use of video) in public speaking training for first year undergraduate law students. Exploring the development of presentation competence presents particular challenges. What constitutes an effective oral presentation depends on the performance of a particular individual in a particular context. The performance is made up of a range of elements in terms of content, structure and delivery and the overall performance is unique to the individual presenter in that context. The context will, itself, be varied in terms of setting, audience and situation and will operate as a factor in determining how the presenter presents. As will be explored in the literature review, this combination of variable individual and variable context makes attempts at objective evaluation and assessment of presentation performance not only challenging but of only limited value to the learner. Consequently, this research is not directed toward how well students improve in their presentation performances but rather it is aimed at exploring how students develop their ability to evaluate and develop their own performances and the role that video can play in this process.

### 1.4.2 Ontological and epistemological views and methodology

Reflecting on the relationship between the individual in a variable context has had a significant impact on my own personal understanding of the nature of the social world

and the nature of knowledge of the social world. Indeed, my ontological and epistemological position has shifted during this project and the work on other projects undertaken as part of this PhD. My methodological approach is a product of this reflective process.

Through the course of this PhD I have maintained a non-dualist view of the social world. I agree with the view that there “is not a real world “out there” and a subjective world “in here”. The world is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her, it is constituted as an internal relation between them” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 12 –13). Although there is no dualist division between an objective world and a subjective world, my conception of that single world is a realist one. As Marton explains, there “is only one world, a really-existing world, which is experienced and understood in different ways by human beings” (Marton, 2000, p. 105). In early research projects, this ontological position led me to use phenomenography to explore the individual experiences of the social world in a collective way in order to reveal the social world through the variation of experience (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111).

Through the experience I gained from using phenomenography, my epistemological position shifted. In particular, I concluded that knowledge of what I understood as a real subjective-objective social world would not be revealed through the variation in reported experience alone. As Ashwin and McLean observe, the difficulty with “Marton and Booth’s subjective account is that it obscures structural factors, such as social class, when considering questions of why people experience learning in the way they do” (2005, p. 383). Further, a focus on subjective accounts of individuals alone, in my view, may not reveal the role played by educational interventions and tools in the learning process. Activity theory offers a lens that “presumes a unified, subjective-objective reality, and...posits activities as mediated, collective subjective-

objective relationships” (Bligh and Flood, 2017, p. 147). This offers a framework that reflects my non-dualist ontological position but shifts the focus from the individual to the activity itself. However, I remain of the view that the variations in individual experiences of phenomena offer a valuable avenue to gaining knowledge of the social world and learning activities in particular. My methodology (discussed further both in this chapter and in Chapter 3), reflects my desire to view learning as a tool mediated collective subjective-objective activity while using variations in the reported experience of individuals to help illuminate the learning activity. Maintaining the perspective of the learner is particularly important where, as is the case with this research, there is a focus on students’ self-evaluation of their own development.

#### 1.4.3 Research aims

The aims of this research are to:

- contribute to enhancing educational theory and understanding of the role of technology in developing oral presentation competence.
- contribute to enhancing educational theory and understanding of the role of student self-evaluation behaviour in developing oral presentation competence.
- contribute to enhancing practice by providing recommendations as to how video recording of presentation performances and video recording of feedback can best be used to support the development of oral presentation competence among undergraduate law students.

#### 1.4.4 Research questions

1. What are the qualitatively different ways in which students describe the experience of using video recordings of their presentation performances and

video recordings of feedback on those performances as part of an oral presentation competence class?

2. What elements within the oral presentation competence learning activity can be identified to account for the change or absence of change in how students experience using video recording of their performances and feedback on those performances.
3. How can video recordings of presentation performances and video recordings of feedback on performances best be used to encourage and support student self-evaluation of their presentation competence development?

## **1.5 Theoretical framework**

NB! Pro domo suo [sic]

This is the final thing I have done in psychology – and I will like Moses die at the summit, having glimpsed the promised land but without setting foot on it. Farewell, dear creations. The rest is silence.

The last written words of Lev Vygotsky (Yasnitsky & Van der Veer, 2015, p. 88)

### 1.5.1 Introduction

Vygotsky's private valedictory was written in 1934 shortly before going to hospital where he would die. For his final piece of writing Vygotsky not only references Cicero's *De Domo Sua* speech but also echoes Cicero's rhetorical style. What Vygotsky presents is Cicero's recommended sequence of ethical appeal or *ethos*

(reference to Cicero and Moses); appeal to logic or *logos* (his contribution to psychology); and emotional appeal or *pathos* (Hamlet's last words – “the rest is silence”). That a Soviet era psychologist would reference “a leader of the Roman landed oligarchy who decried any drift toward arithmetical equality or social parity” (Wood, 1991, p. 6) is perhaps no more than evidence of Cicero's enduring influence on rhetorical thinking. However, it also perhaps illustrates that the way we think about argument is a complex product of the historical and cultural context in which that argument is situated. Vygotsky explored theories of psychology that would make use of Marxist method (Vygotsky, 1978) but at the same time his activities remained part of a wider cultural and historical context that still included a conservative Roman orator.

The activity theory developed by Vygotsky's pupils including Leont'ev (Leont'ev, 2009) offers an investigative tool to highlight and explore potential tensions in the oral presentation competence learning activity. Activity theory also offers a way of reframing and reconceptualising the development of oral presentation competence including the skills students require to manage that development independently. The quotation from Cicero's *De Oratore* at the start of this thesis is used to illustrate two central themes. First, that the oral presentation competence learning activity should be viewed as a socially situated activity and second that the learner plays a key role in managing the development of their own oral presentation competence. It is argued that our understanding of this learning process in the activity can be enhanced by gaining a deeper understanding of how individual students perceive the experience of using video as the mediating tool within that activity. There is very little literature on student perceptions of oral presentation competence development. A phenomenographic approach is used to investigate how students experience using videos of their performances and the feedback on those performances (Research Question 1). The analysis is extended beyond the categories of meaning produced



through the phenomenographic investigation and looks at whether or not the perceptions of individual students shift as they use the videos through the course of an academic year. An activity theory based framework, with videos as the mediating tool, is used to examine possible reasons for changes or the absence of changes in perception through the course of activity (Research Question 2). This offers material to inform the development of strategies for effective use of video to support students' self-evaluation of their oral presentation competence development (Research Question 3). Self-evaluation is used in the sense of students assessing the standard of their own performance but without any grading component (Boud, 1995) (see Chapter 2.2).

#### 1.5.2 Activity theory

Activity theory will be used as a theoretic lens within this thesis and as a means to develop the theoretical framework for this research. I have chosen activity theory because its ontological and epistemological foundations offer a valuable perspective on the role of video recording of presentation performances and feedback on oral presentation competence development. Indeed, it will be used as a tool to help reframe the way in which oral presentation competence is viewed in the context of legal education.

As will be discussed further in Chapter 2.5, activity theory can be used to explore the presentation competence learning activity as a social and cultural process mediated by tools and signs (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). The main mediating artefact in this study is the video recording equipment which operates both as a technological tool and as a means by which video content, such as feedback, is communicated. The unit of analysis in activity theory is the activity itself. Further, the approach is not concerned with examining individual differences but rather concerned with "ways of

acting that tend to be consistent across individuals and over time” (Havnes, 2004, p. 162). It is argued that examination of video supported presentation competence learning as a collective activity offers a clearer understanding of how video can best be used to support the competence development of the individual student.

### 1.5.3 Phenomenography

As will be discussed further in Chapter 3.2, phenomenography forms a significant part of the research design. Central to phenomenographic theory is the idea that each individual experiences the world differently (Marton & Booth, 1997) and that insight can be gained through investigating the qualitatively different ways in which individuals experience the world (Marton, 1986, p. 31). This approach would appear to challenge the focus on the activity as the unit of analysis which forms part of the theoretical framework of this study. The ontological challenges presented by using phenomenography within an activity theory based framework will be considered in Chapter 3.4. However, despite the differences in focus of analysis there are features in common which, it is argued, mean that phenomenography can be valuably employed within an activity theory framework. In particular, activity theory and phenomenography both understand reality as located in the individual’s perception of the world. Gaining an understanding of the range of different ways in which individuals understand the oral presentation competence learning process and the tools and signs employed within that activity offers a valuable insight into the operation of the activity as a whole.

## 1.6 Significance of this study

This small-scale study of oral presentation competence development in the limited context of a single group of undergraduate law students provides an opportunity to

contribute to theory, methodology, practice and policy. The theoretical framework will be used to reconceptualise oral presentation competence development as a collective subjective-objective tool mediated activity. The small-scale study will use this theoretical framework and a novel methodology to examine student perceptions of video in the oral presentation competence development activity as those perceptions change over the course of the academic year. The study is designed to explore gaps in the literature. There are two particular aspects to this. The first is the narrow literature gap around the use of video to support self-evaluation of oral presentation competence development among undergraduate law students. The second aspect is that this small-scale project offers a forum for drawing together several strands of literature relating to student self-evaluation that have not been considered together in the context of oral presentation competence development. This approach may provide an avenue for further research. It is hoped that the research findings will have a direct impact on practice and policy. Certainly, the findings will have implications for the approach taken to oral competence development in its immediate context. However, the new perspective provided by the reconceptualisation of the activity and any recommendations as to how best to use video may have implications for oral presentation competence development within both undergraduate and vocation legal education. Indeed, the research results may have implications to contexts beyond legal education.

## **1.7 Thesis outline**

### Chapter 2 Literature Review

The review draws together a number of areas of literature relevant to this study. Attention will first turn to the literature on feedback in higher education (2.2) with particular attention being paid to student self-evaluation. Consideration will then be given to the literature around oral presentation competence development both

generally (2.3) and in the context of legal education (2.4). Finally, there will be discussion of the theoretical foundations of activity theory and how it applies to oral presentation skills development (2.5).

### Chapter 3 Research Design and Methodology

This chapter will outline how the theoretical framework has contributed to the research design and methodology. It will look at stage 1 of the research, the phenomenographic analysis (3.2), and will discuss phenomenography in longitudinal research (3.2.3) and critiques of phenomenography (3.2.4). Stage 2 of the research is focused on activity theory (3.3). It will also consider the challenges of using activity theory and phenomenography together (3.4). The remainder of the chapter will deal with the research itself from selecting participants to the data analysis (3.6 to 3.11). There is also discussion of issues relating to quality including the position of the researcher (3.5), ethics, (3.12) and rigour (3.13).

### Chapter 4 Stage 1 Research Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the phenomenographic research. It sets out the categories of description that emerged from the interview data (4.2) and examines each category in turn (4.3 to 4.7). The relationships between the categories are then discussed (4.8).

### Chapter 5 Stage 2 Activity Theory Analysis

This chapter will extend the phenomenographic analysis by using activity theory to explore how and why students change the way in which they report their experience of using the video material through the course of an academic year. Individual participants associated with each category of description will be considered (5.2 to 5.6). Attention will then turn to participants who changed their position significantly over the course of the academic year (5.7) and those who did not change their

position (5.8). The chapter will conclude with discussion of the findings of stage 2 (5.9).

#### Chapter 6 Concluding Remarks

The final chapter will provide a summary of the findings (6.2) before reviewing the theoretical framework (6.3), the contribution of the research (6.4), reflection on the rigour of the research (6.5) and avenues for future research (6.6).

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Encoded within the passage of *De Oratore* quoted at the start of Chapter 1 are many of the same themes that will be explored through this literature review. In particular, the contention that developing the competencies required to become an effective public speaker (including the competencies that students need to continue that development beyond the classroom) should be set in social, cultural and historical context. There is no suggestion that Cicero would have viewed the oral presentation learning process in anything but individual terms. After all, the whole premise of *De Oratore* is based on why Rome had produced so few great orators (Roman male individuals such as himself). However, Cicero's brief review of how Rome's orators were produced shows that the men seeking to develop oral presentation competencies in Republican Rome faced many of the same issues as modern students of any gender. Indeed, the fact that undergraduate law departments continue to struggle to find effective ways to develop these competencies suggests that we may be looking at the problem in the wrong way by looking at the individual rather than the activity as a whole. This literature review will look at theories relating to the role of feedback in higher education in general and in the development of oral presentation competencies in particular. Consideration will then turn to the existing literature on the use of video recording to support presentation competence development. These themes will then be put into a subject specific context with a review of the literature on the development of oral presentation competence in legal education. Finally, I will review the literature on activity theory pertinent to this research.

## **2.2 Feedback**

### 2.2.1 Introduction

In the teaching intervention being researched, the object of the activity was to develop students' oral presentation competence and, more particularly, to foster in students the ability to manage their own development of oral presentation competence. After a presentation performance students have at their disposal a range of information and material to help support them in the development process. This information may be recorded in some way or recalled from the student's memory. It may be generated by the tutor, peers or internally generated by the learners themselves. Such information and material that supports development after a performance episode might be termed feedback. However, one of the challenges of looking at feedback is getting beyond broad definitions to understand the learning processes taking place. This section will examine the literature on feedback in order to clarify what is meant by feedback in the context of this thesis and consider how information and materials available to the students after an oral presentation performance can support learning.

The video material in this study is made up of a number of elements including the oral performance and tutor/peer feedback. The next section will consider the extent to which these elements can be described as feedback.

### 2.2.2 Feedback in higher education

Feedback in higher education has produced a large body of academic writing (recently described as "an explosion of literature" (Henderson et al, 2019a, p. 4)). A systematic review of the research evidence relating to the narrow issue of learner engagement and implementation of feedback between 1985 and early 2014 resulted

in a review of 195 outputs (Winstone et al., 2017). Similarly, one of the key papers on self-regulated learning and feedback (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) is, at the time of writing, the most cited article in *Studies in Higher Education*. The research that there is has been described as “highly fragmented and somewhat atheoretical” (Winstone, 2017, p. 31). The object of this section is to offer a selective review that identifies the key aspects of the feedback literature relevant to this research.

Approaches that support and encourage formative use of feedback by students have been linked to significant learning gains (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Parkin et al., 2012). Such approaches are “considered essential to the process of learning” (Price et al., 2011, p. 879). While the importance of feedback in student learning is acknowledged in the literature, there is dissatisfaction with current approaches to its use (Molloy & Boud, 2013). However, as Nicol (2018) observes, in countries such as Italy, where there is no culture of providing feedback on work, learning still appears to take place. This is not to say that feedback does not have the central importance that the literature suggests. Rather it highlights that it is important that we divorce our understanding of feedback from simply being the tutor comments that sit beside a mark on a piece of assessed work. While such tutor comments may be an example of feedback, the concept of feedback in the literature is much wider than this. Given the volume of literature on this topic, it is no surprise that there are a number of definitions of what can be described as feedback. However, the following definition offers a good starting point from which to review recent literature. Feedback can be described as a “process through which learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies” (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 1315). This definition is useful for this study as it recognises that the enhancement of learning strategies, as well as the enhancement of students’ work, is a potential aim of feedback. Each element of this definition will be explored separately.



### 2.2.3 Sources of feedback

Perhaps the most straightforward example of feedback is provided by a tutor on a piece of assessed work which includes a mark and comments on how the work could be improved. This conception of feedback has a number of facets and serves a range of purposes as far as the tutor and learner are concerned. It may correct errors in substantive content, style or presentation. It may be used to reinforce and identify positive traits in the learner's work. It may also be used as a device to explain why a particular mark was awarded. This type of corrective feedback may permit the learner to make adjustments to future work which achieves a higher mark in subsequent assessments (Boud & Molloy, 2013). However, as Boud and Molloy observe, this conception is not corrective in the true sense, as it does not include "monitoring students' work to determine if the information provided to them had an effect on what they did" (Boud & Molloy, 2013, p. 701). Indeed, the idea that the mere act of a tutor providing corrective comments will promote learning is often cited as the main problem with current feedback practices (Henderson et al., 2019a). Models of feedback based on the idea that a tutor transmits feedback information "tend to foster dependency and place responsibility too far in the direction of teachers" (Boud & Molloy, 2013, p. 710). If indeed the learner engages with the material at all. In much of the recent literature this transmission model has been criticised as being mechanistic (Adcroft, 2011; Mclean, 2015; Price et al., 2011). Concerns about mechanistic practices are increased as tutors in higher education face pressure from their institutions to produce more feedback in response to perceived student demand (Carless & Boud, 2018).

Part of the difficulty is that the literature has not reached a consensus on what might be included under the term feedback. Sadler has been influential in framing some of

the key concepts in this area. For him, feedback is a source that is “external to the learner” (Sadler, 1989, p. 122). This is to distinguish external material from the internal cognitive processes undertaken by the learner. For the internal processes Sadler uses the term “self-monitoring” (Sadler, 1989, p. 122) where the “learner generates the information” (Sadler, 1989, p. 122). However, for many writers the information generated internally by the learner might also come under the umbrella term of feedback. The terms *internal feedback* (Boud & Carless, 2018, Butler & Winne, 1995; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006,) and *generative feedback* (Nicol, 2018) fit with Sadler’s idea of information generated by the learner but still employ the word feedback.

Feedback should be given a wide definition. Its source may be external “e.g. peers, teachers, friends, family members or automated computer-based systems to support student self-evaluation of progress” (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 3). Equally, the source of the feedback may be internal, generated by observation and peer review (Nicol, 2019), by use of exemplars (Pitt, 2019) and through self-assessment (Panadero et al., 2019). It may be more helpful to understand feedback in terms of what a learner can do with it in the learning activity rather than in terms of its form. How learners engage with and make use of feedback information will be considered in the next section. However, feedback might be characterised as “information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure” (Butler & Winne, 1995, p. 275) rather than being limited to any particular form or source.

Applying this to the oral presentation competence class in this study and the video material in particular, it can be argued that all of the video material should be categorised as feedback including the performance recording, the tutor feedback and peer reviews. Information generated through the internal cognitive processes associated with a student engaging with the videos or reviewing their peers in class

can also be described as feedback. The processes by which the learner makes use of this feedback in order to develop their performances and learning strategies will be discussed in the next two sections.

#### 2.2.4 Making sense of feedback

Sadler (1989) offers a useful starting point for this discussion because his conception of the fundamental nature of the feedback supported learning process has remained prominent in the literature in the past 30 years. Furthermore, recent discussions of self-regulated learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006), evaluative judgement (Ajjawi et al., 2018; Carless & Boud, 2018; Tai et al., 2017) and generative feedback (Nicol, 2018) are founded on Sadler's analysis of the fundamental nature of feedback supported learning.

For Sadler (refining a definition from Ramaprasad (1983)) feedback is conceptualised in the following terms:

Learner has to (a) possess a concept of the standard (or goal, or reference level) being aimed for, (b) compare the actual (or current) level of performance with the standard, and (c) engage in appropriate action which leads to some closure of the gap.

(Sadler, 1989, p. 121)

The same analysis has elsewhere been conceptualised as the students needing to put the feedback into practice to close the feedback loop (Boud & Molloy, 2013).

There are a number of elements to this definition. Simply providing feedback information will not automatically mean that the learner will engage with the material. Even if the learner does engage, it cannot be assumed that the learner will be able to find sufficient meaning in the information to allow them to use it accurately and so

close the feedback loop. In short, “in order for feedback to be useful, students need to understand the information, it needs to be sufficiently detailed and it needs to be usable” (Henderson et al, 2019b, p. 11).

One of the key barriers to engagement, meaning making and actual use of feedback is the learner not recognising the level of active involvement needed to close the feedback loop (Winstone et al., 2017). Not only do learners need to deal with substantive subject matter content in the feedback they receive, they also need to negotiate subject specific resources and methods of working which may hinder their engagement (Esterhazy & Damşa, 2019). Efforts should be made to ensure that learners are supported with the necessary guidance to deal with these potential obstacles (Esterhazy & Damşa, 2019; Molloy et al.,2020; Winstone et al., 2017; Winstone & Boud, 2019). The difficulties may be exacerbated where the learning activity casts someone other than the tutor as the provider of feedback, such as peer review or self-assessment, as students may well view “the tutor as expert marker” (McConlogue 2015, p. 1504) and reject other sources of feedback.

A number of approaches have been explored to make feedback more meaningful. Some recent strategies discussed in the literature include: providing resources and guiding structures to support meaning-making (Esterhazy & Damşa, 2019); focusing on the development of feedback literacy with students (Molloy et al., 2020); developing learning focused feedback with emphasis on the impact of feedback on students’ subsequent work (Winstone & Boud, 2019); and helping students to develop an “appreciation of the roles of teachers and themselves in these processes” (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 3). What underpins these approaches is a recognition of the need for feedback to be understood in social terms. Feedback needs to be “seen as a social practice in which engagement is influenced by individual and contextual factors” (Price et al., 2011, p. 893). Feedback interventions which may appear rather

mechanistic at an individual level can be built into “an ongoing socially-embedded process” (Price et al., 2011, p. 894) where student engagement is based on their previous feedback experiences. This cannot simply be based on adopting a repetitive cycle of mechanistic feedback. It requires a dialogue, trust and the perception that staff and students are engaged in a joint enterprise (Bloxham & Campbell, 2010; Price et al., 2011). However, even when the feedback process is viewed as a socially situated dialogue, there remains the risk that feedback is seen principally as something that is transmitted from a feedback provider, whether that feedback provider be the tutor or the learner’s peers. As Chong observes, learners require expert assistance but such assistance should be gained through activities that immerse the learner “in the experience of giving, receiving, and interpreting feedback” (Chong, 2021, p. 98) such as use of exemplars and peer review. Feedback generated internally by the learner through these activities is therefore a product of the social context.

Without this vital sense-making process, “feedback, regardless of its degree of detail, will not cause improvement in learning” (MacLellan, 2001, p. 316). Learners certainly need support to ensure that they can make sense of feedback and recognise the social nature of the feedback process. Promoting feedback as a dialogue may well help this process (Carless et al., 2011; Nicol, 2010; Winstone & Carless, 2019). However, consideration needs to be given to whether this understanding of feedback is being translated into improvement to work and learning strategies (Winstone & Boud, 2019). Of particular relevance to this study is how one judges the success of feedback. If measures of success are defined narrowly in terms of achievement within a confined learning activity, broader developments in the learners’ learning strategies may be overlooked (Butler & Winne, 1995). It is argued that for something like presentation competence development, fostering the skills to continue

development beyond the teaching episode is more important than short-term improvements to performance.

#### 2.2.5 Enhancing the learner's work or learning strategies

To again start with Sadler, it can be argued that the aim of the higher education learning process “is to facilitate the transition from feedback to self-monitoring” (Sadler, 1989, p. 122). Certainly, it is the aim of the presentation competence teaching intervention being investigated in this thesis to support students in managing their own development. Indeed, although the unit does hope to offer learners immediate results in terms of oral presentation proficiency, the key object of the learning activity is to help the learner to develop their own self-evaluation skills. I have preferred the term *self-evaluation* to Sadler's *self-monitoring*. As will be discussed in the following paragraphs, the internal use that students make of feedback has generated a number of different terms often used interchangeably in the literature. I have chosen self-evaluation as an umbrella term as it is the key aspect of Sadler's use of self-monitoring which I wish to foreground in this thesis (Sadler, 1989, p. 143). I use it in the sense of students assessing the standard of their own performance but without any grading component (Boud, 1995).

Feedback is only likely to be effective in producing learning gains if it is actively used by the student to evaluate and regulate their own learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Parkin et al., 2012). This has itself produced a number of different ways of expressing different researchers' conceptions of this process.

Perhaps the most prominent way in which this self-evaluation process is expressed in the literature is as self-regulated learning. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) adopt the following working definition:

Self-regulated learning is an active constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features of the environment.

(Pintrich & Zusho, 2002, p. 64)

Much of the literature sees the central goal of feedback as being to help create self-regulated learners (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) and that the creation of conditions for its development should be the overarching aim of the curriculum (Boud & Molloy, 2013). Feedback aimed at self-regulation, rather than at the immediate learning episode, being considered most effective (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Self-regulated learning strategies require the students to be active seekers in the feedback process (Bok et al., 2013; Leenknecht, 2019). Developing students as active seekers of feedback presents its own difficulties. Success is determined by a number of factors including the perceived trustworthiness of the tutor or peer providing the feedback, the relationship between the provider of feedback and the recipient and the motivations of the learner (Bok et al., 2013). Emotional aspects such as fear, confidence and reasoning processes play a significant part in determining how a learner engages with feedback or whether they engage at all (Carless & Boud 2018; Eva et al., 2012; Chong, 2021). Furthermore, learner difference is a relevant factor, “some students are better at self-regulation than others; and it is the weaker students that need opportunities to enhance their sense of control” (Nicol, 2009, p. 338).

That self-regulation is a crucial goal in modern education is a prominent theme in recent feedback literature (Panadero & Broadbent, 2018). It has been described as “an extraordinary umbrella under which a considerable number of variables that influence learning (e.g., self-efficacy, volition, cognitive strategies) are studied” (Panadero, 2017, p. 1) and has been the subject of large body of literature within

educational psychology (Panadero, 2017). As such, the broader literature on self-regulation not only goes beyond the scope of this research (and into educational psychology) but also risks obscuring rather than illuminating the ways in which feedback can best support learning. While acknowledging the relevance of self-regulation, much of the recent literature has focused on the related concept of evaluation and evaluative judgement (Ajjawi et al., 2018; Carless & Boud, 2018; Tai et al., 2017). This is not a new feature as it was a central plank in Sadler (1989) and in much of the literature that followed. Sadler argues that:

[T]he instructional system must make explicit provision for students themselves to acquire evaluative expertise. It is argued that providing direct and authentic evaluative experience is a necessary (instrumental) condition for the development of evaluative expertise and therefore for intelligent self-monitoring.

(Sadler, 1989, p. 143)

Evaluative judgement and self-regulation are interrelated and both involve the development of learner autonomy and expertise (Panadero & Broadbent, 2018). Indeed, both are frequently mentioned together in the literature. For example, Boud and Molloy suggest that “stakeholders in teaching and learning need to be explicitly orientated to the purpose of feedback as self-regulating, and to view it as a means to increase capability in making judgements and acting upon them” (Boud & Molloy, 2013, p. 706). However, it is argued here that evaluative judgement offers a narrower and more focused way of understanding the role of feedback and how it might be supported.

Evaluative judgement can be defined as “the capability to make decisions about the quality of work of self and others” (Tai et al, 2017, p. 5). This involves gaining an



understanding of quality in a relevant context before the learner can start to make decisions about their work or the work of others. Understanding of quality within a subject or context can perhaps be viewed as part of sense-making. However, it offers rather more than making sense of particular feedback episodes or even ongoing social feedback relationships (Price et al., 2011). Opportunities for “students to make judgements about their own and their peers’ work may have more impact on student learning than traditional, transmissive tutor feedback” (McConlogue 2015, p. 1504). This process is likely to be subject specific as “standards of quality are contextually bound within disciplinary notions of knowledge and professional practice” (Ajjawi et al., 2018, p. 9). Interventions need to offer the opportunity for students to develop their ability to make evaluative judgements “as a way of being that is contextual, social and cultural” (Ajjawi et al., 2018, p. 9).

Understanding of quality does not, of course, mean that the learner can automatically go on to apply their understanding of quality to their own work. However, the impact is cumulative. Through gaining the ability to understand quality, the learner is able to make evaluative judgements about their own work. Through repeated “self-evaluations, students learn to generate internal feedback and gradually acquire expertise in making more sophisticated academic judgments” (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 9). This is not simply about creating more formative assessment opportunities. Interventions that involve co-construction of rubrics and assessment criteria (Ajjawi et al., 2018), that rely on exemplars (Carless et al., 2018; Pitt, 2019), that offer opportunities for self-assessment (Boud et al., 2015) or peer review (Nicol et al., 2014) all help to develop evaluative judgement skills. This development may need to be a staged process. For example, exemplars of written work or performances can be used in the early stages of the learning process to build understanding of disciplinary specific notions of quality before building up to peer review of student work (Pitt, 2019). In respect of peer review, the real benefits come from undertaking the

reviewing rather than being reviewed, as this allows students to gain more critical understanding of the relevant criteria which could then feed into the reviewer's own work (Nicol et al., 2014). A key question for this thesis is how the material recorded in the videos can support this process in the context of an oral presentation competence unit.

## **2.3 Oral presentation competence development**

### 2.3.1 General

Oral presentations have become a common feature of teaching and assessments in higher education (Falchikov, 2013). There is a significant amount of literature relating to the development of oral presentation competence. In common with the literature on feedback, it is rather fragmented. This perhaps reflects the many facets of oral presentation competence and the many contexts in which it is found. Even limiting examples of outputs to the last fifteen years, the wide range of papers is apparent. In terms of context, there are papers that look at oral presentation competence in language skills development (Huang, 2016, Hung, 2009; Yamkate & Intratat, 2012); medicine (Hawkins et al., 2012); business (Jackson, 2014); science education (Mercer-Mapstone & Matthews, 2017; Reitmeier & Vrchota, 2009); pharmacy (Mort & Hansen, 2010); engineering (Cochrane & O'Donoghue, 2008; Nikolic et al., 2017) and teacher training (Seidel et al., 2011). In addition to research into general questions of competence development, there are papers looking at issues such as gender and oral presentations (Bolívar-Cruz & Verano-Tacoronte, 2018; Langan et al., 2005) and issues of anxiety (Lucchetti, 2009; Tsang, 2020). Further, there is significant literature on the role of technology on the development of presentation competence. Video has been the most prominent technology in the literature (Baecher et al., 2013; Barry, 2012; Bourhis & Allen, 1998; Cochrane & O'Donoghue, 2008; De Grez et al, 2009a;

Hung, 2009; Leger et al., 2017; Mort & Hansen, 2010; Murphy & Barry, 2016; Nikolic et al., 2017; Quigley & Nyquist, 1992; Ritchie, 2016; Seidel et al, 2011; Yamkate & Intratat, 2012). However, the role of virtual reality (Belboukhaddaoui & van Ginkel, 2019) and technologies that use other blended learning approaches (Barrett & Liu, 2019) have featured in recent publications.

Much of the literature relates to assessment practices and the effect of those practices on developing learner competence. Particular attention has been paid to the mode and sources of assessment and feedback. With recent papers exploring issues relating to assessment practices that use peers, tutors and/or the learners themselves as assessors (Aryadoust, 2015; De Grez et al., 2010, De Grez et al., 2012; Langan et al., 2008; Magin & Helmore, 2001; Mort & Hansen, 2010; Mulder et al., 2014; Murillo-Zamorano & Montanero, 2017; Ritchie, 2016; Tsang, 2017; Tsang, 2018). Another popular avenue has been attempts to develop effective rubrics and assessment regimes (Dunbar et al., 2006; van Ginkel et al., 2017c; Tsang, 2017).

A literature review published by van Ginkel (2015) has, through looking at 52 outputs over the previous 20 years, sought to develop some design principles for developing oral presentation competence. Of the seven principles identified the following three are most pertinent to this thesis:

5. Ensure that feedback is explicit, contextual, adequately timed and of suitable intensity in order to improve students' oral presentation competence.
6. Encourage the involvement of peers in formative assessment processes in order to develop students' oral presentation competence and attitudes towards presenting.

7. Facilitate self-assessment using videotaping and portfolios to encourage students' self-efficacy beliefs, oral presentation competence and attitudes towards presenting.

(van Ginkel et al., 2015, p. 68)

However, the paper noted that “high quality empirical evidence for the effects of peer feedback and self-assessment on developing presentation competence, and the conditions under which these feedback sources are successful, revealed ambiguous results” (van Ginkel et al., 2015, p. 75). The review focused on the oral presentation skills literature, rather than the wider literature on feedback. Although there was some discussion of the feedback literature including self-assessment, there was no detailed discussion of issues such as self-regulation, self-evaluation or the development of evaluative judgement. Other literature has sought to address this perceived gap, with more recent studies explicitly focused on issues of feedback and related issues such as self-regulation. However, these have tended to be concerned with performance development rather than the importance of ongoing self-evaluation (Tsang, 2017; Tsang 2018; van Ginkel et al., 2017b).

### 2.3.2 Oral presentation competence and links with feedback literature

While there is a significant amount of literature on feedback associated with assessment, it has been argued that “there is a dearth of studies exploring the more core concern of effectively enhancing students' presentation skills and how this can be achieved in a pedagogically sound manner” (Tsang, 2018, p. 761). This may overstate the gap in the literature. While it is true that much of the literature looks at feedback in an assessment context (for example, De Grez et al., 2009a; De Grez et al., 2009b; De Grez et al., 2014; van Ginkel et al., 2017a; van Ginkel et al., 2017b), this literature also places significant emphasis on how these assessment practices

support competence development. Nevertheless, Tsang's observation does highlight that the studies generally measure success in terms of improved oral presentation performance within the unit of study. One measure of the success of an oral presentation competence class is, of course, improved oral presentation performances. However, measuring the development of oral presentation competence presents its own problems as it relies on the marker's judgement of a number of different elements in a performance both in terms of form and content. Indeed, recognition of this issue is perhaps what has driven researchers to devote so much attention to looking at the different impact of peer, self and tutor marking (Aryadoust, 2015; Langan et al., 2005; Langan et al., 2008; Magin & Helmore, 2001) and the development of assessment rubrics to help define standards (Dunbar et al., 2006; Tsang, 2017; van Ginkel et al., 2017c). Less attention has been paid to the development of oral presentation related self-evaluation as a goal in its own right.

In relation to rubrics, it has been suggested that their use leads to over generalised feedback that makes it difficult for learners to identify what they need to do to improve (Tsang, 2017). Tsang argues that there is a "need for a marking scheme/evaluation rubric which more accurately captures...the complexities involved in carrying out an oral presentation" (Tsang, 2017, p. 3) and that taking such an approach would support the development of self-regulating behaviour. Tutor feedback via a very detailed marking scheme is said to be necessary because self-regulated learning "does not denote letting learners do all the work alone" (Tsang, 2017, p. 10).

However, it is not clear why even a very detailed inventory of oral presentation factors would remove the risk of over generalised feedback. The problem of assessing content and form in oral presentations is perhaps not one that can be satisfactorily solved by getting more and more granular with assessment criteria. This links back to evaluative judgement and the need for the learner to develop disciplinary notions of quality. For something as complex as an academic or professional presentation,

notions of quality are likely to be so contextually bound that they may be “difficult to articulate” (Ajjawi et al., 2018, p. 9) even for the expert tutor. It is better perhaps to focus on helping learners to develop their own evaluative judgement rather than relying too heavily on tutor created criteria, however granular such criteria become. That said, the co-creation of rubrics by the learners and the tutor (Fraile et al., 2017) may offer an opportunity for the learners to enhance their understanding of quality and avoid performing merely to comply with the tenets of a rubric (Torrance, 2007). Although not articulated in terms of evaluative judgement, there is recognition in the oral presentation competence literature of the need “to find out which features learners themselves consider to be more important than others when it comes to carrying out presentations” (Tsang, 2017, p. 3).

The role and benefits of peer assessment have been popular themes for recent oral presentation competence research (De Grez et al., 2010; Langan et al., 2008; Suñol, 2016; Topping, 1998). However, the focus has tended to be on issues of grading (De Grez et al., 2012; Langan et al., 2005; Suñol, 2016) and discussion of the value of feedback from sources other than the tutor (Mulder et al., 2014). Despite the emphasis in the feedback literature on the potential benefits of peer review for the reviewer (rather than the learner being reviewed) (Nicol et al., 2014; Tai et al., 2016), this has not been something that has had significant attention in the oral presentation literature.

It seems, in relation to rubrics and peer assessment at least, that research related to the development of oral presentation competence has not taken the same approach as the wider feedback literature. Nevertheless, the two lines of literature remain more closely aligned in relation to the active role that the learner needs to play in their own learning. This can be seen in presentation competence development literature based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2005; De Grez et al., 2009a; De Grez et al.,

2012). Following this perspective, behaviours such as oral presentation competence are developed through the observation and performance of modelled patterns of behaviour, with the goal of reaching a point where the learner is able to self-regulate their performance (Bandura, 1986; De Grez et al., 2009a). Recent studies have emphasised the positive impact of observation of public speaking exemplars in the learning process (De Grez et al., 2014). This is an approach that has parallels with the use of exemplars in the evaluative judgement literature (Carless & Chan, 2017; Carless et al., 2018; Pitt, 2019). Indeed, the social cognitive theory literature refers back to Sadler (1989), arguing that students' oral presentation competence evolves by observing and attempting to achieve a match between a set standard of performance to their own performance level (Bandura, 2005; De Grez et al., 2009a; De Grez et al., 2012).

Within the social cognitive theory literature, self-regulated learning is made up of three phases: forethought, performance and self-reflection (De Grez et al., 2009b; Schunk, 2001; Zimmerman, 2000). This type of self-regulatory learning requires students to engage with and reflect upon their performances and the feedback they receive on those performances. The parallels between social cognitive theory and the development of evaluative judgement can be seen from the following description of the application of social cognitive theory to oral competence learners in higher education:

Students in higher education watch professors give lectures on a daily basis, and in a class using oral presentations, they have the opportunity to watch and evaluate each other (whether formally as in this class or informally when no peer assessment is required). As a task is performed and feedback is received, the theory suggests that a process of self-calibration occurs. From the feedback received (whether from the instructor, peer, or self), adjustments

are made so that the next attempt will be closer to the desired level of competence.

(Ritchie, 2016, p. 210)

Social cognitive theory, with its focus on social modelling, self-regulation and self-reflection, is relevant to both the wider feedback literature and the role of video in oral presentation competence development. However, it is argued that the theory behind evaluative judgement and self-evaluation is sufficient for this examination of the learning process that links oral presentation competence development to the feedback literature.

### 2.3.3 Role of video in oral presentation skills development

The value of video to support reflection has been a common feature of higher education disciplines that involve elements of student performance. For example, in the performing arts, video has been used to help students of music and dance to become “the administrators of their own learning processes” (Ramirez-Martinell & Sime, 2010, p. 264). There is nothing new in the same approach being used in public speaking training. Based on a meta-analysis of 12 studies, Bourhis and Allen (1998) reported that videotaped performances and feedback had been in use as an instructional aid for nearly thirty years and had “become a permanent feature of the basic course” (p. 256). It was observed that the “camera's ability to preserve the nonverbal and verbal elements of students' speaking performances for subsequent review and analysis has proven to be a powerful pedagogical tool” (Bourhis & Allen 1998, p. 256). One of the factors cited for the success of video was that “students enjoy and find valuable the experience of viewing themselves on videotape” (Bourhis & Allen 1998, p. 259).



The meta-analysis undertaken by Bourhis and Allen (1998) links with research looking at the self-regulated learning aspects of oral presentation competence teaching from a socio-cognitive theoretical perspective (De Grez et al., 2012). Video recording of student performances can help promote self-regulation of the learning process (Ritchie, 2016). For example, both self- and peer-review of video recorded performances can promote development through observational learning (Barry, 2012). Video recording may also help to develop students' ability to self-reflect on their performances (Miles, 2014; Simpson et al., 2019).

The use of video to support self-evaluation has been reported on in a number of contexts. Particularly pertinent to this study in terms of theoretical framework is Hung's investigation of "video enhanced reflection" (Hung, 2009, p. 174) in language teaching. Activity theory was used to help investigate student perceptions of "the mediating role played by video technology" (Hung, 2009, p. 174) when used to record students' oral language presentations. The study found that "the mediation of video in the language learning activity allows for cognitive reinforcement and affective engagement in the learning process" (Hung, 2009, p. 186) and offered the learners the opportunity to "critically reflect upon their language learning process" (Hung, 2009, p. 186).

Video of performance has also been used to support trainee teachers develop classroom skills. One study looked at an approach that combined the use of video recording of the learner's performance with video models of expert performances and a rubric (Baecher et al., 2013). The study reported that this combination resulted in more accurate self-evaluation and enhanced understanding of what was required for the assessment (Baecher et al., 2013). This echoes the wider feedback literature, where the calibrating of the learner's own performances against videos of set standards, their peers or even their own work offers opportunities to develop

evaluative judgement (Pitt, 2019; Winne, 2004). It is worth noting that other research in the context of teacher training suggested that the trainees reviewing their own classroom performances risked reduced reflection (Seidel, 2011).

Oral presentation assessment has become a common feature in higher education. For oral presentation competence development, having the video of performance available for review by the learner is valuable if they are to make effective use of feedback to improve their performance (Murphy & Barry, 2016; Quigley & Nyquist, 1992; Simpson et al., 2019). Indeed, what emerges from the literature on use of video in oral presentation competence classes is the need to combine different sources of feedback material. This was observed in the teacher training scenario discussed above (Baecher et al, 2013) and in the recent use of video with undergraduate biochemistry students (Simpson et al., 2019). It is argued that having the combination of self-assessment, reflection and tutor feedback that video supports develops “metacognitive awareness and provides students with significant feed-forward” (Murphy & Barry, 2016, p. 224). These findings have useful parallels with the video material being investigated for this thesis which combines elements of performance, peer feedback and tutor feedback.

The broader literature on the delivery of feedback via video or audio files is also relevant to this study. Video and audio delivery of feedback can be found in the general feedback literature (Cann, 2014; Lunt & Curran, 2010; Marriott & Teoh, 2012; Nortcliffe & Middleton, 2011; Thompson & Lee, 2012). It has also been used as a strategy for enhancing student engagement with feedback (Crook et al., 2012). However, the reported benefits have been mixed (Gleaves & Walker, 2013). Providing video and audio feedback has been supported by advances in mobile technologies that make capturing and sharing feedback straightforward and allow students to access the material on their mobile devices. This thesis is focused on

exploring the value of video as a learning tool rather than its mobility. However, it is not possible to divorce the use of video as a teaching tool from the fact that it can be accessed flexibly by the learner on various personal devices. While the mobile learning literature will not be explored in detail, the mobility of video remains one factor in its potential value.

## **2.4 Oral competence development in legal education**

“They were encouraged...to supplement the learning, which they had...gained from private study, by constant practice, and found this better than the instructions of all the professors.”

Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Oratore*

(Cicero, 1892, pp. 6–7)

### 2.4.1 Introduction

The system which operates within the law courts of England and Wales is essentially oral and adversarial. However, there are questions about how the individuals preparing to work as advocates in the courts are being prepared for this oral and adversarial environment. The points in the education process at which a lawyer starting out in legal practice in England and Wales is likely to have received formal oral communication competence education are limited. There has long been oral competence training at the vocational stage of legal education. However, in England and Wales at least, students are unlikely to have had formal teaching or assessment in oral presentation skills during secondary education. They may have received some training at the academic stage of their legal education but there is no guarantee that this was of a high standard (Webb et al., 2013). Further, the introduction of the Solicitors Qualification Examination may result in trainee solicitors missing opportunities to develop oral communication competencies until late in the training

process (Jones, 2019). Leaving oral communication competency so late in the training for professions that values oral communication highly is not merely of ironic interest but is relevant to issues of access to the legal professions. This thesis does not look at issues of diversity in the legal profession. However, delaying educational interventions that support oral competence development is likely to advantage candidates who, as a result of their socio-economic and educational background, already possess the types of oral competence recognised by recruiters. This type of cultural capital (Webley et al., 2016) is likely to be a significant issue for would-be advocates in England and Wales. This is acknowledged in the Legal Education and Training Review (Webb et al., 2013) which cites as a benefit of oral communication teaching the view that it will assist “those entering from a wide range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds” (Webb et al., 2013, p. 299). This part of the literature review will look more closely at current approaches to oral presentation competence development in legal education and the theoretical foundations of these approaches.

#### 2.4.2 Legal education literature

There is surprisingly little literature focused on oral presentation competence development in legal education in England and Wales (Brown, 2006). Expanding the definition to encompass oral communication competence (including client interviewing and explaining) also produces only a limited amount of published research, something acknowledged in the literature (Wallace, 2010). Such published work as there is does not tend to make significant reference to literature relating to either the wider academic writing on feedback or the oral presentation competence literature from beyond law. That said, the law literature does discuss some similar themes and concerns as the wider literature. In particular, it is argued that

approaches to oral competence development need to be more social, active and reflective (Brayne et al., 2002; Finlay-Jones & Ross, 2006; Wallace, 2010).

What characterises the legal education outputs in this area is that they tend to represent pockets of practice and research which touch upon similar themes to this literature review but with limited reference to the literature. For example, Brayne, Maughan and Maughan (2002) argue that less weight should be placed on summative assessment of oral skills in favour of more reflective approaches. However, the focus is on the vocational stage of legal training and the development of professional competency. Finlay-Jones and Ross (2006) highlight the benefits of having third year students supporting first year students in the development of oral advocacy skills. However, the focus is on the mentoring literature rather than that on feedback or peer review. Wallace (2010) discusses oral assessment and the benefits of promoting dialogue between student and tutor. There is reference to the wider literature on constructive alignment of assessment (e.g. Biggs, 2003) and reflection (e.g. Moon, 2006) but little reference to the feedback literature or oral presentation competence development research. While not founded on the same theories discussed in this thesis, there have been more recent attempts in the legal education literature to examine current learning and teaching practices in terms of learning theory. For example, one opinion piece, not referring to any empirical research, called for “teaching techniques which are in harmony with the principles of constructivism, experiential learning and productive failure” (Davies & Welsh, 2017, p. 1). In short, there is a limited amount of legal education literature in similar areas to this thesis. Such literature as there is does not include detailed reference to current research but tends to reflect more general learning theories. Indeed, the absence of reference to current research in the UK legal education literature also extends to discussion of feedback more generally. For example, a recent paper on the role of formative assessment in legal skills teaching discussed the role of formative assessment in

developing subject specific notions of standards but without any reference to the recent feedback literature (Jones, 2020).

#### 2.4.3 Learning theory in oral presentation competence development in legal education

Legal education in England and Wales and its associated academic literature has, to some extent, been shaped by its relationship with legal practice. There are two elements to this: the requirements of the legal professional bodies; and the practical demands of legal practice. While this thesis is focused on undergraduate oral presentation competence development rather than vocational training, understanding vocational advocacy training provides some useful insight into the practice and literature of legal oral competence education.

Advocacy is a key part of vocational training for barristers but is also a significant feature for solicitors and legal executives. The Hampel Method is the method of advocacy training recommended by the Inns of Court College of Advocacy (ICCA) (Bar Standards Board, 2019). It is made up of the six-stage process set out in Chapter 1.3.1. In 2016 the Inns of Court College of Advocacy commissioned a working party of senior barristers to review the use of the Hampel Method for junior practitioners. The working party concluded that the Hampel Method “remains the most effective way to communicate the basic techniques of advocacy” (Working Party on the Method of Teaching Advocacy, 2018, p. 2). The report offers very little insight into the theoretical basis of the Hampel Method or the methods used to evaluate it. The report only discusses minor changes to the structure of the method. This report reflects the practical focus of a professional body that has adopted a system of peer training, staffed by volunteer barristers. As the report makes clear, a method that focuses on only one issue at a time and is both easy to administer by trainers and is

easy to digest for the learner, offers a useful tool for professional training early in practice (Working Party on the Method of Teaching Advocacy, 2018).

Despite the absence of recent research on the merits of the Hampel Method, its theoretical foundations can be traced back to recognised learning theory. However, the focus of that theory tends to be practical and professional. For example, Schön's contribution to reflective practice in professional training and development (Schön, 1983) has "been hugely influential" (Gibbons, 2015, p. 183) in legal skills education. The importance of reflective practice as the main theoretical approach can be seen in the literature. One of the few recent attempts to explore the Hampel Method in theoretic terms has been Davies and Welsh (2016). For Davies and Welsh, the Hampel Method is derived from the application of experiential learning following the work of Kolb (1984) and Moon (2006). Experiential learning is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). For Kolb (Kolb, 2014; Kolb, 1984) this involves a cycle of the learner's concrete experience of a task, followed by reflective observation which leads on to the learner's conceptualisation of the task. The learner then puts their new conceptualisation into operation through active experimentation. This experimentation leads on to further concrete experiences which creates the ongoing cycle. This conception of experiential learning has been prominent in approaches to teaching advocacy skills at the vocational stage of legal education and early career training (Davies & Welsh, 2016). Davies and Welsh trace the Hampel Method back to the application of experiential learning principles in advocacy training in the United States by the National Institute for Trial Advocacy (NITA) (Davies & Welsh, 2016).

Experiential learning approaches have been criticised in the literature. In the context of the theoretical framework of this thesis, it might be argued that Kolb's approach to

experiential learning gives too much emphasis to individual cognition and too little emphasis to social, historical and cultural aspects of learning (Holman et al., 1997). Further, misapplication of the learning cycle can result in an over emphasis on the form of the performance rather than a deeper understanding of the subject (Lubet, 1990; Lubet, 1987). The model of learning by doing for advocacy training adopted by NITA (upon which the Hampel Method is ultimately based) has been criticised on these grounds. Indeed, the use of video may emphasise the problem since it “tends by its very nature to elevate appearance over substance” (Lubet, 1990, p. 722). Davies and Welsh (2016) raise similar concerns and argue that what they describe as the behaviourist model of the Hampel Method should be replaced, at least in the context of the vocational stage of training, with a more constructivist approach. They argue that a constructivist approach would allow more constructive dialogue between tutor and student and provides a more reflective approach to skills development (Davies & Welsh, 2016). This echoes much earlier criticism of advocacy training that argued that the “goal of teaching students must also include orientation to and comprehension of the profession” (Lubet, 1987, p. 123). For Davies and Welsh (2016) this would offer a learning experience more in line with Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 2014). To a limited extent the Bar Standards Board recognises that students should be introduced to a range of advocacy training methods but it emphasises that this should include the Hampel Method (Bar Standards Board, 2019, p. 59). It is questionable whether this type of professional training process gives sufficient weight to relevant learning theory so as to make it suitable for a vocational course or, for that matter, undergraduate students. Indeed, there is very little direct research on the efficacy of the Hampel Method. Such literature as there is has tended to question its role in legal education (Brayne et al, 2002; Davies & Welsh, 2017).

The work of the likes of Schön (1983), Kolb (1984) and Moon (2006) on reflection and experiential learning have provided a popular source of learning theory for



researchers in legal education. In particular, Kolb's conception of experiential learning has often provided the theoretical foundations for the introduction of more problem-based approaches to legal education and practical initiatives such as simulations and law clinics (Burke, 2015). Experiential approaches, such as moot court exercises, have been suggested as a means to help bridge the gap between secondary and tertiary education (Marsh & Ramsden, 2015). Arguably, Kolb's experiential approaches do not place sufficient emphasis on reflection (Newbery-Jones, 2015). Indeed, reflection, particularly in the context of the development of legal skills, "must go beyond mere observation and include an in-depth reflection on one's practice" (Newbery-Jones, 2015, p. 6). Such concerns about Kolb's conception of experiential learning are not new. Early critics argued that it failed to "uncover the elements of reflection itself" (Boud et al., 1985, p. 13). These concerns have, to some extent, been balanced by an emphasis in legal education literature on the role of reflection based on Schön (1983), Moon (2006) and Boud (Boud et al., 1985). However, to be effective, reflective elements of the law curriculum need to be clearly defined and structured for both the students and the tutors (Gibbons, 2015).

## **2.5 Activity theory**

"...the laws and institutions and ancestral customs of the Roman people were my teacher."

Cicero, *De Oratore*

(Fantham, 2004, p. 80)

### 2.5.1 Introduction

Activity theory has been developed from the work of Vygotsky who argued that humans do not interact with the world through a simple behaviourist stimulus and response model. Instead humans have developed tools and signs which change the

way in which we interact with the world (Vygotsky, 1978). These tools might be physical (such as a hammer) or psychological (such as language or other signs or symbols) (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). The process by which these tools and signs change the way that humans interact with the world and learn is referred to as mediation. Humans develop through a series of social and cultural interactions with the world mediated by these tools and signs (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006).

As an analytical framework, activity theory offers a means to gain insights into the way tools (for example, video recording and playback facilities) and signs (for example, recordings of performance and feedback) mediate between the subject (the student) and the object (competence development). Activity theory is often chosen as a framework for research in higher education “for its direct empirical applicability; used for abstraction, explanation and contextualisation; and valorised for apprehending complex situational dynamics” (Bligh & Flood, 2017, p. 125). This use of activity theory is most commonly found in conjunction with Engeström’s (2014) expanded framework. While activity theory will be used in this research as an analytical tool to explore the role of video material in oral presentation competence development, it is also used because it offers a fresh perspective on the way in which oral presentation competence is developed.

In ontological terms the approach taken by activity theory is non-dualist, where reality is located in the individual’s perception of the world leading to multiple interpretations. However, these perceptions are viewed in their social, cultural and historical context. This ontological perspective offers a means of understanding both individuals and their context (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). Activity theory “presumes a unified, subjective-objective reality, and that it posits activities as mediated, collective subjective-objective relationships” (Bligh & Flood, 2017, pp. 146–147). The focus of attention is at the collective level rather than the individual level. In terms of

education, “learning is viewed as social practice situated in a specific historical and sociocultural context” (Havnes, 2004, p. 162). The approach is not about examining individual difference but rather concerned with “ways of acting that tend to be consistent across individuals and over time” (Havnes, 2004, p. 162).

This focus on the collective rather than the individual might seem to run counter to our experience of oral presentations or courtroom advocacy. The skills exhibited and the variation in approaches taken by different people suggest something that is highly individual rather than collective. The collective nature of an individual’s oral presentation is, of course, recognised by the accommodations that a speaker will make to account for the composition of the audience. However, audience is just one aspect of context. Context is made up of a number of factors which will have a significant impact on how a speech is conducted. For example, an oral presentation will be different at a wedding, a retirement event or a university research seminar; even when the people involved as presenter and audience may be the same. The performance is a product of an individual in their social, cultural and historical context. The unit of analysis then “is the person-in-the-situation, not the person as a separate entity” (Havnes, 2004, p. 162).

Even recognition that the focus is on the person in the situation rather than the individual is unlikely to remove concerns about viewing oral presentation competence in collective terms. This is because observed experience shows that how people exercise their oral presentation skills in a particular context will vary from individual to individual. For example, different people will conduct a wedding speech, a retirement speech or a research seminar in their own personal presentation style. In the higher education context, it is clear that a class of students will be made up of individuals with different backgrounds, abilities and motivations. By focusing on the person in the situation, we do not lose sight of these differences. In a learning activity, each

individual faces the demands of the programme of study and social context in which it is situated. That social context, in some form, is already present when the student joins the programme and operates as a force that helps shape the learning of the individual. However, the relationship between the individual and the context does not operate in only one direction. The participant will also operate as a force that helps shape the social context itself. As Havnes observes, “the scope of our intention simultaneously goes in two directions; toward the context and toward the participants. Neither can be understood independently.” (Havnes, 2004, p. 163).

Viewing a learning activity as part of a unified subjective-objective reality can help to direct the investigation towards the environment in which the learner experiences that learning activity. This is particularly so when exploring the mediating role of a new tool in a learning activity. For example, Hardman (2005) has used activity theory to explore how computers facilitate learning and, in particular, “how teachers and students change the computer and are transformed by it over time” (2005, p. 380). This focus on the collective activity level allows us “to understand learning as a complex result of tool mediated interactions, rather than as something opaque which happens in a student’s mind” (Hardman, 2005, p. 380). In the context of the present study, focusing on the collective activity in the oral presentation skills classroom will help foreground the mediating role of video in the learning process.

### 2.5.2 Mediating tools

For Leont’ev, “[o]nly through a relation with other people does man relate to nature itself, which means that labour appears from the very beginning as a process mediated by tools (in the broad sense) and at the same time mediated socially” (Leont’ev, 2009, p. 411). This study will look at the various ways in which the oral presentation competence development activity is mediated. The main focus is on the

role of video recording of student performance and feedback. The video, as a tool, has a number of facets. It has physical characteristics as something that is recorded and can be viewed on an electronic device (laptop, tablet, phone etc.). The viewed material is made up of a combination of visual performance and language (both the content of the speech and the feedback). The video can be viewed as both a physical tool and a collection of verbal and nonverbal signs. For Vygotsky (Vygotsky,1978) both tools and signs will mediate activity. However, Vygotsky makes a distinction between tools and signs:

The tool's function is to serve as the conductor of human influence on the object of activity; it is externally oriented; it must lead to changes in objects. It is a means by which human external activity is aimed at mastering, and triumphing over, nature. The sign, on the other hand, changes nothing in the object of a psychological operation. It is a means of internal activity aimed at mastering oneself; the sign is internally oriented.

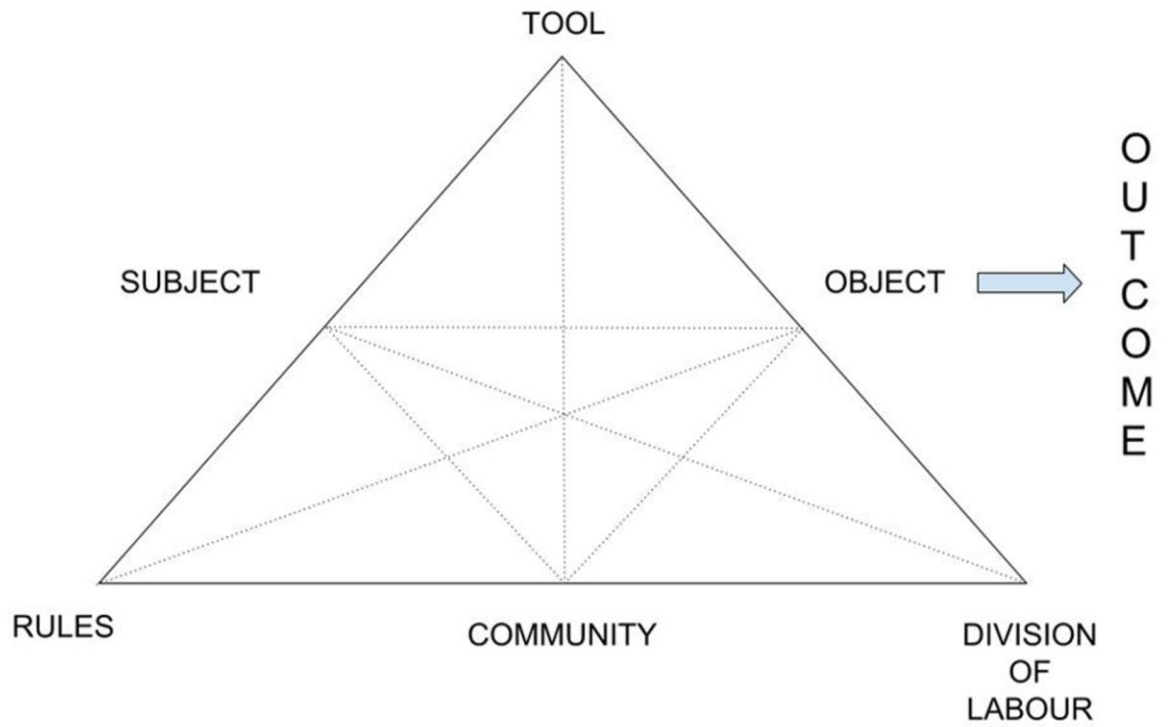
(Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55)

It is also important to view these tools and signs as phenomena within the unified subjective-objective reality. New learning tools, such as the video material, have what Leont'ev described as a "double life" (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 411). They have objective meaning in that "they are produced by society and have their history in the development of language, in the history of the development of forms of social consciousness" (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 411). They also have subjective meaning in the activity and consciousness of the individual but, in becoming subjective and individual, "they do not lose their socio-historical nature, their objectivity" (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 411). Exploring the video supported oral presentation competence development activity from this subject-objective perspective offers a way of

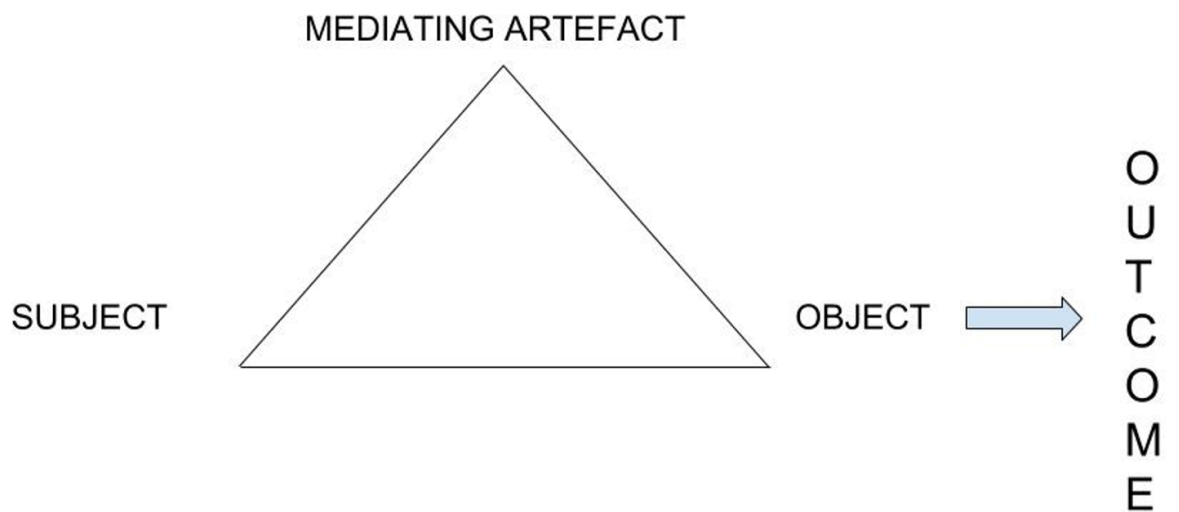
understanding the development of competence that is both individual but at the same time dependent on context.

### 2.5.3 Activity system

While Vygotsky focused on the mediating role of tools and signs, he acknowledged that in an activity, a “host of other mediated activities might be named; cognitive activity is not limited to the use of tools or signs” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55). Indeed, Vygotsky’s theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) emphasises the mediating role of other human actors in the activity. The ZPD “is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). While the focus of this study is primarily on the role of the video, an understanding is also required of the interaction of other elements of the activity. Engeström’s triangular expanded framework (Engeström, 2001, p. 137) (Figure 2.1) offers a way of representing the wider range of mediating influences in an activity. Engeström’s “model visually depicts a subject-object system mediated by interlocking artefacts (whether more or less materially tangible), divisions of labour (whether by expertise or authority) and rules (whether or not explicitly recognised)” (Bligh & Flood, 2017, p. 130).



**Figure 2.1** The structure of the human activity system (based on Engeström, 2014)



**Figure 2.2** The individual mediation element of the activity system (based on Engeström, 2014)

This framework is best understood by breaking down its elements. It starts with a basic stimulus and response model represented by the single line in Figure 2.2 between Subject and Object. This depicts basic animal behaviour; for example, the subject sees and eats some food. However, human actions are not normally based on a simple stimulus-response process. Instead humans have developed tools which mediate the way in which we interact with the world. Human activity mediated by tools and signs can be depicted in the triangle in Figure 2.2. However, this triangle only shows an individual learner. This individual learning process is part of a wider social, cultural and historical activity (Leont'ev, 2009). Engeström's expanded framework (Figure 2.1) shows the individual mediated learning process (the triangle at the top) but also draws in the various facets of the wider activity. This includes the rules which operate in the activity, the community of people involved in the activity and how the tasks within the activity are divided between the members of the community (Engeström, 2014). This expanded framework can be used to explore how human activity, such as teaching and learning, are mediated by the tools and social structures which form part of the activity. The mediating role of a new tool in an activity system "often leads to an aggravated secondary contradiction where some old element...collides with the new one. Such contradictions generate disturbances and conflicts, but also innovative attempts to change the activity" (Engeström, 2001, p. 137). Activity theory and activity systems analysis offer a means by which the complexities of the competence development process can be understood by providing "opportunities for investigators to (a) work with a manageable unit of analysis, (b) find systemic implications, (c) understand systemic contradictions and tensions, and (d) communicate findings from the analyses" (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 5). Depicting the activity as a framework provides a visual way to explore this process.



There have been attempts to adapt Engeström's activity system to help understand the different facets of new technological tools in a learning activity. For example, the task model for mobile learning (Jalil et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2006) is a two-layered activity system that depicts the dialectical relationship between technology and semiotics (Taylor et al., 2006). The semiotic layer looks at the students' learning behaviour which is mediated by cultural tools and signs. The technological layer represents the students' engagement with technology within this activity. According to the task model, as "the learners appropriate the technology into their learning activities, their learning behaviours in turn will be shaped by that technology" (Jalil et al., 2015, p. 3). While this model has not been adopted for this research, it does operate as a reminder that the tool being examined in this study is a combination of the technology itself and the video content it delivers.

#### 2.5.4 Activity, actions and operations

Activity theory is concerned with analysis of activities, activity being the unit of analysis. Engeström's expanded activity system is a visual representation of the collective activity set in its social context. However, activity theory involves more than an analysis of a human activity at a collective level. According to Leont'ev (2009), activity needs to be viewed in a hierarchical structure. The activity as a whole is created from a collection of actions. In turn, actions are made up of operations. Within this flexible hierarchy "activity presupposes a corresponding motive, which coincides with an object of activity; actions are aimed at concrete goals; and operations are connected to certain tasks" (Lektorsky, 2009, p. 77). Activities represent the collective level of human activity towards an objective; actions represent the individual conscious pursuit of goals; while operations are what individuals do without conscious thought, often referred to as conditions (Bligh & Flood, 2017).

The overall activity created from this hierarchy requires an object; for Leont'ev the "expression 'objectless activity' has no meaning at all" (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 397). Once there is division of labour in an activity, some participants may be working toward intermediate results rather than the final product (the object). However, all participants can be satisfied "by the share of the product of the total activity that each receives thanks to the relationships between the participants arising in the process of labour, that is, the social relations". (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 400).

Leont'ev illustrated this with the example of collaboration in the acquisition of food in a tribal society. Each individual participant "must perform actions that are not directly aimed at obtaining food. For example, one of his goals may be the making of trapping gear" (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 400) which may be used by others in the community to catch food. The object (or motive) of the collective activity is to catch food but the action (or goal) of the individual participant is to make a trapping gear. Therefore, within an activity, an "action is a process whose motive does not coincide with its object (i.e. with what it is directed to) but lies in the activity of which it forms part" (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 364).

The levels of activity, actions and operations "are not stable and fixed" (Engeström 2014, p. 114). Indeed, "activity is a highly dynamic system, which is characterised by constantly occurring transformations" (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 401). Actions may become operations and/or develop into new activities. The transformation of actions into new activities is "exceptionally important" (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 364). Leont'ev (2009) illustrated this developmental process at the individual level with the example of encouraging a school child to do their homework. It may only be possible to induce the child to complete the homework by saying that they will not be able to go out and play until it is finished. As Leont'ev explained:

The child begins doing its homework conscientiously because it wants to go out quickly and play. In the end this leads to much more; not simply that it will get the chance to go and play but also that it will get a good mark. A new 'objectivation' of its needs comes about, which means that they are understood at a higher level. (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 366)

As well as actions generating new activities, actions may be internalised and become unconscious operations. Leont'ev illustrates this with the example of learning to shoot a gun (Leont'ev, 2009).

After the novice has learned, for example, to squeeze the trigger smoothly, he is given a new task, to fire at the target. Now the aim in his consciousness is not 'to squeeze the trigger smoothly' but another one, to 'hit the target'. Smoothness in pressing the trigger is now only one of the conditions of the action required by this goal.  
(Leont'ev, 2009, p. 370)

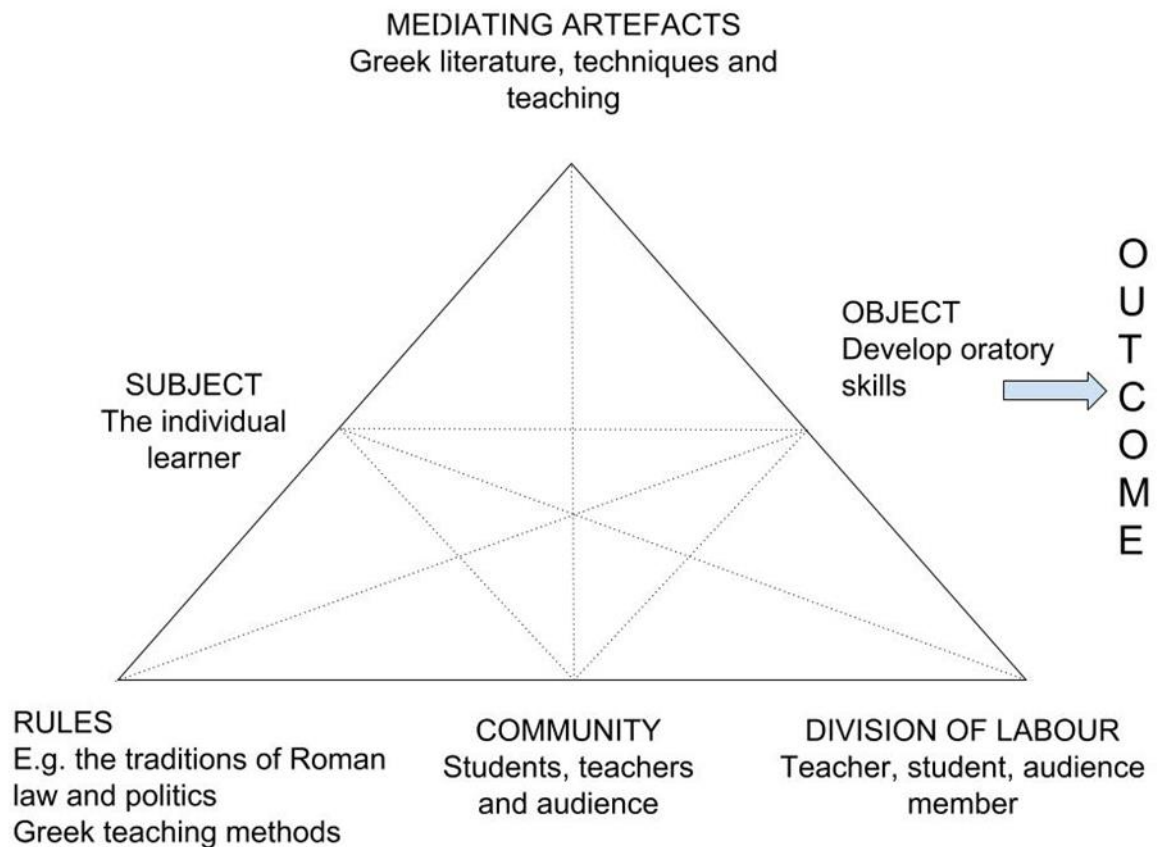
Turning back to the example of the school child and their homework, it is important to keep in mind that the activity level is social and collective. The child's individual goal to go outside to play explains the action to do the homework. However, this is all part of an activity which takes place in a social, cultural and historical context; the object of which is the development and learning of the pupils (the subjects in the activity system). Indeed, the motive/object of the activity may not be immediately apparent to the subjects of the activity (Leont'ev, 2009). For example, it may be sufficient to have a student whose main goal is to pass the examination, as long as the course design is such that this will also mean that the student meets the learning outcomes (the object) of the course. However, the potential dynamic and unstable nature of the

object of the activity means that the object of the learning process is not necessarily what the teacher wants it to be. For example, problems with design may mean that the motive/object of a learning episode becomes merely to pass the examination rather than to learn and understand the subject topic. As Havnes observes, “it can be questioned if the object of the education practice is learning for future professional practice or the passing of exams” (Havnes, 2004, p. 163).

Although the triangular activity system (Figure 2.1) developed by Engeström only represents the collective activity level, actions and operations are incorporated. Engeström observes that the triangle of activity should be “depicted as a three-level hierarchy. Each corner of the triangle would thus have three qualitatively different levels: that of the overall activity, that of actions, and that of operations” (Engeström, 2014, p. 122).

Cicero’s description of the learning of oratory can be used as an illustrative example of an activity. In Cicero, the Greek teachers and the Greek literature on oratory have had an impact on the oral competence development of Roman orators. They have played a mediating role which has allowed the learners to develop beyond what could be achieved without their intervention - Vygotsky’s ZPD. However, within activity theory the Greek teachers have a role within the wider activity, what Leont’ev would describe as a “double life” (Leont’ev, 2009, p. 411). They have objective meaning in that they are the product of the cultural, historical and social development of Roman society as it embraced Greek thinking and approaches to public speaking. They also have subjective meaning in the activity and consciousness of the individual learner but, in becoming subjective and individual, “they do not lose their socio-historical nature, their objectivity” (Leont’ev, 2009, p. 411). The activity that Cicero describes after the influence of Greek teaching was introduced can be plotted in an expanded

activity system (Figure 2.3). From this it is possible to get a visual representation of how the various elements of the activity interact.



**Figure 2.3** Activity system “after they had heard the Greek orators, studied Greek literature, and called in the aid of Greek teachers” (based on Engeström, 2014)

### 2.5.5 Activity theory and feedback

There are examples of activity theory being used to explore the role of feedback in education. However, it has not been a significant presence in the general feedback literature. Most relevant to this study is the use of activity theory to look at learners’ perceptions of the value of video in oral competence teaching, in particular in the context of foreign language learning (Hung, 2009) (Chapter 2.3.3 above).

Activity theory has also been used to examine other aspects of feedback. For example, Pryor and Crossouard (2008) used activity theory as a model to explore the way that formative assessment can be used to support active learning by deconstructing the contextual power relations between teacher and student (Pryor & Crossouard, 2008). Activity theory has been used to explore the use of formative assessment in higher education (Asghar, 2013). Despite activity theory not being a significant part of the general feedback literature, it offers a useful framework for this study. This is emphasised by the literature that highlights that learning from feedback is socially situated (Bloxham & Campbell, 2010; Price et al, 2011).

More recently there has been research that takes a sociocultural approach to feedback (Chong, 2021; Esterhazy, 2019; Esterhazy and Damşa, 2019). This adopts the same perspective as activity theory with learning being viewed as meaning-making that does not take place “in a vacuum but within a social, cultural, and historical context” (Esterhazy and Damşa, 2019, p. 263). While this approach does not share the same focus on the activity, sociocultural perspectives are useful in understanding situations where feedback is a shared process. As Esterhazy and Damşa observe, “[t]hrough their interactions, participants make their own interpretations observable to other participants, and these interpretations become shared resources for meaning-making” (Esterhazy and Damşa, 2019, p. 263).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The focus of this research is on how video of oral presentation performances and feedback on those performances can be used to support the development of oral presentation competence (including effective self-evaluation behaviour) in a legal education context. Perhaps unsurprisingly there is no literature on this narrow issue. However, the learning activity being explored in this thesis draws on a number of

strands of literature which have generally not intersected. Despite the importance of oral presentation competence in legal education, there have been only modest levels of research in this area. This is perhaps the result of the influence and practical focus of the legal profession. There is significant literature on oral presentation competence development away from legal education including the role that video can play in supporting competence development. The focus has tended to be on developing and assessing presentation performance rather than developing self-evaluation behaviour. There is literature on self-regulation of presentation competence development mainly based on social cognitive theory. This approach does provide a link with some of the wider literature on the role of feedback in learning in higher education. However, this connection is only rarely reflected in the literature.

# Chapter 3 Research Design and Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

In this thesis activity theory operates both as the theoretical framework and as an approach to analysis. Viewing oral presentation competence development as a social, cultural and historical activity mediated by tools and signs offers a valuable way of understanding an area that is ordinarily explored in terms of the individual learner. However, it is also recognised that failing to take account of the different ways that learners experience the activity may lead to misunderstanding of that activity. In order to address this concern, the first stage of the investigation seeks to determine the qualitatively different ways in which the video material may be experienced by the learners. Gaining an understanding of the different ways in which the learner may experience the video material allows a more nuanced analysis of the activity and an insight into how experience of using the video material changes as it is used. Combining the learner perceptions of the video material with an analysis of the activity as a whole also allows a more detailed insight into the relationship between the video material and the development of self-evaluative behaviour.

The research is divided into two stages. Stage 1 consists of a phenomenographic analysis of student experiences of using the video material with the aim of showing the various ways in which the video material can be experienced in the context of the activity. Stage 2 uses activity theory as an analytical tool to explore how the reported experiences of individual students change through the course of an academic year and considers what interventions might allow better use to be made of video to support self-evaluation of oral presentation competence.



## 3.2 Stage 1 Phenomenographic analysis

### 3.2.1 Introduction

Stage 1 of the analysis uses a phenomenographic approach to explore the qualitatively different ways in which students describe the experience of using video recordings of their presentation performances and video recordings of feedback on those performances (Research Question 1).

Despite the weight of literature on the role of feedback in higher education, the focus has not principally been on how students report their experience of feedback (McLean et al., 2015). Further, in the oral presentation competence literature it has been argued that amongst the “plethora of research on self-evaluation and feedback, not many explored further learners’ feedback on their own feedback (i.e. their opinions of self-reflection and evaluation)” (Tsang, 2017, p. 768). The success of any feedback episode is dependent on what the learner does in terms of making sense of information and then using it in their own development. Successful feedback relies on the active internal processes of the learner. In order to understand “these processes, and the role of students, we require a better understanding of how students conceptualise feedback” (McLean et al., 2015, p. 922). Phenomenography offers a useful way of exploring these conceptions.

### 3.2.2 Phenomenography

Phenomenography is non-dualistic in the sense that it is not based on the idea of a subjective consciousness and a separate objective reality. Rather there is only one world which is constituted as an internal relation between the world and each of us (what Marton (1981) describes as a *second-order* perspective). Each individual will therefore experience the world differently (Marton & Booth, 1997; Åkerlind, 2012).

Phenomenography is concerned with exploring “the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them” (Marton, 1986, p. 31). It may be used both for “describing the phenomena in the world as others see them, and in revealing and describing the variation therein, especially in an educational context” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111). These variations in the ways different people see particular phenomena can be arranged into logically related categories and “can, as a rule, be hierarchically ordered” (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111). For a researcher, the aim is not limited to gathering a collection of different meanings but also logically constituting categories of description which represent different ways of experiencing a phenomenon. These categories of description “are thus seen as representing a structured set, the outcome space” (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 116). This outcome space should “represent the full range of possible ways of experiencing the phenomenon in question, at this particular point in time, for the population represented by the sample group collectively” (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 116). This does not mean that there is only one possible hierarchy that can be created from the interview material. However, it must be a hierarchy that can be convincingly argued from the data (Ashwin et al., 2014).

### 3.2.3 Using phenomenography in longitudinal research

Phenomenography and the hierarchy that can be developed from the outcome space offer a means to explore how learners change their conceptions over time. The results of phenomenographic analysis have been used, for example, to explore students’ changing views on sociology (Ashwin et al., 2014). Such an approach requires each subject to be interviewed multiple times in a set period and their descriptions of the phenomenon plotted over the course of the period of the study (Ashwin et al., 2014). The phenomenographic study itself stops at the point at which the categories of description are decided. This further analysis is a “use of

phenomenographic outcome space rather than a part of the phenomenographic study” (Ashwin et al., 2014, p. 224).

#### 3.2.4 Critiques of phenomenography

There has been criticism of phenomenography being the “search for so-called conceptions or ways of experiencing” (Säljö, 1997, p. 188) and that researchers would be better served looking at the subjects’ accounts of a phenomenon (Ashwin, 2006). Such accounts can then be analysed “as attempts at communicating in situated practices rather than as ways of experiencing” (Säljö, 1997, p. 188). It is argued that the issue of whether phenomenography can reveal the range of conceptions of a phenomenon reflects more general concerns associated with the limitations of phenomenography. In particular, the part that the researcher plays in constructing the categories of description of the phenomena from the minds of the interviewees.

The key issue is in how the results of a phenomenographic investigation are viewed. Richardson (1999) notes that Marton takes a realist position in relation to the results of phenomenographic research outcomes. That is to say, Marton would maintain “that the aim of the phenomenographer is to discover and classify people's conceptions of reality in just the same way that a botanist might discover and classify new species of plants on some remote island” (Richardson, 1999, p. 65). As Richardson observes (1999), if it is accepted that different researchers could reasonably create a different hierarchy of categories of description from the outcome space then one must conclude that the interpretation of the outcome space and the resulting categories of description in relation to a phenomenon must, to some extent, be a construction of the researcher. It might of course be argued that differences between the outcomes produced by different researchers simply suggest that some or all of the researchers

have failed to reveal the true categories of description. I do not take the view that knowledge of the social world is found through looking at the variation of perceptions alone. However, understanding the nature and validity of the phenomenographic outcome space is central to this thesis.

Richardson's approach highlights important concerns about the validity of results of phenomenographic research. Of particular concern in the literature is the extent to which the results of phenomenography are merely constructions imposed on the data by the researcher rather than emerging from the data (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Indeed, it has been argued that "phenomenographic research will tend to report the history of a particular discipline as it is understood by the researchers and as they reconstruct it through the people they interview" (Webb 1997, p. 201). There is force in the argument that it is not possible for a "researcher to have pristine perception, make neutral observations, build objective categories and give neutral interpretations" (Webb 1997, p. 201). Nevertheless, in the context of this project it is argued that it is sufficient to conclude that the value of phenomenography is "not its theoretical purity, but its value in producing useful insights into teaching and learning" (Entwistle 1997, p. 129). Ultimately, this project is not a piece of phenomenographic research, rather it is using phenomenographic techniques to provide a structured analysis of the ways of experiencing video material in an oral presentation competence development unit. While I have taken detailed steps to reduce the impact of my own preconceptions (considered further below), I take the view that the phenomenographic results provide a valuable way to explore the range of experiences of using video in oral presentation competence development rather than being an end in itself.

### **3.3 Stage 2 Activity theory and research design**

Stage 2 of the analysis seeks to identify elements within the oral presentation

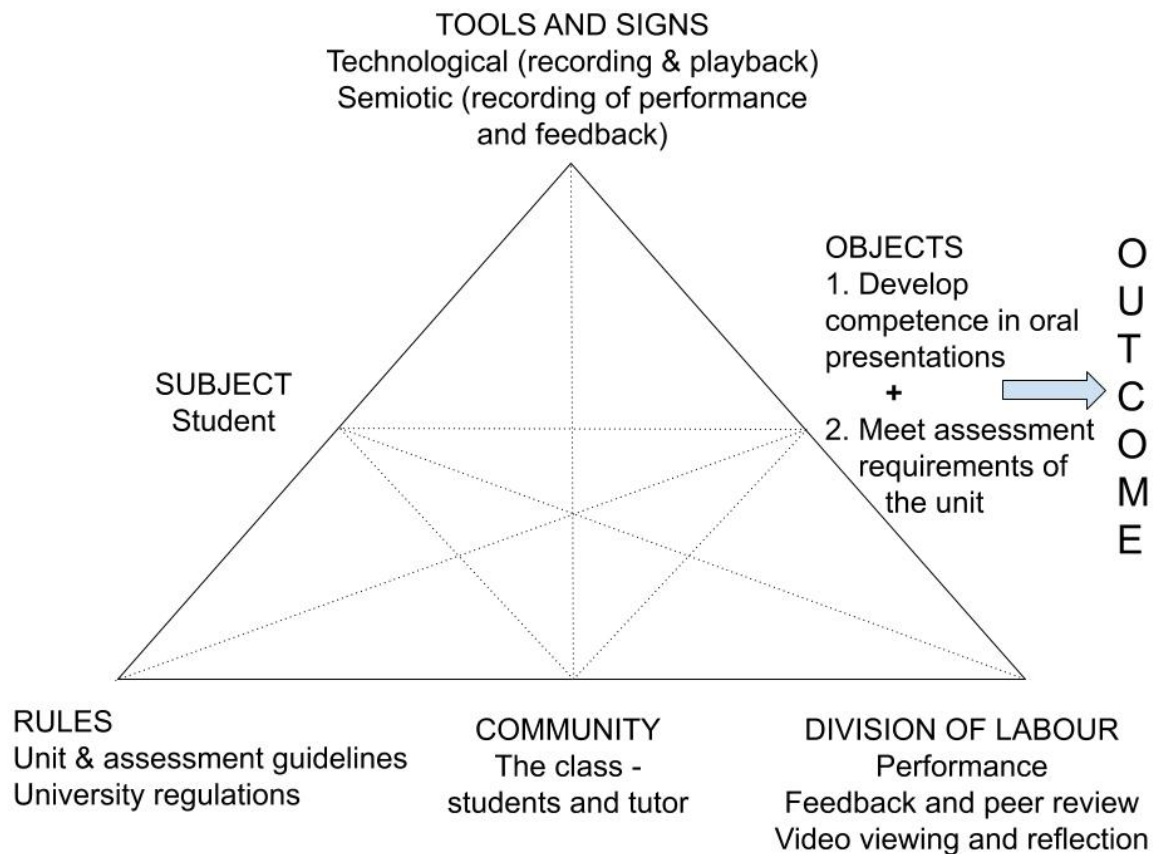
competence learning activity that might account for changes or absence of changes in students' perceptions of the video material (Research Question 2). It then goes on to consider how the video material might best be used to encourage and support student self-evaluation of their presentation competence development (Research Question 3).

The research questions are designed to link the social, cultural and historical conception of oral presentation competence development with an activity theory based analysis of the tool mediated learning activity. Central to researching from this perspective is the idea that all activities are "the result of certain historical developments under certain conditions" (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006, p. 71). Development in activity theory "is not only an object of study, but also a general research methodology" (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006, p. 71). One product of being a general research methodology is that activity theory is "not wedded to any particular research method but instead starts from the problem and then moves to the selection of a method" (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006, p. 72). Activity theory is often used in conjunction with other methodologies that share an interest in tracking the history and development of human activity (e.g. ethnography) or activity theory adopts the research methods of other methodologies without necessarily adopting the associated philosophy. In this research, phenomenographic methods are used and elements of phenomenographic philosophy form part of this study. However, I take the view that the results of phenomenographic research are not sufficient on their own to provide knowledge of the activity under investigation. Activity theory offers a means to extend the research beyond the categories of description produced from the phenomenographic analysis to better understand the oral presentation competence activity and, in particular, the role played by the video material.

There has already been some discussion in Chapter 2 about how activity systems analysis (Engeström, 2001) offers a visual means for researchers to “(a) work with a manageable unit of analysis, (b) find systemic implications, (c) understand systemic contradictions and tensions, and (d) communicate findings from the analyses” (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 5). These elements will be used as headings to explain how activity theory will be used.

### 3.3.1 A manageable unit of analysis and finding systemic implications

For activity theory the unit of analysis is the activity. This research looks at the single activity of an oral presentation competence development unit. In order to analyse the activity and the interaction of its components, the activity system can be depicted diagrammatically. The activity system being used for this analysis is shown in Figure 3.1. This activity system is based on the intended design of the oral presentation competence development unit. As such it is neither definitive nor immune from change, it merely offers a starting point for analysis. The focus of the research is the relationship between the student and the video material; how that relationship changes over time; and how understanding that changing relationship can be used to improve the activity and the use of video material in particular.



**Figure 3.1 The activity system for video supported presentation competence development** (based on Engeström, 2014; Jalil et al., 2015; Sharples et al., 2005; Taylor et al., 2006)

The activity system consists of a number of components.

- The **subject** of the activity is the student learner.
- The **community** is limited to the immediate class and the tutor.
- The **division of labour** requires the subject to engage in performance, peer review, video viewing and reflection on their performances. The tutor provides feedback and the conditions in which the performance take place (the classroom) and the video material (recording the performance and feedback and making it accessible).

- The **rules** are at both the unit level (assessment and class participation) and university level (observing the relevant university regulations).
- The **tools and signs** are the videos of performance and feedback. The dual nature of the video material is acknowledged within the activity system. The video material consists of both technological elements (ability to record and the availability of the recordings on the student's own device) and semiotic elements (the student's own meaning making after reviewing the performance and feedback) (Jalil et al., 2015).
- The **object (object 1)**. From a design perspective, the intended object of the activity is to support the development of presentation competence with a particular emphasis on developing self-evaluation skills. The **outcome** being that the subject will be equipped to continue their development beyond the unit.
- The design recognises that **object 1** is not enough on its own. **Object 2** recognises that the subjects of the activity may consider meeting the assessment requirements of the unit to be their motive/object (with the desired **outcome** of passing the unit). The hope of the unit design is that a focus on the assessment requirements (**object 2**) will also develop oral presentation competence (**object 1**).

### 3.3.2 Contradictions and tensions

What has been presented in Figure 3.1 is the planned activity. Essentially the diagram depicts subjects who are motivated to develop their oral presentation skills; in an activity that is mediated by the video material; supported by peers and tutors who all have clear roles; and governed by rules that are in tune with the object of the activity. However, the “activity is a highly dynamic system, which is characterised by constantly occurring transformations” (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 401). These transformations



result in contradictions in the activity system (Engeström, 2001). These contradictions may be negative in that they operate as barriers within the activity. For example, in research into the operation of an earlier version of this oral presentation competence class, contradictions in the relationship between the rules and the subject meant that the students were not engaging with the video material and contradictions between the division of labour and the subject meant that too much emphasis was placed on tutor feedback (Barker & Sparrow, 2016). However, contradictions also provide the driving force behind innovation. Again, looking back over the development of the oral presentation competence unit, the shortcomings of the Hampel Method produced a number of contradictions in the activity which led to a greater focus on reflection. Reflection as a strategy faced further contradictions until a means was found to record the presentations and feedback.

### 3.3.3 Communicate findings

The activity system diagram provides an analytical tool, a means of communicating findings and a way to illustrate future change. However, there are limitations on what the activity system can show. The diagrammatical representation of the activity (Figure 3.1) only shows the activity layer. It does not show the hierarchical levels of activities, actions and operations. For this study attention will be paid to the chain of subjects' actions which form the activity. These "actions are not separate things that are included in activity" (Leont'ev, 2009, p. 401), the activity only exists as actions or chains of actions (Leont'ev, 2009). It is at this level that it is anticipated the most useful observations are likely to be made as this is the point of greatest dynamism. As Leont'ev observed:

Activity may lose the motive that evoked it, in which case it turns into an action that realises perhaps a quite different relationship to the world, a

different activity; conversely, action may acquire an independent motivating force and become a special kind of activity; and finally, action may be transformed into a means of achieving a goal capable of realizing different actions.

(2009, p. 401)

It is hypothesised that for a new activity, where the intended object is quite remote to the students, engaging with the unit is likely to involve actions directed towards shorter term goals (getting through a speech in class without embarrassment). How these actions and motives develop (whether remaining static; becoming subconscious operations; becoming more engaged with the intended activity; or forging new activities) is a crucial focus of stage 2 of the analysis.

#### 3.3.4 Critiques and limitations of activity theory

The shortcomings of attempts to depict activity in a diagrammatic form hint at some of the wider criticisms of activity theory and, in particular, how it is used in education research. The neatness of this relationship between the theoretical foundations of activity theory (Vygotsky, 1978 and Leont'ev, 2009) and the more recent use of the expanded activity system model (led by Engeström, 2001) as an analytical tool has given rise to concerns about the validity and usefulness of the theory. For Bakhurst (2009), the apparent universal application of activity theory highlights concerns about its value. It appears to offer a useful analytical tool in circumstances “where you have a reasonably well-defined object, a pretty good sense of desirable outcomes, a self-identifying set of subjects, a good sense of what might count as an instrument or tool, etc.” (Bakhurst, 2009, p. 206) but offers “no explanatory value” (Bakhurst, 2009, p. 206) for a whole range of activities from mundane day to day tasks to the creation of art (Bakhurst, 2009). However, these concerns may illustrate issues with how activity

theory is being used in research rather than shortcomings in the theory itself. A review of 59 empirical higher education activity theory based research papers (Bligh & Flood, 2017) concluded that activity theory is used for its “empirical utility” (Bligh & Flood, 2017, p. 148) as an analytical tool rather than making use of the theory to change established research practices (Bligh & Flood, 2017). In this research, I would argue that its usefulness as an analytical tool is a necessary consequence of “reframing”, to use the terms used by Bligh & Flood (2017, p. 146), oral presentation competence development as a tool mediated social, cultural and historical activity.

Conceptualising oral presentation competence development as a collective rather than individual activity highlights the concern prominent in the literature that activity theory does not pay sufficient attention to the role of the individual. Indeed, activity systems not depicting actions and operations moves the analysis further from the individual. For example, it has been argued that activity theory “ignores an important aspect of the human mind” (Toomela, 2008, p. 298). There are a number of problems that can flow from this. First, it can result in a misleading analysis of an activity or phenomenon as “externally the same behaviour can emerge from qualitatively different mental operations” (Toomela, 2008, p. 298). Furthermore, there is a risk that an activity theory based analysis may miss “out on much that is crucial to understanding of individual persons’ knowledge and practices” (McMurtry, 2006, p. 215). These criticisms are challenged, notably by Ratner (Ratner, 2008) and Yamagata-Lynch (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Nevertheless, this concern is one that is recognised in the research design. In particular, it is acknowledged that, although presentation competence needs to be viewed as socially situated, individual perceptions and decision making play an important part in the activity. Indeed, it is this concern that has led to the decision to use phenomenographic method, despite some epistemological challenges (Chapter 3.4), as a means of integrating the perspective of the subject of the activity (the learner) into the research. Nevertheless,

while phenomenographic method offers an effective way to understand the range of perceptions of a phenomenon, it does so by analysing a collection of experiences gathered together in the research outcome space. This means that the relationship between the individual and the particular perception will be lost. This problem is addressed by extending the analysis beyond the phenomenographic study by looking at individuals' experiences through the activity in stage 2 of the analysis.

There remains the concern that neither activity theory nor phenomenography offer sufficient insight into individual difference. For example, activity theory may not offer the most appropriate way of exploring the role of race, class and gender as such characteristics may not be "assigned any distinctive ontological status" (Hartley, 2009, p. 146). It should be noted that exploring these characteristics was not part of the research design. However, the impact of such difference on public speaking and issues such as stereotype threat (anxiety associated with the prospect of confirming a negative stereotype (McGlone & Pfiester, 2015)) are not problems that an activity theory analysis seems well equipped to explore. Similarly, in relation to phenomenography, Ashwin and McLean observe that the difficulty with "Marton and Booth's subjective account [of learning] is that it obscures structural factors, such as social class, when considering questions of why people experience learning in the way they do" (2005, p. 383).

### **3.4 Activity theory and phenomenography in combination**

Activity theory and phenomenography may appear to be philosophically incompatible. Activity theory takes the activity as a whole as the unit of analysis, while phenomenography looks to the range of ways in which a phenomenon can be experienced. As Berglund observes it is a "difference between an externalist

perspective, which leads researchers to observe events and to analyse them from within their theoretical and methodological frameworks, and an experiential perspective, in which the researcher seeks to see events as the actors experience them” (2004, p. 69). Attempting to examine the activity from the experiences of the subject potentially challenges the philosophical foundations of activity theory. However, it is argued that phenomenography not only offers useful methodological tools for research based on activity theory, it is also compatible with activity theory in ontological terms.

Activity theory and phenomenography are both non-dualist in that both understand the mind and the material world to be part of a single reality (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010; Marton & Booth, 1997). However, the differences become apparent when looking at their epistemological perspectives. Phenomenography holds that “conceptions are the central form of knowledge” (Svensson, 1997, p. 171), while activity theory looks at the collective level of human activity as a series of social and cultural interactions with the world mediated by tools and signs (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006). With both phenomenography and activity theory the focus is not directly on the individual but on the larger collective group. Phenomenographic research “aims to explore the range of meanings within a sample group, as a group, not the range of meanings for each individual within the group” (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 117). Once this range of meaning is captured and structured in a logical hierarchy, the phenomenographic analysis is complete. With activity theory the focus is not on examining difference, rather “the focus is on mechanisms that make people act in similar ways within a given context” (Havnes, 2004, p. 162). Structured differences in the way a phenomenon can be experienced can be used to better understand “the person-in-the-situation” (Havnes, 2004, p. 162). However, it is acknowledged that using the phenomenographic outcome space in this way is not consistent with the philosophical foundations of

phenomenography, where the structured hierarchy of the outcome space is the goal of the research.

Nevertheless, phenomenography has been used in conjunction with activity theory by a number of researchers (e.g. Berglund, 2004; Shreeve, 2011). The combination offers a means of linking the categories of description from the phenomenographic analysis with the context (Shreeve, 2011). For Berglund (2004), the “outcome space of the phenomenographic analysis is associated with different components of an activity system” (Berglund, 2004, p. 70) and the researcher is able to go beyond recording variations in experience. The epistemological conflict between phenomenography and activity theory can be avoided by considering the activity from the perceived context of the subject; essentially viewing the whole activity from the perspective of the subject (Berglund, 2004). However, issues of compatibility are easier to reconcile by separating the phenomenographic analysis from the activity theory based analysis. For example, Shreeve (2011) uses activity theory as a heuristic device to examine individual subjects that aligned closely with particular categories of description produced by the phenomenographic investigation (Shreeve, 2011). This approach allows categories of description to be understood within the context of the activity.

It is argued that for an activity such as the acquisition of oral presentation competence there is justification in looking at the activity from the perspective of the subject. The object of the activity is not simply whether, as a result of the teaching activity, students become more proficient at the act of public speaking. The object of the activity is also to develop the way in which students experience oral presentations and, in particular, develop their ability to evaluate and foster their own ongoing competence development. Adopting a perspective that is entirely collective and externalist would not explore these issues in sufficient depth. Indeed, it is important to

look at the whole hierarchy of activity, including actions and operations. in relation to the use of video and to explore how this changes over the course of the year of study. Stage 1 of the research (the phenomenographic analysis) does not track development over time. However, by establishing a hierarchy of variations in the way the video material may be experienced, it is possible to then use activity theory to track how and why students' accounts of their experiences change over time.

I have adapted the approach taken by Shreeve (2011) so that the activity theory framework can be used to examine how and why individual subjects move within the categories of description through the course of the academic year. At the beginning of the year the subjects are faced with the prospect of using video but will not have any experience of using it. As each student's video bank builds through each class performance and feedback episode it will be possible to consider whether and to what extent use of the video material alters students' reported experiences of that video material. An expanded activity system can be developed to explore the implications of the different categories of description in the context of the wider activity. By doing this it is hoped that it will be possible to better understand the mediating role of the video material and design ways in which it can be used more effectively.

### **3.5 The position of the researcher**

The research requires the students to describe their experiences of using video from their perspective in the activity. I am the designer and lead tutor on the unit in question. The design has developed based on my own views of how best to teach oral presentation competence. I am therefore conscious that my own views may contaminate the phenomenographic analysis. One approach to this issue is for me to set aside (bracket) my own assumptions, as far as is possible, in order to register the

subject's own point of view (Ashworth & Lucas 2000). According to Ashworth and Lucas (2000) this bracketing process needs to be maintained throughout the research so as to avoid the researcher being led away from the subject's experience. This approach is linked to the ontological assumptions which inform a phenomenographic study such as this. The non-dualist phenomenographic "world is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them" (Marton & Booth 1997, p. 13). Since the research object has the character of knowledge the distinction between ontology and epistemology becomes blurred (Svensson 1997, p. 166). Investigation of variation within this non-dualist world clearly risks being disturbed by my own standpoint. Nevertheless, I felt that the process of setting aside existing assumptions was unrealistic and chose instead to maintain "an interpretative awareness" (Sandbergh, 1997, p. 209) by acknowledging and explicitly dealing with subjectivity throughout the research process. I found that the best way to achieve this was to consciously and carefully consider my own views at the outset. This approach is consistent with my epistemological position which sees the value of the phenomenographic analysis as being its insights into learning activity rather than in its "theoretical purity" (Entwistle 1997, p. 129).

The students involved in the study were part of an undergraduate presentation competence unit that I coordinate and teach on. The study is therefore insider research (Trowler, 2011). While I have taken appropriate steps to safeguard ethical issues and maintain ethical research practices (see following sections), it is nevertheless acknowledged that the power relationships between interviewer and interviewee may distort the data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mercer, 2007). In particular, the participants are likely to emphasise behaviours that have been encouraged by their tutors and minimise behaviours that they do not perceive as in tune with the unit design. The participants are likely to be positive about engaging



with videos of their performances and feedback away from the classroom. While this may distort the data relating to the level and degree of engagement with the activity, it is unlikely to disrupt the student descriptions of their use and understanding of the video material. I hypothesised that the most likely point at which the participants would echo my views of the video material was at the start of the unit (after the role of video has been explained but before it has been used in classes). As a result, the first round of interviews was scheduled just before video was used for the first time (in the fourth week of classes). While the concerns relating to the influence of the researcher's views cannot be eliminated, the first round of interviews were designed to provide some indication of the extent to which the interviewees' reported experiences may have been affected by my own views.

### **3.6 Selecting and inviting participants**

The Art of Persuasion unit is part of the first year (Level 4) of the Law School's undergraduate LLB Law programme. The cohort from which the participants were drawn was mostly made up of UK based students who had come directly from secondary education in England and Wales. The cohort also included a small number of international students.

The pool of potential participants was small (around 100). I had hoped that around 20 volunteers would be recruited for interview from this cohort. I considered that to be a sufficient number to reach the point where no further categories of meaning would be generated or the saturation point (although I note the criticism of 'saturation' as a term in this context (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012)). I explained to the cohort that research volunteers were being sought and that further details could be sent on request. This approach resulted in 19 volunteers for the first round of interviews. While this was not

the 20 I had originally sought, I decided not to attempt a more active approach to recruit volunteers (direct emails had been approved in the ethics approval process).

Table 3.1 shows the participants identified by their pseudonyms. Ten of the students identified as female and nine as male. This balance reflected the make-up of the student cohort on the unit. Other than age and gender no other information was gathered about the individual characteristics of the participants. All but two of the students interviewed for this study had come directly from A-Levels taken at schools in the UK. Two of the students (Ally and Bess) were international students and had come via an international school access course associated with the University. All but one of the students interviewed was aged between 18 and 20 through the course of the interviews. One student (Bess), at 22 years old, was the only individual who would be defined as a mature student (over 21 at the start of her studies).

| Participant<br>(pseudonym)<br>M = Male<br>F = Female | First Interview<br>(Before any<br>recordings made)<br><br>Date and duration | Second Interview<br>(All participants<br>had completed at<br>least two<br>recordings<br>including an<br>assessment)<br>Date and duration | Third Interview<br>(End of the year. All<br>students needed to<br>include at least six<br>recordings for the<br>assessment but most<br>had done more.)<br>Date and duration |
|--|---|--|---|
| Ally (F)   | 03/10/2016<br>7m 23s  | 11/01/2017<br>16m 30s  | 20/03/2017<br>16m 57s   |
| Anna (F)   | 12/10/2016<br>15m 48s   | 22/11/2016<br>26s 28s  | 19/06/2017 (Skype)<br>20m 40s   |
| Anthony (M)  | 11/10/2016<br>19m 05s   | 06/12/2016<br>29m 23s  | 23/03/2017<br>25m 55s   |
| April (F)  | 17/10/2016<br>10m 33s   | 29/11/2016<br>18m 38s  | 20/03/2017<br>20m 07s   |
| Bess (F)   | 04/10/2016<br>12m 33s   | 06/12/2016<br>8m 09s   | 17/03/2017<br>14m 49s   |
| Cameron (M)  | 10/10/2016<br>9m 31s  | Unable to<br>schedule a time   | 28/03/2017<br>21m 03s   |
| Charlie (M)  | 11/10/2016<br>14m 39s   | 06/12/2016<br>26m 20s  | 23/03/2017<br>22m 13s   |
| Connor (M)   | 11/10/2016<br>11m 17s   | 22/11/2016<br>17m 00s  | 31/03/2017<br>15m 01s   |
| Ian (M)  | 06/10/2016<br>16m 20s   | 24/11/2016<br>29m 38s  | 30/03/2017<br>35m 43s   |
| Ike (M)  | 04/10/2016<br>10m 59s   | 29/11/2016<br>15m 52s  | 21/03/2017<br>17m 38s   |
| Katie (F)  | 10/10/2016<br>10m 39s   | 05/12/2016<br>20m 54s  | 24/03/2017<br>17m 48s   |
| Marnie (F)   | 03/10/2016<br>8m 43s  | 09/12/2016<br>15m 58s  | Unable to schedule a<br>time  |
| Mia (F)  | 11/10/2016<br>9m 26s  | 29/11/2016<br>21m 24s  | 23/03/2017<br>22m 21s   |
| Michael (M)  | 05/10/2016<br>17m 41s   | Suspended<br>Studies   | Suspended Studies   |
| Mitch (M)  | 12/10/2016<br>12m 27s   | 23/11/2016<br>25m 19s  | 21/03/2017<br>15m 19s   |
| Nell (F)   | 04/10/2016<br>16m 06s   | 06/12/2016<br>22m 01s  | 21/03/2017<br>17m 28s   |
| Peter (M)  | 07/10/2016<br>10m 12s   | 02/12/2016<br>20m 46s  | 20/03/2017<br>17m 17s   |
| Ren (F)  | 10/10/2016<br>14m 39s   | 05/12/2016<br>27m 23s  | 20/03/2017<br>26m 21s   |
| Sarah (F)  | 10/10/2016<br>9m 34s  | 05/12/2016<br>13m 26s  | 21/03/2017<br>18m 59s   |

**Table 3.1 Interview participants and interview details**

### **3.7 Preparing for the interviews**

Interviews were the most appropriate choice of data collection “since phenomenography studies take a second order approach and are committed to the subjective and relational nature of the knowledge” (Kinnunen & Simon 2012, p. 201). The interviews were semi-structured (Prosser et al, 1994). To allow the participants to reflect and not be influenced by my views (Ashworth & Lucas 2000), initial questions were broad and open-ended. Prompts aimed at allowing the participant to expand and/or clarify points were used to develop the discussion (Ashworth & Lucas 2000). Stage 1 of the analysis was focused on the interviewees’ reported experiences of using the video material both in terms of the technology and the material recorded on the videos. However, stage 2 required wider consideration of issues such as feedback and peer review. This meant that further questions were asked not directly relating to the use of video.

### **3.8 Conducting the interviews**

All but one of the interviews was conducted in a private room well away from the main Law School teaching and administrative rooms. The one that was not was conducted via Skype. The interviews were arranged by mutual agreement on timing. An iPod Touch (specifically purchased for this purpose) was used to make the audio recordings of the interviews. No field notes were taken during the interviews.

I did not arrange pilot interviews as I was conscious that I would have a limited pool of participants to work with in the academic year in question. However, I had used earlier research projects to develop questions and open questioning techniques in relation to similar topics (for example, Barker & Sparrow, 2016). Although not a full

pilot, the questions were tested on a colleague to check that they were sufficiently open to allow detailed responses.

### 3.8.1 Questions for the first round of interviews

The first round of interviews was conducted at the beginning of the academic year before any presentations were recorded. All 19 participants were interviewed. The interviews were based around the core questions set out below, which were designed to capture the participants' perceptions before they had engaged in any presentations. As anticipated, the interviews were short with none going for more than 17 minutes. This reflects the fact that the activities being investigated had not yet started.

What do you understand by the term 'feedback'?

How do you feel about getting feedback on your academic work?

How do you make use of feedback?

How do you feel about public speaking?

Have you had public speaking training before?

How do you think you will feel about getting oral feedback after a presentation?

How do you feel about being recorded?

How do you feel about watching the videos of your performance and feedback?

Do you think the videos will be useful? In what ways?

### 3.8.2 Questions for the second round of interviews

The second round of interviews was conducted after the participants had completed at least two recorded presentation activities in class. This included at least one short individual speech exercise and an assessed moot exercise (a mock appeal). 17

participants were interviewed because Michael had suspended his studies for the academic year and I was unable to arrange a mutually convenient time to interview Cameron. The interviews were based around the following core questions. The interviews lasted up to 30 minutes. However, it is noted that one interview (Bess) was very short (under 10 minutes). This was because Bess had not found the videos and therefore had not watched them.

How does the feedback you have received at university compare with the feedback you had in your previous studies?

How did you find giving your speech?

How did it compare with your expectations?

How did you feel about the camera?

How did you feel about the audience?

How did you find watching the video of your performance and feedback? Is it useful?

In what ways? (This question was repeated for each of the activities that the participant had completed.)

Do you think you will watch future videos?

Can you think of anything that might help encourage you to engage with the videos?

### 3.8.3 Questions for the third round of interviews

The final round of interviews took place at the end of the academic year. All students required at least six recordings to include in their portfolio assessment. However, each of students interviewed had completed at least 10 videos through the year. Again, there were 17 participants. Michael remained on suspension of studies and I was unable to arrange a mutually convenient meeting time with Marnie. One meeting

had to be conducted via Skype (Anna). Interviews were up to 35 minutes, with most around 20 minutes long.

How do you feel about public speaking?

Do you think that your feelings have changed over the year?

Do you feel that you have developed your skills?

How do you feel about getting feedback from your tutor?

Has this changed over the course of the year?

Do you feel that the feedback has been useful in your development? In what ways?

How did you feel about receiving feedback from your peers?

Is peer feedback useful? How does it compare to tutor feedback?

What about the process of giving feedback, do you find that useful?

How do you find watching other people perform and/or get feedback?

How do you feel about being recorded? Has this changed over the course of the year?

Have you watched your performances and feedback? Is it useful? In what ways?

(This question was repeated for each of the activities that the participant had completed.)

Do you think you will watch future videos?

What prompts you to watching the videos?

How do you feel about watching the videos? Have your feelings changed over the year?

### **3.9 Transcribing the interviews**

A transcription service was used to transcribe the interviews under a confidentiality agreement. The audio files were shared with the transcriber in an encrypted format and pseudonyms used throughout the process. The interviewees' names were not

used in the interviews and, beyond what was said in interview, no additional information was provided to the transcription service that could connect the audio recording to the interviewees' identity. The transcription was fully verbatim including verbal fillers, repetitions, pauses, coughs, mobile phone alerts and laughs.

The transcripts were checked against the audio files as part of the first phase of the analysis process. No material errors were found (such errors as were present were limited to course specific matters such as case law and legal terms).

### **3.10 Conducting data analysis**

The aim of the data analysis process is to create a set of descriptive categories which satisfy the following methodological requirements:

The first criterion that can be stated is that the individual categories should each stand in clear relation to the phenomenon of the investigation so that each category tells us something distinct about a particular way of experiencing the phenomenon. The second is that the categories have to stand in a logical relationship with one another, a relationship that is frequently hierarchical. Finally, the third criterion is that the system should be parsimonious, which is to say that as few categories should be explicated as is feasible and reasonable, for capturing the critical variation in the data.

(Marton & Booth 1997, p. 125)

Checking of the transcription against the audio recording allowed me to immerse myself in the outcome space and view it as a single entity, rather than as separate interviews (Prosser et al. 1994, p. 220). The checking process helped me to understand "the emotions and emphases of the participant" (Ashworth & Lucas 2000,



p. 300). The next stage was to work through the single transcript looking for comments relevant to the use of the video material and coding them using NVivo (Åkerlind 2012, p. 118). I copied and pasted the tagged comments into a separate document which helped me to divorce each comment from the individual participants and focus “on the ‘pool of meanings’ discovered in the data” (Åkerlind 2012, p. 118). This helped me to maintain interpretative awareness.

On a practical level, it was difficult to sift through the pool of meaning without being drawn into considering structure. Ashworth and Lucas (2000) warn against searching for structure too early in the process. However, it was difficult not to be persuaded by the counter-approach which suggests that, because structure and meaning are intended to be co-constituted, consideration of structure should not be left too late (Åkerlind, 2012). As I worked through the quotes taken from the single transcript, categories began to emerge. Mindful of the need for a parsimonious approach to the categorisation process, I worked at narrowing down the categories of description.

I encountered significant challenges in creating the categories of description. As discussed above, I had decided that a bracketing approach, where existing assumptions were set aside, was an unrealistic strategy. Instead, I sought to acknowledge and explicitly deal with preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (“interpretative awareness” (Sandbergh, 1997, p. 209)). However, while conducting the analysis process I lost confidence in the analysis process. I had concerns that addressing preconceptions was not sufficient to prevent the categories of description from becoming a construct of my preconceptions. This situation produced an impasse.

A number of points in the literature helped move the analysis forward. The first was the advice that it can be useful in the bracketing process not to review the relevant

discipline literature until after the analysis process has taken place (Ashwin et al., 2014). Clearly this was not something that could happen in the present research. Not only had the literature been looked at in detail, I had been running and adapting the unit over a period of 10 years. However, the advice helped me to reflect on how deeply held my conceptions about the unit design were. This led to consideration of alternative ways of working with the pool of meaning. Key to this was the need to engage and empathise with the lifeworld of the interviewees (Ashworth & Lucas 2000, p. 307). Although bracketing was not considered possible in this research, reengaging with the material and actively attempting to understand the interviews as representations of the interviewees' lifeworld helped me to separate from my preconceptions and permitted the analysis to progress.

The categories of description that emerged through this process maintained some similarities with those sketched out in the first attempt at analysis (notably Categories 1 to 3 which essentially remained unaltered). However, the change of approach was much more significant with the categories further up in the hierarchy. In particular, Categories 4 and 5 emerged without the fetters of theory that had given rise to concerns in the first analysis. However, I had gained an appreciation of the challenges of using phenomenography when working as a lone researcher (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Ashwin, 2014). Nevertheless, categories emerged from stage 1 which, in keeping with the guidance of Ashworth and Lucas (2000), the reader will be able to evaluate in Chapters 4 and 5.

### **3.11 Stage 2 analysis**

The phenomenographic analysis produced a set of categories of description indicating the qualitatively different ways in which students described the experience of using video material. These categories were analysed using activity theory. There

were two aspects to this process. First, each category of description was explored using the reported experience of the participant most associated with that category. This involved re-reading each interview to identify the participants who, where possible, identify most closely to each category. Using the interviews for these participants, a bespoke activity system was prepared for each category in order to understand how the system operated and identify any contradictions and tensions within that system. Attention then turned to interviewees who showed the most significant shift in their perceptions (again established by re-reading the interviews) in order to understand the historical development of the activity. Additional contrast was provided by undertaking a brief analysis of participants whose perceptions did not alter through the course of the research. This process provided a rich picture of the activity and allowed consideration to be given to the changes that could be made to the activity to better support student self-evaluation of their presentation competence development.

### **3.12 Ethics**

The ethical processes of Lancaster University were followed in all respects and approval granted in July 2016 (see Appendix). As a result of this approval and the provision of the relevant documentation (e.g. institutional permissions letter, research proposal, consent form and participant information sheet) institutional permission was granted to interview the students in September 2016.

As was made clear throughout the ethics related documentation, I was the unit coordinator and a tutor on the unit being investigated. This potentially gives rise to a number of concerns both in terms of ethics and reliability. Students may feel obliged to participate. It was made clear that participation was voluntary and that grades would not be affected in any way. All assessments were marked by two and, in some

cases, three tutors. This meant that fairness in the marking was maintained (and seen to be maintained) without any risk of attention being drawn to the research participants that might affect confidentiality.

The interviews were limited to how the interviewees experienced the video material in a presentation competence development unit. However, this did involve discussion of related topics such as the role of feedback, views on public speaking and peer review. Interviewees could withdraw at any time but after 2 weeks of participation data could still be used in the study. No student withdrew from the study at any stage. However, one student left the unit and two missed one interview each. Their unavailability was respected, and no pressure was applied to conduct an interview with them or any other participant. The participants have not been identified at any point in the research by name or in any way that could connect their responses to identifiable individuals. Pseudonyms are held in an encrypted file. This file and the paper consent forms (stored in a locked filing cabinet in locked office) are the only documents that link individual students with this research.

The original ethics approval had suggested that participants would be recruited by direct individual email. I chose to first issue an open invitation for students interested in volunteering to receive further information. The open invitation approach resulted in sufficient volunteers. The follow up emails provided all the information the students needed in order make an informed decision, including the participant information sheet and consent form. In particular, it was made clear that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that the decision about whether to participate and anything they said in interview would neither affect their position at the University nor their grades in any way. All these points were discussed individually with each participant (when going through the participant information form with each students)

before any interviews took place. The students were briefly reminded of the content of the consent form and the participant information sheet at subsequent interviews.

### **3.13 Rigour**

The research conducted as part of this PhD programme (this thesis and previous research projects) has all been qualitative. I have no previous background in qualitative research as my academic background is in law and history. As someone coming from disciplines which have their own conceptions of evidence, the rigour of qualitative research has been a major focus of my research. In particular, when sharing my research with legal academics I have been very conscious that “without rigor, research is worthless, becomes fiction, and loses its utility” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 14). In the conventional scientific paradigm (which I suspect many of my legal academic colleagues would recognise from their desk-based legal research), the tests for rigour in research include “the truth value of the inquiry or evaluation (internal validity), its applicability (external validity or generalizability), its consistency (reliability or replicability), and its neutrality (objectivity)” (Lincoln and Guba, 1986, p. 74). However, qualitative researchers have argued that indicators of rigour such as reliability, validity and generalisability are based on a positivist ontology, arguing that “notions of validity and reliability in research typically rely on being able to measure in an absolute sense; treating the research object, and the project as a whole, as a closed system” (Collier-Reed et al., p. 340).

An alternative vocabulary has developed where the focus is more on the consumer of the research. Rigour, therefore, can be assured through the trustworthiness of the research. For Lincoln and Guba trustworthiness is made up of credibility (in place of internal validity), transferability (in place of external validity), dependability (in place of reliability) and confirmability (in place of objectivity) (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In

relation to phenomenography, considering rigour in terms of trustworthiness (rather than validity and reliability) has some further significance as it touches upon notions of the status of phenomenographic results. For example, Cope argues that “scientific concepts of validity and reliability can be applied and adapted to phenomenographic research approaches” (Cope, 2004, p. 17). However, Collier-Reed, Ingerman and Berglund (2009) argue that the more open world of trustworthiness “plays an important role for not only effecting change in the original setting of the research, but also for contributing toward building a body of knowledge that can play an important role in societal change” (Collier-Reed et al., 2009, p. 352).

From an ontological point of view, I prefer to view rigour in terms of trustworthiness. This view has been reinforced by my experiences of using phenomenographic methods as a lone researcher. The credibility of the research has needed to be established through transparency in the research processes both in terms of methodology and engagement with the wider literature. Although Chapter 2 has necessarily been a selective literature review, I have attempted to present a balanced view of the relevant material. In terms of methodology, I have recorded these processes in detail in this chapter, setting out the approaches taken, the reasoning behind methodological decisions and the challenges faced through the process. However, these processes do not offer any outside check of credibility. The collective nature of the outcome space “makes member checking inappropriate as a validity check” (Åkerlind et al., 2005, p. 81). Although the stage 2 analysis did look at individuals, this still involved categories of descriptions drawn from the outcome space. Again, member-checking would be incompatible with the nature of the categories of description drawn from the outcome space. Publication offers an external check on credibility. At the time of writing, I have not published any of the analysis. However, the theoretical framework has been peer reviewed and published (Barker, 2019).

Similar issues arise in relation to dependability and confirmability. In phenomenographic research, it may be appropriate to interjudge reliability. This requires “that one or more researchers (co-judges) read the same data as the original researcher, but with reference to the categories of description that have been identified by the original researcher” (Sandbergh, 1997, p. 205). I did consider whether it would be appropriate to ask a colleague (e.g. one of the other tutors on the unit being investigated) to co-judge in this way. There were two elements to this issue. The first was whether it was appropriate to involve a third party in research for a PhD thesis. The second was whether using a co-judge would add to the reliability of the research.

In respect of the first point, I concluded that I was not comfortable with engaging a co-judge in a piece of lone research. This view was supported by Åkerlind’s observation that the “large number of existing phenomenographic doctoral theses indicates that high-quality phenomenographic research can be accomplished as an individual researcher working on one’s own” (Åkerlind, 2012, p. 112). That said, Åkerlind also acknowledges that co-judging can take understanding of the phenomenon further (Åkerlind, 2012). This led me to consider whether, in this research, the need to reinforce the phenomenographic analysis outweighed the requirement to operate as a lone researcher. I concluded that the reliability of the research would not be significantly enhanced by employing a co-judge. The aim of the phenomenographic element of the research was to produce categories of description that were sufficient to illustrate the full range of experiences of the video material for use in the activity theory analysis. Indeed, involving others in this limited aspect of the research may give rise to additional issues. In particular, it would not take into account all the methodological processes designed to achieve

dependable results (Sandbergh, 1997). I concluded that the reliability of this aspect of the research should be based on the maintenance of my own interpretive awareness through the research (Sandbergh, 1997).

Similar issues arise in relation to the activity theory based analysis in stage 2 of this research. The interpretation of the activity systems and the identification of contradictions and tensions in those systems has been completed as a lone researcher. Within the constraints of the thesis format, I have sought to provide a full and frank presentation of my approach to the activity theory analysis and support my conclusions with appropriate evidence.

The context specific nature of the research means that it is not readily generalisable. Indeed, limits to external validity are features of the literature relating to both phenomenography (Collier-Reed et al., 2009) and activity theory (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). However, the value of a study such as this is not limited to the research context. The findings may add to the body of knowledge in relevant discipline areas and so lead to change (Collier-Reed et al., 2009). Others seeking to develop approaches to teaching oral presentation competence, particularly in a legal context, may well be able to observe similarities and differences relevant and transferable to another context. The findings and approach to research may prompt further similar studies resulting in “an overall epistemological gain...in terms of a growing body of knowledge and understanding” (Collier-Reed et al., 2009, pp 351-352). I have sought to identify areas where some of the findings may be transferable and potentially relevant to other contexts when exploring the research findings in Chapters 4 and 5 and considering final conclusions in Chapter 6.

I am conscious that any judgements that a reader makes about the credibility, dependability and transferability of my findings will also include an evaluation of the



researcher. I have already discussed the insider nature of this research and the impact this has on the research (Chapter 3.5). Recognition of my position as an insider researcher has also led me to take a reflective and reflexive approach to the research. This approach has been incorporated into the writing up of the research findings and can be seen in the sections on data analysis (Chapter 3.10), ethics (Chapter 3.12), potential impact of the unit design on the participants' reported experiences (Chapter 4.8.5) and my final reflections on rigour in Chapter 6.

### **3.14 Summary**

This chapter has described the two-stage data analysis process used in this study along with the practical and ethical issues arising from the research design. My ontological and epistemological position is closely linked with activity theory. Indeed, a key theme of the thesis is that the development of oral presentation competence should be viewed in a social, historical and cultural context and should be investigated from that perspective. However, it is also recognised that activity theory based research may not take sufficient account of the perspective of the subject of the activity. This is addressed by using phenomenography in conjunction with activity theory. The phenomenographic element of the research (stage 1) offers a collective view of the range of ways that the subject might experience the video material. Activity theory is then used to extend the analysis to look at the experiences of individual participants who identify most closely to particular categories of description identified in the phenomenographic analysis.

This approach gave rise to a number of challenges. The epistemological conflict between activity theory and phenomenography was resolved through designing a two-stage analysis process. However, the most significant challenge arose from my concerns about the influence of my own preconceptions on the phenomenographic

analysis of the pool of meaning produced from the interviews. Although I was able to resolve this through a process of empathising with the interviewees, the experience highlighted the challenges of conducting phenomenographic research as a lone investigator. A further challenge related to the concern that the interview data would be distorted by the insider nature of the research. The research has been designed to attempt to provide some insight into the extent of this distortion and will be a point explicitly discussed throughout the analysis.

## **Chapter 4    Stage 1 Research Findings**

### **4.1    Introduction**

In this chapter I set out my analysis of the research interviews using a phenomenographic approach to examine the qualitatively different ways in which students described the experience of using the video material in the activity. My aim was to create a set of descriptive categories where each category is distinct; the categories stand in a logical relationship with one another; and the minimum number of categories is used to capture the critical variation in the data (Marton & Booth 1997). The interview transcripts were put into a single document and coded for reference to the video material. The coded sections were moved into a separate document and, through the process set out in Chapter 3.10, the categories of description emerged. As a result of this process, I have constructed five categories that illustrate the qualitatively different ways of experiencing the video material.

### **4.2    Categories of Description**

The phenomenographic analysis revealed the following five categories of description that can be applied to the use of the video material.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Category 1 Negative experience</b></li> </ul>   | The video material is experienced in negative terms and does not support learning   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Category 2 Part of the requirements of the unit</b></li> </ul>                          | The video material is experienced as one of the conditions and requirements of the unit rather than as something that supports learning.                            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Category 3 Memory refreshing</b></li> </ul>   | The video material is experienced as something that supports learning by refreshing the students' memory of both the classroom performance and associated feedback. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Category 4 Offers a different perspective on performance and/or feedback</b></li> </ul> | The video material is experienced as something that supports learning by providing a different perspective on the classroom performance and/or associated feedback. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Category 5 Showing change over time</b></li> </ul>                                      | The video material is experienced as something that supports learning by showing change in classroom performance and/or feedback over time.                         |

**Table 4.1 The qualitatively different ways of experiencing video in an oral presentation competence development unit**

### **4.3 Category 1 Negative experience**

The video material is experienced in negative terms and does not support learning.

It might be possible to categorise the different types of negative experience and produce further categories of descriptions. However, the limited number of reported negative experiences and the broad homogeneity of those experiences suggest that such an endeavour would gain little insight into the different ways of experiencing the phenomenon. What binds these negative experiences into a single category is that the negative experience of using the video is associated with video not supporting learning. As discussed in Chapter 3, the insider nature of this research is likely to have a significant impact on the reporting of negative experiences. Obtaining a deeper and more granular understanding of these negative experiences is likely to require a different research design. Based on the current approach to exploring student experience of using the video material, it is appropriate to view these negative experiences as a single category of description.

There were two broad aspects to the reports of negative experiences and how they impact on learning:

- The video material is not perceived as something that supports learning; and
- The challenges of watching/listening to the videos prevent them supporting learning.

#### 4.3.1 Video material not perceived as something that supports learning

Negative experiences that prevent video material being seen as something that can support learning may be as simple as not finding the videos interesting. Although the following is the only direct example from the interviews.

It's just that it's really boring. Like, not, like-, it's boring to watch yourself repeat the same thing.

(Ren, Third Interview)

These concerns were also expressed with reference to a preferred approach to learning.

I don't really see much use in it, especially considering that my main criteria for improvement are more emotion, which doesn't really-, is more, more effective to look at a script rather than to look back at yourself saying it, erm, and, you know, less movement isn't something that you really need [half laugh] to watch yourself doing; you kind of need to just practise it more and get more comfortable with how you're presenting.

(Anthony, Third Interview)

#### 4.3.2 Negative experience of watching and/or listening to the videos

The challenges that many of the participants faced engaging with the video emerged clearly from the interviews.

Erm, it's more like, when you hear yourself, your voice sounds really weird, and, like, I'm not one of those people who really likes the sound of my voice [chuckles]. And, erm, and just looking how you actually just there, like, 'Oh, that's not very nice to look at [disappointedly],' [chuckles]. I'd say just no.

(April, Second Interview)

I'd feel like obligated to watch them. Erm, I wouldn't enjoy watching them, 'cos I don't like... well, I don't like having photos and things taken of me, and, like, I don't like seeing myself.

(Ian, First Interview)

However, the division between not liking to watch the videos and not finding watching them a useful learning experience is not always clear.

I'm not a massive fan of, er, re-watching myself. Erm... I don't know, I found it, I guess, useful, it, sort of, clarified and supported what I already thought, but, at the same time, I think, 'cos I'm quite aware, quite self-aware of myself, a lot of the points-, a lot of the things I noticed, I already had an idea of.

(Charlie, Second Interview)

Despite these concerns, strategies were suggested to ease the experience.

I think, yeah, the first time I was like, 'Oh God [awfully], like, I'll just listen to it, I can't,' [half-laugh], 'cos you just look at yourself and you think, 'Oh, I did look really nervous, I looked a bit awkward,' like. I think it's easier to just listen to it more so [half-laugh].

(Katie, Second Interview)

The reported negative experience of watching (or avoiding watching) did not necessarily exclude the perception that watching may have benefits. However, the negative experience operated as a barrier to these perceived benefits.

I would see the benefit in hearing it, but I might not, necessarily, go hear it.

(April, Second Interview)

Indeed, the reports of negativity changed with experience.

You kind of just get used to it and you're like, 'Yeah, it's just uni, you know, everyone gets recorded, it's not bad [OK].' It's there to be improve. It's like the main focus...Knowing that it's there for my benefit makes it, you know, less daunting almost, because it's there for me, not for anyone else. So...  
(Cameron, Third Interview)

I didn't find it as bad after, like, the first three [chuckles], erm, 'cos it was like-, the other ones were group ones, so I could watch them as well, but then I was-, just sort of skipped some of them and then just went straight to myself [half-laugh]. But it wasn't-, it was sort of like this odd curiosity. Like, first I was like, 'Oh, I don't want to watch it, I don't want to watch it [worriedly],' and then I watched it and I was like, 'Mmm, let me watch everything [interestedly] [chuckles] just to make sure,' [chuckles].  
(Nell, Second Interview)

#### **4.4 Category 2 Part of the requirements of the unit**

The video material is experienced as one of the conditions and requirements of the unit rather than as something that supports learning.

Under this category, the activities that involve the viewing of videos and evidencing their use are perceived as part of the teaching and assessment framework rather than as a learning tool. Within this category there remains some variation in the reported experiences. However, this variation does not affect the integrity of the category of description. The experience is reported in the following terms.



Sarah: I don't know. I just think it's weird,... like watching myself.  
But...

Interviewer: So does that sort of stop you wanting to watch those videos?

Sarah: Yeah, I think it does.

Interviewer: So what, what sort of makes you want-,... actually end up doing it, then, do you think?

Sarah: I think using it for, like, coursework that we have.

(Sarah, Third Interview)

The relationship between being forced to do something and what benefit this might provide is not a clear one.

When, the necessity's there to watch them and I then go and do that, it is a beneficial experience. It's just I sort of need to... have like a carrot on a stick, something making me actually get that benefit.

(Charlie, Third Interview)

The benefit experienced may not necessarily be linked to any learning benefit. The benefit of using the video material may only be as a tool to achieve a high mark rather than for learning.

If you mess up in one, at least you have something to show you improved, 'cos I think, I, purposely, messed up in one because I just... it will just make the reflective portfolio better, in a way, and you have more to talk about.

(Ally, Third Interview)

#### **4.5 Category 3 Memory refreshing**

The video material is experienced as something that supports learning by refreshing the students' memory of both the classroom performance and associated feedback.

Memory refreshing is experienced as something that offers developmental benefits. The purpose of being reminded of the performance and feedback is to assist in the process of error correction. Being reminded of content, perceived mistakes and feedback allows the student to better prepare for the next performance.

The videos were made up of the performance, tutor feedback and some peer review and discussion. The amount of tutor feedback, peer review and discussion depended on the activity and stage in the year. There were therefore a number of elements that the student might refer back to in order to refresh their memory. Generally, students have perceived value in watching their performance, their feedback or both.

##### **4.5.1 Useful for the performance**

Once you've done your speech, you kind of forget all about it. So then, like, you'd actually want to see how you did, from, like, a kind of step back, kind of take a week or so back from when you did it and then kind of look at it again and be like, 'This is how you actually did,' instead of being like, 'Oh yeah, it went fine.'

(Mia, Second Interview)

#### 4.5.2 Useful for the feedback

Yeah, I would listen to the feedback to see, erm, the things that I did wrong that got me the mark I did, and what I can do to adapt from that and better myself with presenting and stuff.

(Sarah, Second Interview)

If you didn't have the feedbacks in the video, then you wouldn't know-, we would've forgotten our feedback or not remembered it. So I think having the feedback in the video is good.

(Sarah, Third Interview)

#### 4.5.3 Performance and feedback

I watched all of it. I felt like it was something that, you know, you should, er, just double check, er, and really make sure that you know what happened and what you did wrong.

(Mitch, Second Interview)

#### 4.5.4 Feedback in the moment versus feedback after the event

Prominent in the interviews is the perception that there is a need for some means of refreshing memory because it is often difficult to take in feedback immediately after delivering a presentation. This difference between recollection and recording marks a transition point into Category 4 which relates to a change in perspective. The difference between a perception that the video is merely reminding the viewer of what happened (Category 3) and perceiving the video material as providing something of a different quality (i.e. by offering a different perspective – Category 4) is an important one.

It definitely needs to be videoed, because I don't really think that you-, sometimes you get quite a lot, especially if you get yours and peer feedback. So it's not, you can't always take it all on board. So I think, otherwise you'd just cling to that one bit of feedback and be like, 'Oh yeah, I remember that,' but I don't think you'd remember it all. So I think having it all on the film to go back to is, 'Oh yeah, they said that [realising], that's quite helpful.' So I think it's quite nice to have it all in one place that you can just go back to and have a look at.

(Katie, Third Interview)

When you've just finished your speech, you're, you're listening but not as attentively as to when you're looking back, erm, when, when you're looking at the recording. So you can rewind the thing, see key, key areas of what actually to do.

(Peter, Second Interview)

#### **4.6 Category 4 Offers a different perspective on classroom experience**

The video material is experienced as something that supports learning by providing a different perspective on the classroom performance and/or associated feedback.

Under this category the video is experienced as something distinct from both the classroom experience, when the video was recorded, and the student's recollection of the classroom experience. This is something more than simply being reminded (Category 3).

This additional perspective is perceived as offering developmental benefits. Viewing the classroom experience from a different perspective assists the student in preparing for future performances. However, variations in the way that the learner goes on to use this change of perspective may lead to quite different outcomes. It is submitted that these differences do not disturb the integrity of Category 4. I have divided the following extracts to illustrate the boundaries of this category.

#### 4.6.1 Change of perspective in relation to a particular performance

These extracts illustrate how the video offers a different perspective on a particular performance episode which provides a learning opportunity. The extracts do not indicate whether this change in perspective provides any wider change of view.

The new perspective may relate to appearance during the presentation.

So actually seeing it and seeing yourself putting your hands in your pockets does make you realise, 'Oh, OK, I didn't realise I'd done that.' That is quite, you know, annoying to watch, so it makes you actually want to improve next time.

(Connor, Third Interview)

Or the new perspective may help balance a negative recollection.

I think-, erm, sometimes you'll get feedback and you'll think, 'Mmm, I don't think I did that well,' and you'll watch it back and be like, 'Oh no, it was better than I thought,' or you think, 'Really [surprised]? Was I really speaking as fast as they said?' and you'll go back and be like, 'Oh yeah, OK, I was [realising],'

(Katie, Third Interview)

The change in perspective may be perceived as being put in the position of an audience member.

I was looking forward to actually watching it as well, 'cos I like to see how we look from someone else's point of view.

(Marnie, Second Interview)

The new perspective may support objectivity in analysing both the performance and the feedback. Indeed, the following extract from Anna is perhaps showing how this change of perspective may extend beyond the particular performance episode.

Obviously I could see myself from an outside perspective and I could say, 'OK, yeah, no, I do agree with that.' Erm... and also it helped me to think of critiques of my own, as well. Erm... you know, yeah, when, when you're given feedback straight after something, you might think, 'Oh, I messed up that one line,' and be focusing on the one thing that you think you messed up, as opposed to... listening to what everyone else saw, you know. Erm, I think, in a situation of pressure, it's very easy to get, kinda, stuck in your own head and not necessarily be objective about it.

(Anna, Second Interview)

#### 4.6.2 Change of perspective on the wider activity

The experience of changed perspective may extend beyond a particular performance and may include a changed perspective on the competence development activity.

The learning benefit produced may be limited to using the video to feed forward to the next performance episode.

Once you've got the feedback, erm... [pause] you, if you've got a copy of it, what that will do is, instead of helping you look back at what you've done, it will help you look forward to what you're going to improve on next time.

(Michael, First Interview)

Or the new perspective may be useful for planning longer term development.

It gives you an insight to yourself, I guess,... like you're, you're seeing what you're doing in that, in that moment; so that moment is taken there for you to use and you can use it as a template to build on.

(Peter, Third Interview)

Interviewer: How do you feel about the idea of having it recorded?

Marnie: Yeah, I'd be comfortable with it 'cos, if, if I'm standing talking in front of a bunch of people, obviously, to be a lawyer, you're going to be doing that anyway. So it will be, it will be good to know whether I've got, like, some bad habits and stuff, that I might not necessarily notice myself but others might,...

(Marnie First Interview)

This change in perspective is not limited to identifying strengths and weaknesses, it may also help to identify appropriate solutions.

It sort of helps match up, er, feedback that I've received in class to what I'm actually doing. Er, because it's easy enough just to, sort of, sit there and listen to... er, someone being critical of what you're doing, but it's not always

easy to change it. Er, but, if you spot specifically what you're doing, then I just feel it's just so much easier to, sort of, take out from your performance.

(Mitch, Third Interview)

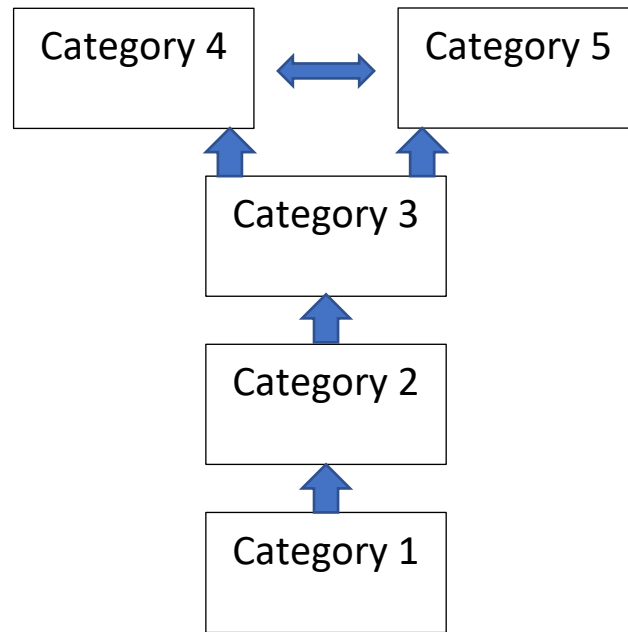
#### **4.7 Category 5 Showing Change Over Time**

The video material is experienced as something that supports learning by showing change in classroom performance and/or feedback over time.

The identification of this category raises some questions around how the phenomenon under investigation is defined. Categories 1 to 4 arguably conceptualise the phenomenon as single episodes of recorded performance and feedback. This may be an individual recording or a series of individual recordings. However, Category 5 requires that multiple episodes (at least two) are viewed together as a single phenomenon. It is submitted that the integrity of Category 5 is not affected by this difference between individual recordings and a collection of recordings making up a body of material. This shift in perception of the video material is one of the key characteristics which help create a distinct category. The significance of that shift will be considered further in Chapters 5 and 6.

There is also a question about whether Category 5 is genuinely in a hierarchical relationship with the earlier categories. In particular, Category 5 does not necessarily require that students have a different perspective on the video performances. It merely has the students observing change. As with Category 4, Category 5 may relate to simple observation or it may stimulate a changed view of the whole activity. Figure 4.1 shows an adapted hierarchy that accommodates this issue.





**Figure 4.1** Category of description outline hierarchy

#### 4.7.1 Observing progress over time

The reported experience associated with Category 5 may be a simple matter of observation of progress which the videos can illustrate.

I just watch them 'cos I want to see, like, if it's progressing and if it's working.

(Katie, Third Interview)

'Cos then you can log it, like, each step of the way you can see how you're improving, seeing the feedback as it goes on.

(Ike, Second Interview)

I've seen how I've progressed and what I can do to make myself... better as a public speaker. So it is good to have the videos.

(Sarah, Third Interview)

#### 4.7.2 Analysing perceived progress

The perception of change over time may also be associated with further analysis or reflection on that progress. There is an overlap here between Categories 4 and 5.

The change over time operates alongside a change in perspective.

This may result in deeper reflections.

I think it's all too easy to kind of... do a presentation and then forget about it completely. Erm, and, so, being able to completely revisit, erm, things over and over again has made me, kind of, look more deeply into what I'm doing and why I'm doing it.

(Anna, Third Interview)

There may be change in feelings about using the video material.

I feel less weird watching it back now and more-, I kind of engage with it more now and, instead of, like, thinking, 'This is really embarrassing, I'm re-watching myself on a video, talking,' I don't think of it that way anymore; I think-, I can instantly, like, identify, like... presentation skills I'm using or presentation skills that are changing the more I talk to an audience.

(Mia, Third Interview)

There may be a change in confidence levels as a result of the combination of change over time and the different perspective that the video material offers.

The more you watch yourself perform, the more confident you'll become. Er, you'll get used to seeing yourself perform, and so I think it will be, it will become easier to do it, er, and, er, by the time I did, er, the second exercise, er, I was, I was already a lot more confident.

(Mitch, Second Interview)

Category 5 may also be perceived alongside both a change in perspective (Category 4) and refreshed memory (Category 3).

I think that's the, the, you know, beauty of the video being there; you just, you get to look back and you get to still, you know, find ways to improve and then you look at your new stuff and, you know, it goes refreshed in your mind again and again, rather than you doing it once and then you forget, and then you don't remember what you were doing wrong, and, yeah.

(Bess, Third Interview)

#### 4.7.3 Application to other contexts

Experiencing the video as something that offers evidence of change appears to be linked to a perception that the learning might have an application beyond the immediate activity. The perceived changes may extend to other areas of the curriculum that include oral presentations.

If you're going to be doing, like, another speech or something, ... or even if you're not, and you, you just want to, like, be improving for later on down the line, having those there, they're always going to be there to watch so you can go back whenever you want to, and... yeah, I don't know, I just think it's really good to have it, like, permanently there and be able to watch yourself and the

feedback and have it all to compare, altogether, and spot the patterns and everything between your performances and the feedback.

(Mia, Third Interview)

The perceived changes may extend beyond the curriculum.

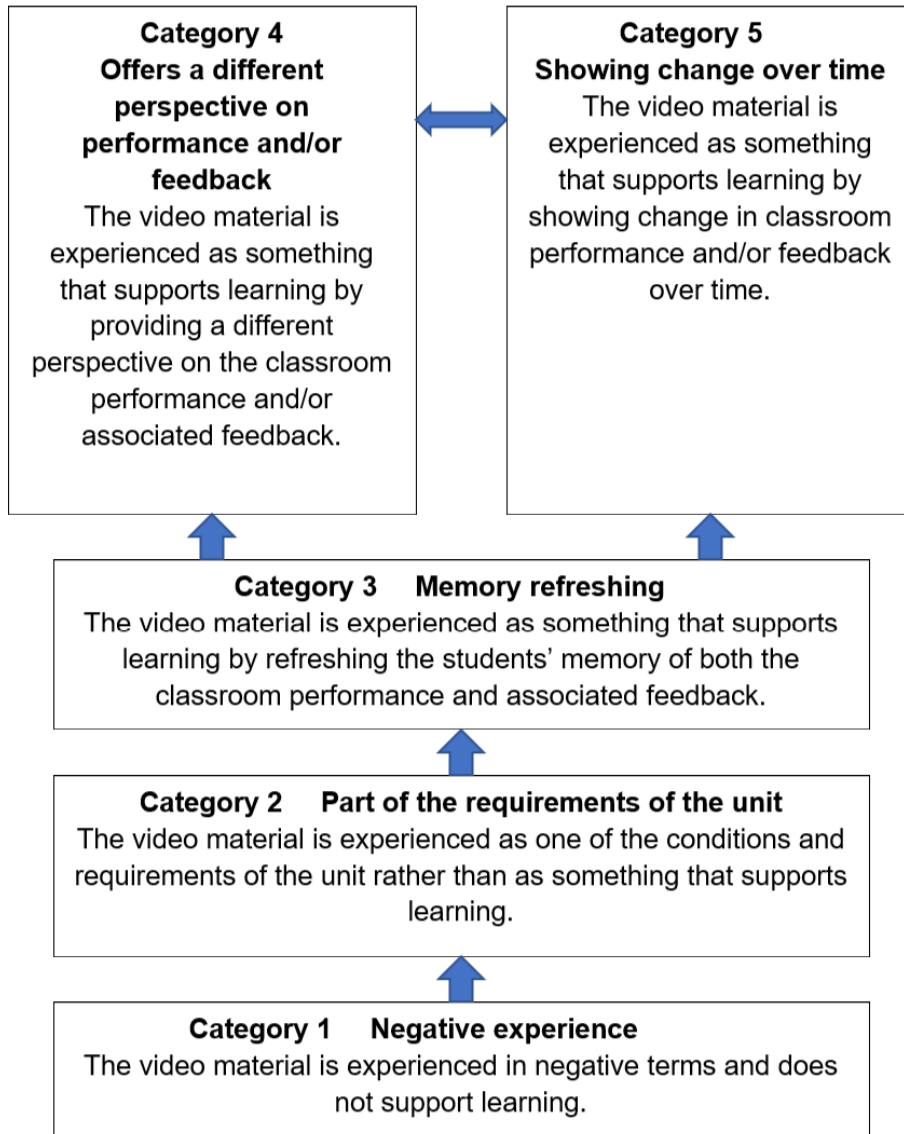
Yeah. It's the benefit of you actually take in your feedback a lot more when you can see yourself, it, because, normally, when you're performing, you-, everything kind of slips out of mind, and then, when you watch back, then it's the time you realise that you've done this wrong or this was well done, and, even if it was forced, it, it served that purpose for later on, but not necessarily speech-making during the year.

(April, Third Interview)

## **4.8 Discussion**

### 4.8.1 Introduction

The phenomenographic analysis revealed five different categories of description.



**Figure 4.2 Hierarchy showing the qualitatively different ways of experiencing video in an oral presentation competence development unit**

The aim of the analysis was to create a set of descriptive categories which are distinct; in a logical relationship with one another; and parsimonious. I am satisfied that the minimum number of categories has been used to capture the critical variation in the data. However, there are elements of the relationship between the categories, notably the boundaries between categories and their relationship with one another, that merit further discussion. That discussion is followed by an analysis of how the

individual participants identified with the different categories of description in their interviews. That information is central to stage 2 of the data analysis.

#### 4.8.2 Division between Categories 2, 3 and 4

Throughout the analysis there was the possibility of a further category emerging. The issue was focused around Category 3. The question was whether a distinction should be made between video being used to remind the student of the performance and feedback out of interest and being reminded to better prepare for the next performance. Category 3 settled on memory refreshing with the purpose of future preparation as this was more directly associated with learning. I concluded that watching out of curiosity was really an element of Category 2 in that it is essentially associated with watching because it is a condition or requirement of the unit. Ultimately, I concluded that the distinctions between Categories 2, 3 and 4 were founded on significant conceptual and qualitative differences that I felt were pertinent to the theme of self-evaluation. Category 2 is based on the student being instructed to watch the videos. The type of memory refreshing observed under Category 3 is a mechanistic response to feedback. The responses that fit within Category 3 tend to be limited to minor fixes when feeding forward, whether this is the result of watching their own performance or based on the tutor's or a peer's advice. There is a change in emphasis when moving up to Category 4, where the student perceives a change in their perspective. They are no longer simply being reminded of what happened during the performance episode, they are looking at the episode in a different way. While both Categories 3 and 4 represent students making sense of feedback, Category 4 suggests greater feedback literacy as students make more sophisticated use of the video material as a feedback tool.

#### 4.8.3 Challenges of Categories 4 and 5

Category 5 (change over time) is problematic in that it does not fit comfortably into a hierarchical relationship with the other categories. Nevertheless, it emerged as a clear category. It might be argued that this is a reflection of the fact that the research has been conducted as the participants were being introduced to the phenomenon over a period of time. In interview one, the participants could only give their views on the idea of being recorded in the future. In interview two, they had only limited examples of recording upon which to draw. By interview three, they had multiple recordings available as a body of work. It might be suggested that the incomplete hierarchy merely reflects that the participants are viewing two different phenomena; the single videos of their early experience and the multiple videos experienced by the end of the unit. As can be seen from the examples of Category 4 that came from the third interviews, Categories 4 and 5 coexist as different categories of description at the top of the hierarchy. This was how they emerged through the phenomenographic analysis. Reflecting on the results of this process, what these two categories at the top of the hierarchy have in common is that they both represent a use of the video material as something more than a mechanistic response to a single feedback episode. Categories 4 and 5 both suggest more critical engagement with the video material than can be observed in Category 3.

#### 4.8.4 Relationship between the participants and the categories

Table 4.2 shows which interviewee reported which category of description in each interview. It provides an overview of the spread of the categories of description across the group along with an indication of how the distribution changed over the course of the year. The table only records whether or not the interviewee reported at least one clear comment linked to a particular category of descriptions. It does not show which category the interviewees particularly associated with. Table 4.3 links the

participants who most clearly and consistently associated with a particular category. It also shows those who changed most over the course of the module. I have also included those who, although not clearly associated with a particular category of description, remained most consistent in their reported experiences across the interviews. This information forms part of the stage 2 data analysis (Chapter 5).



|             | Interview 1 |   |   |   |   | Interview 2                               |   |   |   |   | Interview 3       |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Categories  | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1   | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1                 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |   |
| Ally (F)    |             |   | X | X |   |   | X | X | X | X |                   | X | X |   | X |   |
| Anna (F)    |             |   | X | X |   |   |   | X | X | X | X                 | X | X |   | X |   |
| Anthony (M) |             |   | X | X |   |   |   |   | X |   | X                 |   | X | X |   |   |
| April (F)   |             |   | X | X |   | X   | X |   |   |   |                   | X | X | X | X |   |
| Bess (F)    |             |   |   |   | X | Interviewed but Bess had not Found videos |   |   |   |   |                   |   |   | X | X | X |
| Cameron (M) |             | X | X |   |   | Unavailable                               |   |   |   |   | X                 | X | X |   |   |   |
| Charlie (M) | X           | X | X |   |   | X   | X | X |   |   |                   | X |   | X |   |   |
| Connor (M)  |             |   | X | X |   |   |   |   | X |   |                   |   | X | X |   |   |
| Ian (M)     | X           | X | X |   |   |   |   | X | X |   |                   | X | X | X |   |   |
| Ike (M)     |             |   | X | X |   |   |   | X | X | X |                   |   | X | X | X |   |
| Katie (F)   |             |   |   | X |   | X   |   | X | X |   |                   |   | X | X | X |   |
| Marnie (F)  |             |   | X | X |   |   |   |   | X | X | Unavailable       |   |   |   |   |   |
| Mia (F)     |             |   |   | X | X |   |   | X | X |   |                   |   |   | X | X |   |
| Michael (M) |             |   |   | X |   | Suspended Studies                         |   |   |   |   | Suspended Studies |   |   |   |   |   |
| Mitch (M)   |             |   |   | X |   |   |   | X | X | X |                   |   | X | X |   |   |
| Nell (F)    | X           |   |   | X |   | X   |   |   | X |   |                   |   | X | X | X |   |
| Peter (M)   |             |   | X |   |   |   |   | X |   |   |                   |   | X | X |   |   |
| Ren (F)     |             | X | X | X |   | X   | X |   | X |   | X                 | X | X |   |   |   |
| Sarah (F)   |             |   | X | X |   |   |   | X | X |   |                   | X | X |   | X |   |

**Table 4.2 Categories of description identified by participants in the interviews**

|   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Category 1<br>Negative experience   | Ren                         |
| Category 2<br>Part of the requirements of the unit                          | Charlie                     |
| Category 3<br>Memory refreshing   | Ian                         |
| Category 4<br>Offers a different perspective on performance and/or feedback | Nell                        |
| Category 5<br>Showing change over time                                      | Ally                        |
| Change in perception  | April and Mia               |
| No change in perception   | Anthony, Cameron and Connor |

**Table 4.3 Participants most closely associated with particular perceptions**

#### 4.8.5 Influences on reported experiences

The participants' perceptions will be a product of their own social and cultural experiences, in particular their prior educational experiences. In Chapter 1.3.2 the limited extent of oracy teaching in English secondary education was discussed. The interviews reveal that the limited extent of oracy development in secondary education is reflected in the participants in this research. Most participants described school class presentations and drama experience. Beyond preparation for drama

performances, there was very limited experience of public speaking and associated teaching or training for public speaking.

The results and analysis are unlikely to be disrupted by significant differences in the learning activities of the participants prior to coming to university. However, there is value in understanding the extent to which the course design, and my own opinions on that design, may have impacted on the reported experiences of the interviewees.

While I have been careful to maintain interpretative awareness through the phenomenographic analysis, I am conscious that there are other ways in which my position as an insider researcher may have an impact on the data. There is one aspect of the insider research that is best addressed by reference to the interview data. The participants are all students on the unit under investigation. The design and purpose of the unit has been communicated to them in classes and in the unit material. This section will discuss the impact of this information on the integrity of the data.

Fifteen interviewees offered very similar accounts of the benefits of using the video material in their first interview. The first interview took place before any performance recording was undertaken in the classroom. At that point the interviewees were only being asked how they thought they might use the material. In the absence of any previous experience of this type of teaching, they only had the account from the unit materials and the tutors to work from. The impact of this can be seen in Table 4.2 where the majority of the interviewees reported experiences associated with Categories 3 and/or 4. With a particularly high number associated with Category 4. The commonality can be seen from some of the comments that were made.

It would be really interesting to see how I actually did, and you can kind of then see what... techniques, I guess, you used when you were talking and-, to everyone, and see how you kind of presented yourself through it.

(Mia, First Interview)

Yeah, because I don't really notice my bad hobbit, habit [correcting], hobbits [chuckles], habits until someone tells me to; tells me like, 'You've been doing this.' So, I guess now it's a chance for me to be saying, 'You've been doing this a lot,' and just improve really.

(April, First Interview)

Er, I want to be able to, erm,... once I've got that feedback, to be able to see what I've done, with that feedback in mind, is completely invaluable.

(Michael, First Interview)

It would not be appropriate to attempt to draw too much from these reported experiences of using video. These are not reports of experiences because the participants are being asked to comment on something they have not yet done. Furthermore, although the participants were asked about their views and any changes in those views after experiencing the use of video, they were not directly questioned about specific changes. Nevertheless, two points are worthy of note. First, most of the comments focus on how they might appear on video and any habits or mannerisms that might be revealed. This might be associated with general anxiety about a new practice that forces them to watch themselves perform in a stressful situation. Second, looking at Table 4.2, it is striking that the plotting against the first interview (before video was used) shows consistency of reported experiences.

However, the plotting for Interviews 2 and 3 show a much more varied picture. This perhaps reflects the difference between what the interviewees anticipate (based on what they have been told) compared with their views after their first-hand experiences in the unit.

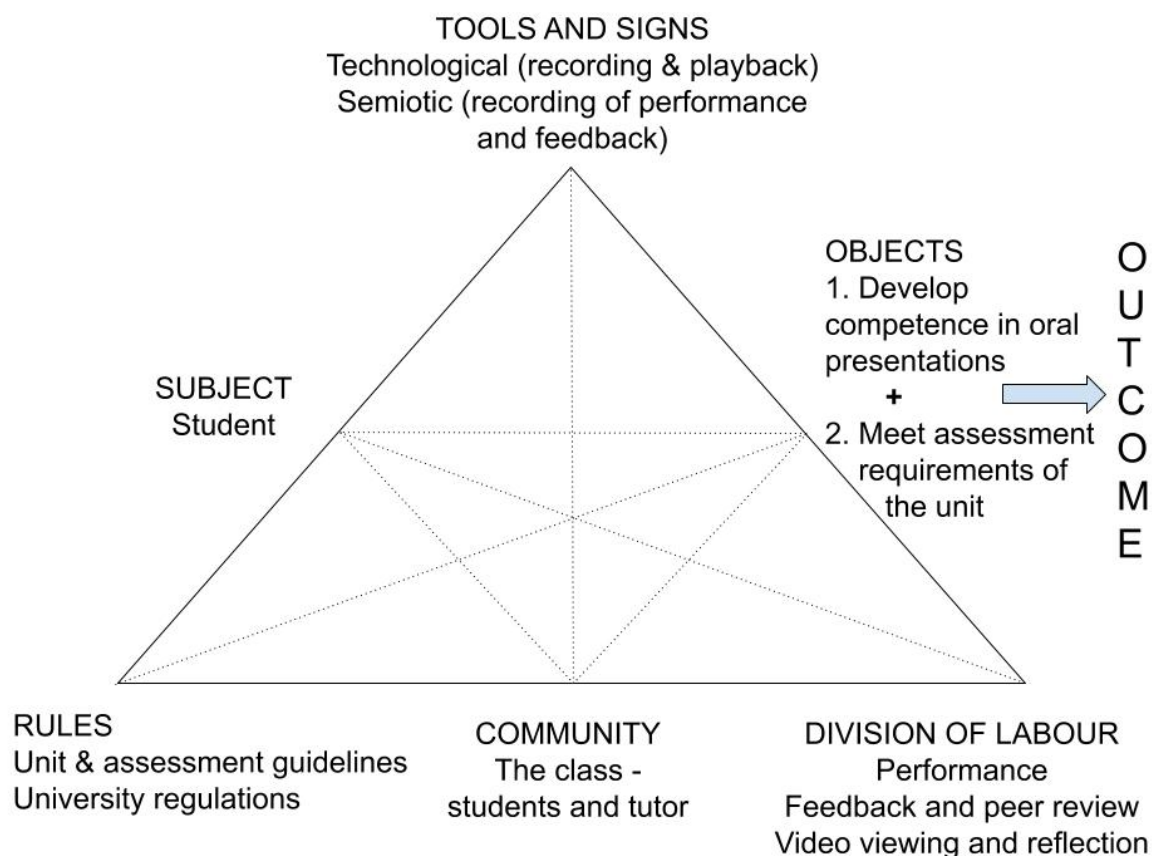
There is insufficient evidence from which to draw firm conclusions. However, for the purposes of this research, I would submit that the participants' preconceptions were, to some extent, influenced by the unit information and tutor comments at the time of the first interview. However, in subsequent interviews, the students were able to report on their own experience of using the video material. While the unit information and tutor comments will be present in these perceptions, they do not prevent the full range of categories of description from emerging in the outcome space. This seems to be supported in the difference in distribution of perception between the first interview and the second and third interview.

## Chapter 5 Stage 2 Activity Theory Analysis

### 5.1 Introduction

The phenomenographic analysis revealed five different categories of description that form the qualitatively different ways that students describe the experience of using the video material (Research Question 1 – Figure 4.2). Through the research process some participants changed their position while others maintained a more consistent description of their experience of using the video material. The second research question seeks to identify the elements within the oral presentation competence learning activity that accounts for this change or absence of change. To answer this question, each category of description was explored using the reported experience of a student most associated with that category (Table 4.3). Activity theory was used for this process. This approach was also used to consider the experiences of participants who have shown the most significant shift in their position in order to understand what factors may have prompted the changes. A similar approach was taken with three participants whose reported perceptions did not shift significantly through the interviews. The results of this analysis have been used to consider how the video material can best be employed to encourage and support student self-evaluation of their presentation competence development (Research Question 3).

Figure 5.1 shows the activity system as it was originally designed to operate. This will be used as the starting point for analysing the experiences of the individual students.



**Figure 5.1 The activity system for video supported presentation competence development** (based on Engeström, 2014; Jalil et al., 2015; Sharples et al., 2005; Taylor et al., 2006)

## 5.2 Ren Category 1: Negative experience

Ren reported experiencing the videos in negative terms and probably shows the closest association with Category 1. However, in the first interview Ren had reported that the video was likely to offer a different perspective (Category 4).

OK, although I hate saying this, I would, I would see where I embarrassed [chuckles] myself in the video and I would make sure next time not to repeat the mistake. So there's probably a benefit to it.

(Ren, First Interview)

These views did not persist beyond the first interview. Perhaps the key word in the above quotation is 'mistake'. The idea of 'mistake' is a recurring theme in the interviews with Ren. This can be seen in a number of contexts.

In relation to feedback.

Ren: I did not like it much, to be honest, but it was really for my benefit.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ren: Like, when my teacher told me that, erm, I didn't do well in this area, I would get really upset, because I know I put like 100% of effort on, on anything I do.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ren: But, like, when I get something negative, although it really, er, upsets me, but it really helps me later on.

(Ren, First Interview)

In relation to watching peers get feedback.

OK, some students, they do really well and there's that one tiny thing that screws up the entire thing,...that, that basically ruins the entire thing. So it's really nice of you to say something, like, 'Oh, no,' you know, 'you did that, blah, blah, blah. If you didn't do that, it would be a hundred times better.'

(Ren, Third Interview)



In relation to peer feedback (giving).

Yeah, I love doing that, I love doing... And, erm... it, it kind of, also, helps you, like you see what they do wrong, so you know what, if you're next, you wouldn't do the same mistake. So it's kind of, like, helpful in that way. But...  
(Ren, Third Interview)

This negative language can be seen in Ren's perceptions of the video material. As shown in 4.3.1, Ren described the idea of watching videos of her performance as "really boring" (Third Interview). Although Ren may not have been the only participant to feel this way, she was the only one to express it in interview. Similarly, Ren was clear about her view on the value of watching the videos.

Interviewer: Do you think you gained anything by watching the video?

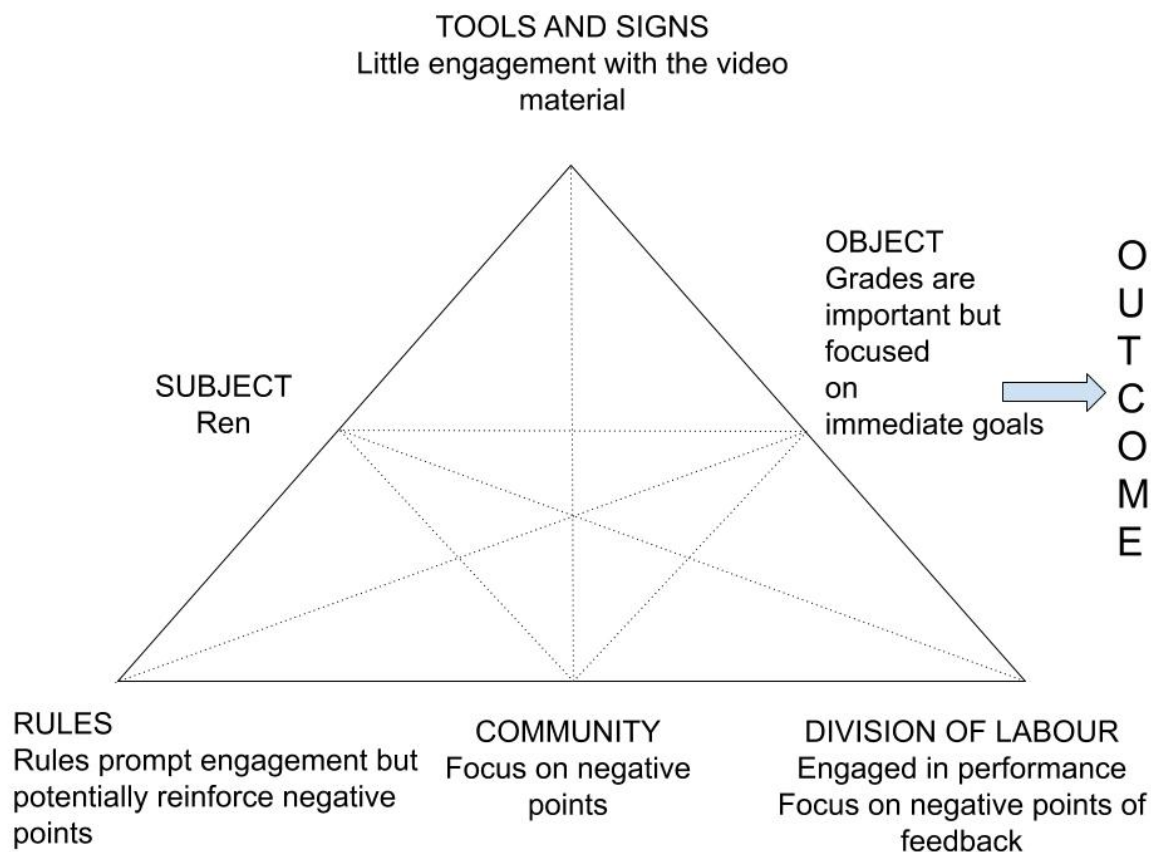
Ren: Erm... [thinking] to be honest,...

Interviewer: Mmm [yes].

Ren: ... not really from this one.

(Ren, Second Interview)

Arguably Ren's conception of feedback (whether generated by her tutor, by her peers or by herself) is focused on the negative. In terms of the activity (Figure 5.2), this creates contradictions in her relationship with the video material, the rules, the community and the division of labour. By characterising feedback and what she can see in the videos as negative, Ren's actions are focused on avoiding error and, in the case of the video material, avoiding observing anything she might see as an error in her performances. However, there is a danger of overstating the level of contradiction within the system as Ren does acknowledge the developmental value of feedback.



**Figure 5.2 Negative experience of video material as experienced by Ren**

While Ren's actions may be directed to avoiding engaging with what she perceives as errors, it might be argued that the object of the activity for Ren is achieving a good grade.

Like, if I got, like, say, a 50, and I know I could've got a 60, but without feedback, how, how am I supposed to know what I did wrong? So I would just, like, get really annoyed and pissed off about what I did wrong. So, I guess, feedback is a must. It's really important.

(Ren, Second Interview)

However, the focus in the interviews appears to be less associated with the activity as a whole but rather on the short-term goals of managing the day to day tasks in the

classes. Indeed, where the rules force engagement with the videos the negativity is reduced.

It's not as bad as I thought it would be, like I was expecting something way worse.

(Ren, Second Interview)

This conclusion in the second interview did not prompt a change of approach by the third interview. Indeed, the rules were still needed to force engagement.

Ren: I don't watch them. I haven't watched most of them,...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ren: ... but, like, I'll need to watch them as soon as possible, for ELS first, and then I'll need...

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ren: ... it for Art of Persuasion

(Ren, Third Interview)

Engagement appears to only be triggered by rules forcing Ren to watch the videos. It does not appear that such forced engagement operates in a way that significantly changes Ren's perception of the video material. However, Ren reports the use of her evaluative judgement when peer reviewing classmates, albeit motivated by the desire not to make the "same mistake" as her peers. The question is how students in Ren's position might be encouraged to take a more evaluative approach when watching their own videos.

### 5.3 Charlie      Category 2: Video as one of the requirements of the unit

Charlie's position throughout the interview process was that he would need to be forced by the requirements of the unit to watch the videos.

I don't-, I wouldn't-, it's not necessarily watching myself, like, erm-, if you told us to re-watch them, I'd probably give it a watch. It's just more, I'm not sure how, how much I'd be able to take from it.

(Charlie, First Interview)

I'd say, probably, erm,... up to this point I haven't felt much need. I was thinking about revisiting it because, obviously, I'm doing a one-minute speech on Friday,...so I was thinking about revisiting it for that purpose, but I guess, up until this point, I was just... swept up with the moot and thought I'd just focus on that,

(Charlie, Second Interview)

There is some recognition that this process may result in a learning benefit. Indeed, Charlie's position seems to be founded on two points. First, that direct and active self-evaluation is not something he enjoys doing and second, that he is already sufficiently self-aware of his performances.

I hate self-assessing, whether it's written work or... vocal... public speaking or drama or anything, 'cos I feel like, erm... I've always sort of tried my best the first time. Any time I watch it back, it just sort of makes me second guess rather than actually be constructive.

(Charlie, First Interview)

It didn't seem like it would add much for me, 'cos I, I did-, like, even if I watch it, I might see a few things that I wasn't aware of, but I feel like I'm aware of the majority of what went wrong in that moot. Like I can even now remember that, er, the nerves got to me, so I was shaking a bit, my hands, my legs. Erm, also, at one point, I tripped and sort of forgot myself, 'cos I didn't root myself in the text, and I was sort of improvising a bit, and that caused me to stumble. And I, I know that now, even without watching it.

(Charlie, Second Interview)

Charlie does suggest that he sees the potential benefits of the videos but not so much that it would operate to make him actively seek the videos.

It's quite interesting to be able to watch myself and pick up on things and see it, er, from a different perspective rather than myself in the moment. It meant that I was able to sort of, again, analyse it a bit better. Erm, but then... I think I did see the benefit of that and I did actually find it a good experience, but it hasn't motivated me to return.

(Charlie, Third Interview)

Not wishing to engage with the videos did not reflect in any lack of engagement in the class activities. Charlie described active engagement both with performances and as a peer reviewer.

Benefits of watching peer review.

Well, I guess, just in the first place, it means that you're more switched on; you're paying attention more so that you can be-, you're in a position to give feedback. And, also, it, erm... it's helpful in a sort of comparative way, not in

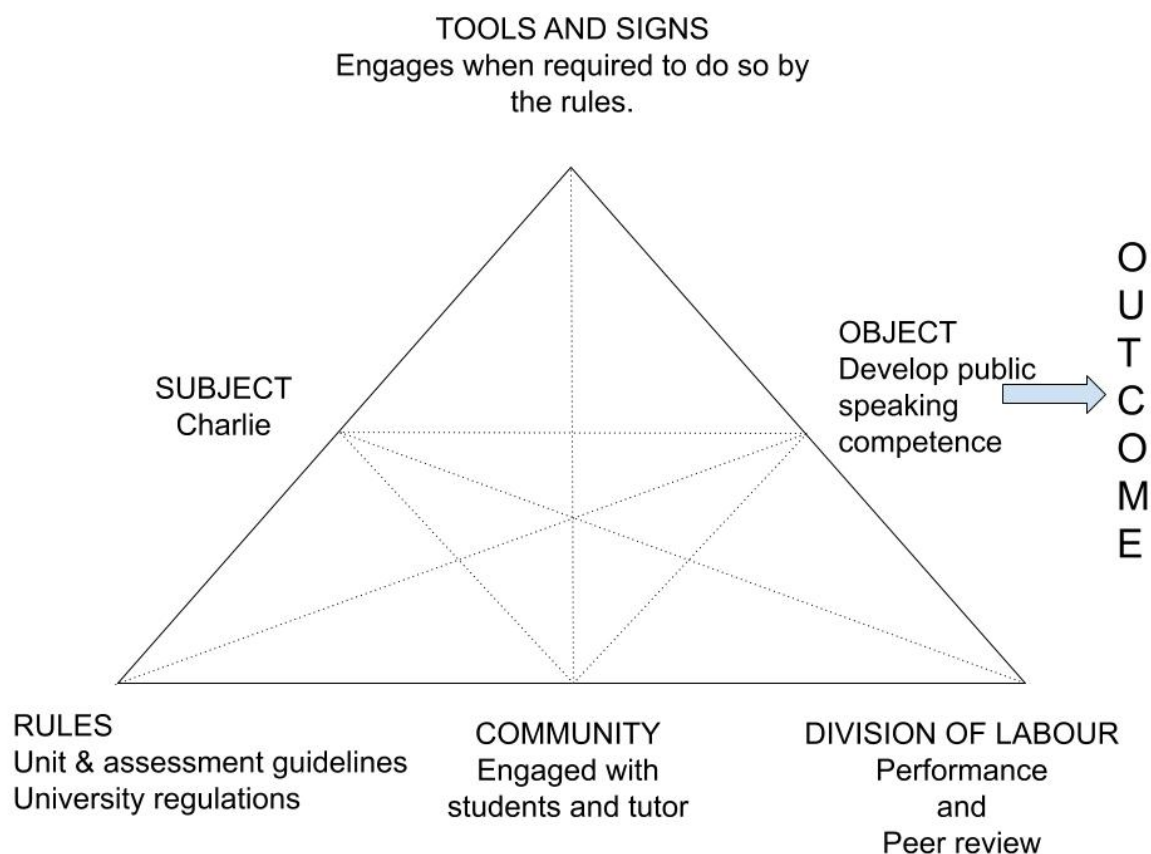
comparing myself as in, 'Oh, I'm better than them,' or, 'I'm worse than them,' but just, 'Oh, that's a technique they're using,' 'Oh, that's something they're doing quite successfully, maybe I should-, maybe I can apply that,' or, er, oh, they don't this that I would then advise them not to do, and also I'd watch out for myself. So it gives you a chance to be quite analytical and, like, 'cos you're not in the moment, you're not reflecting on yourself, you can take a step back and just sort of try and objectively look at it. So I found it quite beneficial, yeah.

(Charlie, Third interview)

Watching a peer review taking place.

Erm, yeah, again, it's another different perspective that, again, can sort of open my eyes a bit more, make me see it in a different way that I hadn't thought of, which then is beneficial again because, if I hadn't thought of it this way but it is a good technique, then it will put it in my mind, I might remember it, I'll think, 'Oh, I remember when So-and-so did this and So-and-so commented on it positively,' work that into my own work.

(Charlie, Third interview)



**Figure 5.3 Video experienced as one of the requirements of the unit as experienced by Charlie**

Charlie's experiences of using the videos are depicted in Figure 5.3. Charlie is not keen to engage with the videos as a means to evaluate his own performances. He reports not enjoying such self-evaluation but reports behaviours that suggest that he exercises evaluative judgement both of his own performances and those of others. In terms of contradictions, it might be argued that the issue is with the rules. Tighter rules might force engagement with the video material and support the development of self-evaluation. However, this conclusion potentially misinterprets the activity. Charlie is highly engaged with an activity where developing presentation competence would appear to be his motive. Further, this motive seems to be supported by a chain of appropriate actions. He appears to be participating in every other facet of the activity other than full engagement with the video material. Arguably, for Charlie, the video

material is not operating as the principal mediating tool in this activity system. For Charlie, the activity is mediated by the feedback he receives from peers and tutors; from his own observations of others; and his reflections on his performances. This analysis raises questions about the place that the video material holds in the unit design.

#### **5.4 Ian Category 3: Memory refreshing**

Ian identifies as a confident public speaker who values the videos as a reminder of his previous performances.

After you've done something like... kind of like filled with adrenalin and, like, nervousness, erm, you, you're just not really thinking about anything else afterwards. So, erm... yeah, like I think, afterwards, once you've had the feedback again and you're watching yourself, then you can understand, 'Oh right, at this point they were talking about that, erm, and me doing this.'

(Ian, First Interview)

It's usually been where, either... when I'm seeing something relevant in the next task; so, if I was doing, like, the one-minute speeches, like, if I'm just using the same speech over and over again, erm, then I'll typically flick back to my old ones and make sure that I get, get it right in the next one. Or if just the subject matter is quite relevant.

(Ian, Third Interview)

However, he is not keen to watch his performances.



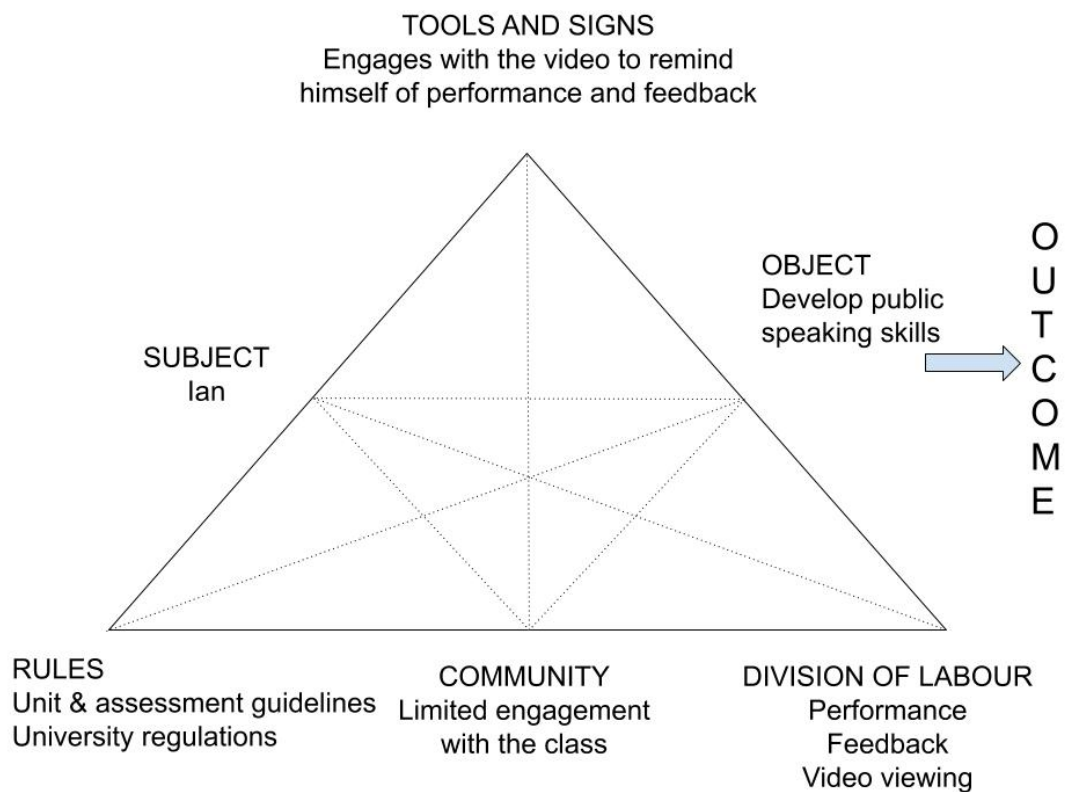
I don't like watching myself. Er, I don't mind listening to myself, as such, but I, I, I think I probably prefer listening to myself to watching myself. Erm, I'm not sure why, erm, I just, I just don't like looking at myself on camera.

(Ian, Third Interview)

But he reports that the videos are valuable and it is worth being forced to do it.

I've kind of got to do it, otherwise I'm not going to make any further improvements, erm, like I'm not going to be able to, like, criticise myself accurately, erm, if I don't watch them. So it's kind of one of those things where I've got to do it, so stop complaining about it.

(Ian, Third Interview)



**Figure 5.4** Video experienced as a memory refreshing tool as experienced by Ian

Ian's example presents a rather mechanistic model reminiscent of transmission feedback practices. The activity (Figure 5.4) is essentially focused on the top part of the activity system triangle. Ian is motivated to improve his presentation skills and this improvement forms the object of the activity. Note that in this context I have preferred the word 'skills' to 'competence', as I take the view that Ian's actions appear to be focussed on adjustments to improve delivery rather than wider competence development. Ian seeks to improve through a cycle of performance, reminder of performance/feedback and adjustment to performance. Ian's actions are directed at the goal of making the next performance better than the last. The engagement with the bottom part of the activity system is limited to receiving tutor feedback. The contradictions in this activity appear to be associated with Ian's relationship with the broader community and engagement with the rules. The focus that Ian has on the development of his public speaking through incremental improvement risks excluding the benefits of the social aspects of the activity (e.g. peer feedback and peer observation). Similarly, Ian may be missing some of the benefits afforded by the rules of the activity which encourage engagement with the breadth of video material rather than using that material as an episodic memory aid. I should make clear that this is not associated with any lack of engagement in the unit activities. On the contrary, it is clear from the interview transcripts that Ian was an active participant in classes. The point is that contradictions in respect of Ian's relationship with the rules and community mean that the activity may not be delivering all that it can to support Ian's development.

#### **5.5 Nell Category 4: Video offers a different perspective**

Nell had initial concerns about watching the videos.

I would, no, I'd look at it through, like, through my eyes, like, through, peek, peeking through [chuckles] and just look at it,... because it's one of those things where, on yourself you're really self-critical.

(Nell, First Interview)

I think it's one of those things where I was very critical in the beginning, but now I'm like, 'Oh,' you know, even though there is stuff to criticise, but it's like I think you've gotten used to seeing yourself. I guess it's like when people make videos or, like, initially, everyone's a bit like, 'Oh no, I don't want to see it [awfully],' or like your voice on the recording, you're not really...

(Nell, Third Interview)

However, once she had embarked on watching the videos it is clear that she was able to gain a different perspective on her performances and take action based on that perspective. The approach appears to combine elements of observation, use of feedback from tutors and peer, and reflection.

I didn't realise how much I uhmed, and, er, they didn't really say it was bad, but I could hear it when I looked back at it. I was like, 'Oh, I didn't know I uhmed [surprised],' but I did, which was interesting, and I moved my hands, like, 3,000 times, and I was like, 'That's fine, I can work on it,' [smiles].

(Nell, Second Interview)

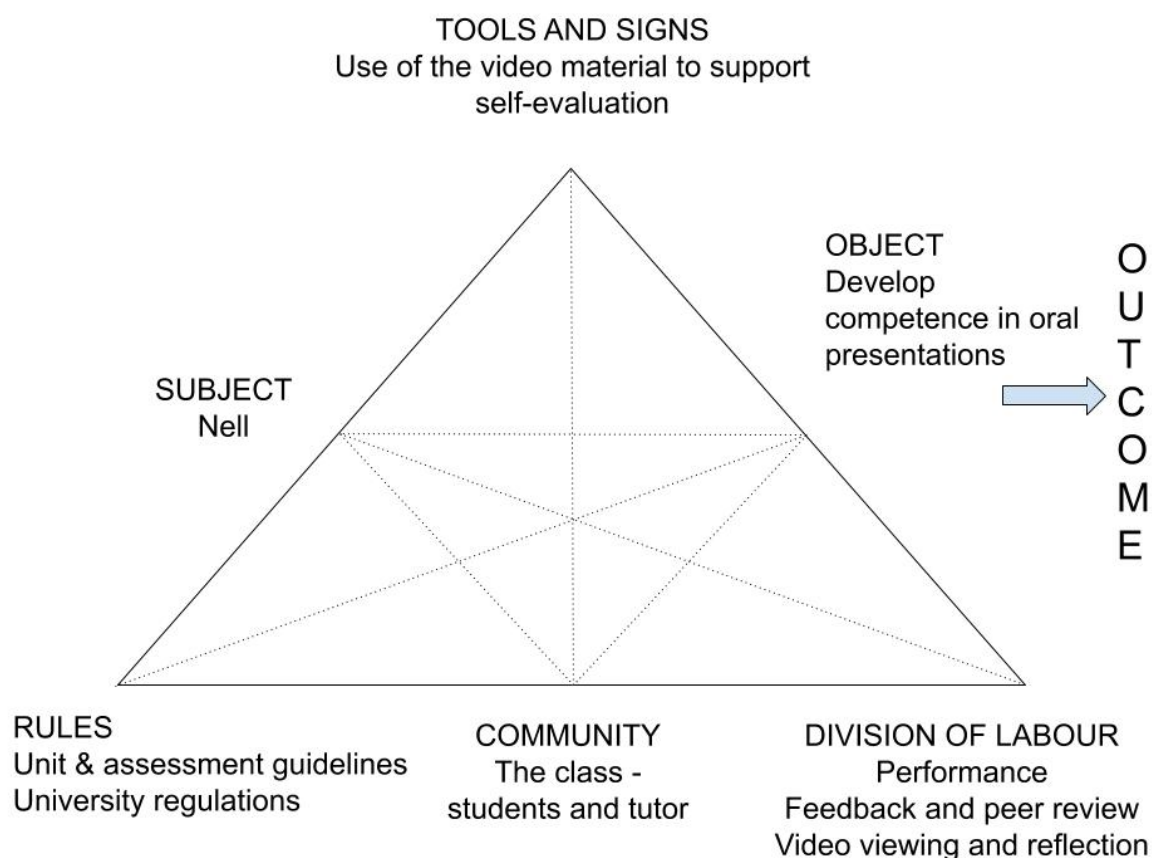
I was just a bit curious, really It's one, it's one of those things where you, like, want to see yourself and, like, want to-, I don't know, I, I heard the feedback and I was like, 'Mmm, do I do that [thinking]?' and I was like, 'Let me just check myself. Let me triple-check for myself'.

(Nell, Second Interview)

This process also operates when Nell discusses class activities involving her peers.

I think it's 'cos you look at them to try and improve yourself,...so, when you're seeing it, you're like, 'OK, so, at this point, I think everyone sort of does that and what can I do differently?' or sometimes it's like, 'What can I do like them?' 'cos sometimes they're quite, like, they just take a long pause and you're like, 'Oh, OK [impressively].' Like I see it's not a long pause, but I realise that they're doing it 'cos I'm looking out for it [smiles].

(Nell, Third Interview)



**Figure 5.5** Video experienced as tool that changes perspective as experienced by Nell

Nell's relationship with the video material is very close to the design of the unit (activity system in Figure 5.5). Nell's reported perceptions of the video material appear to suggest that she views it in quite different terms to the class activity. In particular, it provides a tool for revealing information about the performance and feedback that would not otherwise be available. However, this extends beyond the relationship Nell has with video material. Working through the activity system (Figure 5.5), it can be seen that Nell is an active part of the division of labour. She receives feedback from the tutor and peers and provides peer reviews. The community aspect of the learning is clearly relevant to Nell as she describes the learning gains available from working with the group. The rules in the activity have supported Nell's use of the video material as a tool to evaluate her own performance.

It is interesting to compare Nell with Ian. They are both highly engaged participants in the activity. However, the qualitatively different ways that Ian and Nell make use of the video material have a significant impact on what each can gain for the activity. For Ian the videos support his iterative improvement. However, for Nell the videos provide more significant insights into her performance and how to develop.

There is a further difference between Ian and Nell. The barrier free connections that Nell enjoys with the rules and community afford her greater opportunities to develop her competence. However, what cannot be said from this comparison is the extent to which there is a connection between perception of the video and engagement with the community within the activity. This will be explored further in relation to the participants who change position.

In one respect Nell and Ian are similar. Neither offers a strong conception of the video showing change over time. Ian does not express anything along these lines and Nell only briefly comments on this aspect in her third interview.

## 5.6 Ally Category 5: Video shows change over time

For Ally the videos and the activity itself appear to be viewed in a wider context. By the third interview, the videos are perceived as a body of material that can be used to observe and reflect on her performance. This includes developing her body language and becoming comfortable with her accent.

I think it's the fact that you get to... for me, personally, it's just watching over-, 'cos sometimes people don't like hearing their voice, I think it's watching over those videos as well and just, you know, looking at the little things that-, like my hand gestures and like, you know, not being too insecure or bothered with my accent anymore, and stuff like that. Yeah [half-laugh].

(Ally, Third Interview)

However, even before recordings started in class, Ally perceived a wider benefit in having the video material.

I want to represent clients in courts and stuff, so, because I play with my hands a lot, so, if I get to see it in the video, I'll just be like, 'OK, maybe I shouldn't do this. Maybe I should do something else.' So it'll just help me in the long run when I'm a barrister or solicitor.

(Ally, First Interview)

By the time of the third interview, Ally suggests that the unit has offered wider social benefits.

Interviewer: And... do you feel that you have sort of developed your skills through the year?

Ally: Yeah, I do. And, like, it just helps me to make conversation more in the sense of-, it's not like, erm-, I ask more questions, even if it's not like related, to just like break the ice, and stuff like that. So... yeah.

(Ally, Third Interview)

For Ally, the video material appears to have a number of facets. As set out above, it operates as a means to develop professional and social skills. However, the video is also perceived as a memory aid.

After you've finished doing your speech, you don't really hear, 'cos you're like, you just want to get away from the limelight. But, when you actually go home and you sit down and you listen, you're just like, 'Oh yeah, that makes sense [realising], ' sort of thing, yeah.

(Ally, Second Interview)

Further, Ally can see the value of the video as a tool that can be used to pass the unit (independent of any learning benefit). As has already been quoted in chapter 4.4, Ally was the only student to vocalise that the videos can be used strategically to satisfy the requirements of the unit.

Yeah, I think so, 'cos, if you mess up in one, at least you have something to show you improved, 'cos I think, I, purposely, messed up in one because I just... it will just make the reflective portfolio better, in a way, and you have more to talk about and, yeah.

(Ally, Third Interview)

In common with Nell, Ally shows a strong connection with the community aspects of the learning activity. Indeed, in Ally's interviews, there is a close connection between her own performances and the benefits of working with peers. This includes the role played by providing peer feedback and listening to feedback being given to peers in her own development.

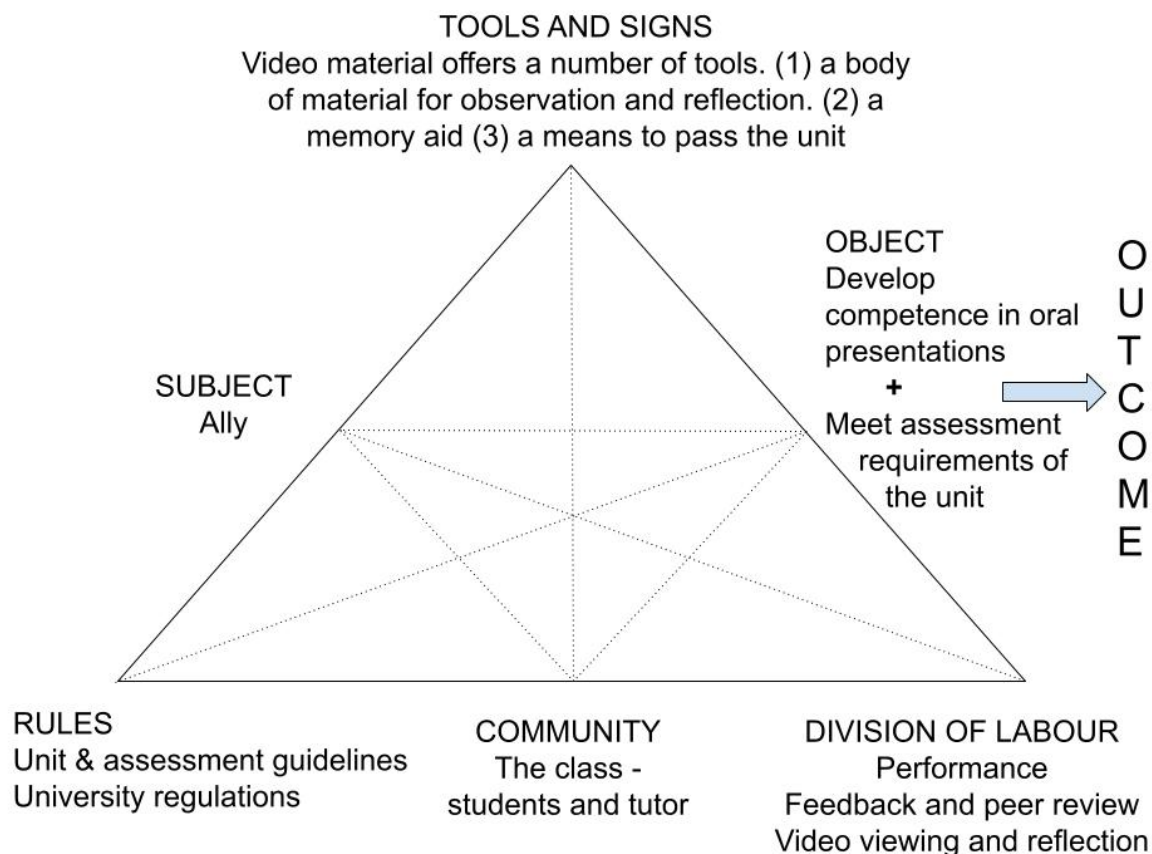
Normally they would give us feedback on our presentations directly, so it makes you see-, 'cos you might be like, 'Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, they did this and that,' but I think, once they just give you feedback, you, you kind of learn from what they say, even if it's to your peers as well, 'cos you're like, 'OK, well, maybe I do that,' or, you know, if you have to give feedback to your peers, you at least know what exactly-, you're not just being harsh but you're just looking-, giving, like, important feedback that actually matters and will help them improve.

(Ally, Third Interview)

Yeah, I think sometimes, like, you get a feedback and you might be annoyed with it, and then, if it's given to somebody else, you sort of listen. Like you see the feedback, you get it, but it's like, 'Did I really do that?' but, if you see somebody else who did the same thing and they got the same feedback, it makes you wonder, like, 'Hmm, maybe [thinking],' yeah.

(Ally, Third Interview)





**Figure 5.6 Video shows change over time as experienced by Ally**

Ally's experiences of using the video are depicted in Figure 5.6. The examples of Ally and Nell suggest a close connection between working with their peers and perceiving the videos of their own performances as something more than a memory aid. The examples of Ren and Charlie suggest that there are barriers to use of the video material. These barriers may be associated with the discomfort of watching the videos or a belief that watching the videos does not offer sufficient learning benefit. These barriers do not appear to be associated with any lack of engagement with the wider community within the activity. However, for Ren, negative perceptions of her own performances appear to influence the way she perceives engagement with the wider community. Ian experiences the video as an episodic memory aid which helps him to make adjustments to his performance and improve incrementally. Ian contrasts with each of the other examples in that his engagement with the wider

community is mostly centred around his relationship with the tutor who provides feedback on each performance. So while fear and scepticism operate as reasons for not watching the videos, limited engagement with the peer activities may limit the value of the video as a tool for self-evaluation. These themes will be explored further when looking at students who changed their position through the course of the unit and those whose position remained the same.

## 5.7 April and Mia Changing position

### 5.7.1 Introduction

April and Mia have been chosen because they represent, to different degrees, changes in their perspective through the course of the year. Although the changes in the reported perceptions of April and Mia do not appear dramatic (see Table 5.1), they represented the most significant changes of position through the three interviews. Understanding what changes in the activity contributed to these shifts in perception will offer insights into how the activity can be developed in the future.

|            | Interview 1 |   |   |   |   | Interview 2 |   |   |   |   | Interview 3 |   |   |   |   |
|------------|-------------|---|---|---|---|-------------|---|---|---|---|-------------|---|---|---|---|
| Categories | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| April (F)  |             |   | X | X |   | X           | X |   |   |   |             | X | X | X | X |
| Mia (F)    |             |   |   | X | X |             |   | X | X |   |             |   |   | X | X |

**Table 5.1 Categories of description identified by April and Mia in the research interviews**

### 5.7.2 April

April offers a useful example of transition through the course of the unit. At the first interview, before recordings had started in class, April presented perceptions that were focused on Categories 3 and 4. This perhaps reflects her engagement with the course materials and the classes up to that point.

Interviewer: Would you...

April: Probably,...

Interviewer: ... watch your video again?

April: ... because I know I do tend to fidget, fidget a lot, so I'd be like-  
, I'd try to pick up on what I did wrong. So a video would be  
helpful.

(April, First Interview)

Interviewer: You'll have a video which has your performance and then the  
feedback that you've got. Do you think you'd listen to the  
feedback again?

April: I think probably less because I think I would remember the  
feedback more, but, if I do tend to forget, then probably.

Interviewer: And do you think there's any difference between receiving the  
feedback immediately that you've done the speech and  
receiving the feedback when you're watching the video?

April: Erm, after my speech I'll probably be still quite nervous, so it  
might not enter my brain as easily. So, watching back, I guess,  
I'd just be able to, like, 'Oh, you actually said that [surprisingly],  
that as well,' [chuckles].

(April, First Interview)

By the time of the second interview, this position had changed and there was now a barrier preventing April from engaging with the video material. Indeed, April's actions in the system were geared to not watching the videos with the goal avoiding it for as long as possible,

I thought I would watch it beforehand. I was like, 'Yeah, that would be good.'  
But then, when I actually came to it, I'm like, 'Do I really want to see myself again doing that speech?' and I was like, 'No, not really [apprehensively],'  
(April, Second Interview)

Despite these negative experiences of the recorded performances, April maintained the perception that viewing the performances would be beneficial. Further, she would engage with them in accordance with the requirements of the assessment task.

Interviewer: Is anything is ever going to make you watch your... videos?

April: I think I will watch them, at desperate times [chuckles], but-, 'cos I do want to know what bad habits I've been, I will show on camera. But, mmm [pondering], just haven't so far.

Interviewer: One of the things that we're going to do in the unit is to build a portfolio of the stuff that you've done through the year, and you need to select that and talk about how you're going to develop. Do you think you're in a position to be able to engage with your videos, to do that sort of process?

April: If it's needed, yeah, I would.

Interviewer: And do you think there's anything that the teaching staff can do to make that any easier?

April: Erm, no, I think it's more of a personal thing [chuckles], getting over seeing yourself again and again.

(April, Second Interview)

These comments might suggest some recognition of the benefit of viewing the videos being a change of perspective. However, since April had not engaged with the videos at this stage it is difficult to categorise her perceptions as anything beyond Category 1 (negative experience) and Category 2 (need to meet the requirements of the unit) at the point of her second interview.

By the third interview, near the end of the academic year, there is a significant shift in April's perceptions and actions. In particular, the video material becomes a useful memory aid (Category 3).

Well, at first, I thought I would remember all the feedback 'cos it is talking about me, and then-, but then, when I watched back at the videos, I realised I did forget some and I realised that it linked the feedback back to I get what they were saying now, like about the movements. I didn't notice it then, but, when I watched back the videos, I was like, 'Oh, those movements [realising],'

(April, Third Interview)

Perhaps more significantly the videos, as a body of work that shows her progress, are perceived as playing a significant role in April's development.

Although nerves are still there, but now it's just more I know how to deal with them and I know, like, what I am like in public speaking because of the videos, and I made changes and I feel a lot more confident in doing it. So, yeah.

(April, Third Interview)

It is tempting to argue that the key contradiction in the system was the barrier that was preventing April from engaging with the videos. Certainly, April acknowledges that it was the rules of the activity that eventually forced her to engage with the material.

I didn't really watch them until I had to.

(April, Third Interview)

The solution might be to change the rules to require (rather than just recommend) engagement with the videos early in the unit. However, looking at the whole of April's interviews, there are two reasons why that might be an overly simplistic way of viewing the activity. Firstly, it is clear that the benefit of the video material that April perceives is related to it showing development.

But, again, it was only until I realised how much easier presenting was after and, compared to the beginning of the year, and I was only able to kind of stop that because I did look at the videos. Even briefly, I did notice my own-, because my main problem is fidgeting, and it was only through the videos I was able to-, even if other people said, as long as you didn't really see it, you don't really stick in your mind. But, whenever I present now, it's just an image of me fidgeting shows up.

(April, Third Interview)

Secondly, there is evidence in the interviews with April that suggests that the contradictions also run in other directions in the activity system. In the second interview April reported as follows.

I really appreciated actually working in a group with the helpful side of the group, erm, because you're like, 'Oh, I didn't actually think of that before [interestingly],' but then they would have. And, also, like, when you practise it, they would be there like, 'I'm not sure if you've noticed, but you pronounced this wrong,' and you would be like, 'Oh [interestingly].' And it's just-, it's a lot easier; it gives you a bit more confidence, 'cos...

(April, Second Interview)

This suggests that, at the time of the second interview, the social aspects of the activity, in particular April's links to the community and division of labour in the activity system, were important to her development in the activity. April expands on this in the third interview.

Interviewer: So does watching people perform and get feedback change your view of your own performance or anything?

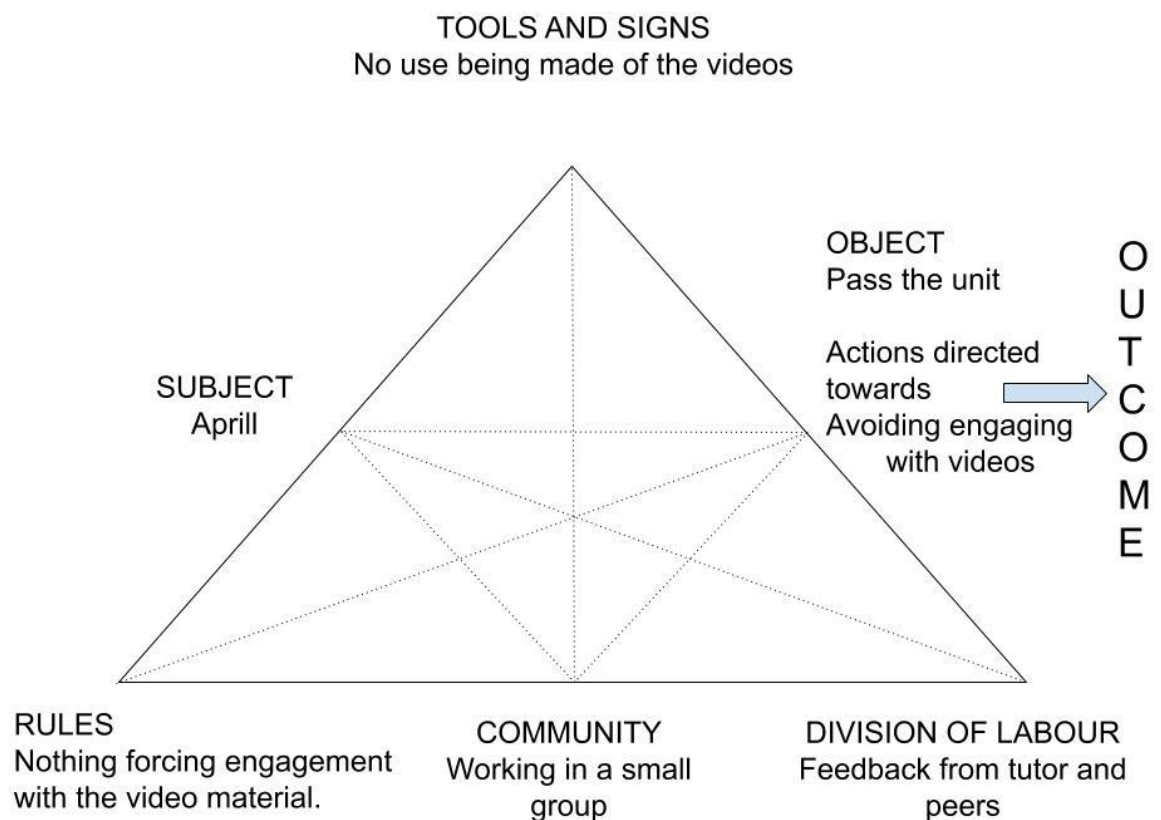
April: Yeah, it's more when you see a really good performance and then you realise-, you start to notice what they're doing and then you're like, 'I can use that,' and, yeah, it's more their performances [quietly].

Interviewer: OK. What about the feedback that they're getting? Do you think that's something that you get anything from the feedback that somebody else receives?

April: Erm, normally, if it's things that I don't reali-, that I didn't even realise that well, looking at their performances, and then, if someone else brings out something, then it just made me realise how picky people can be and it makes you more aware, if you're doing those things yourself.

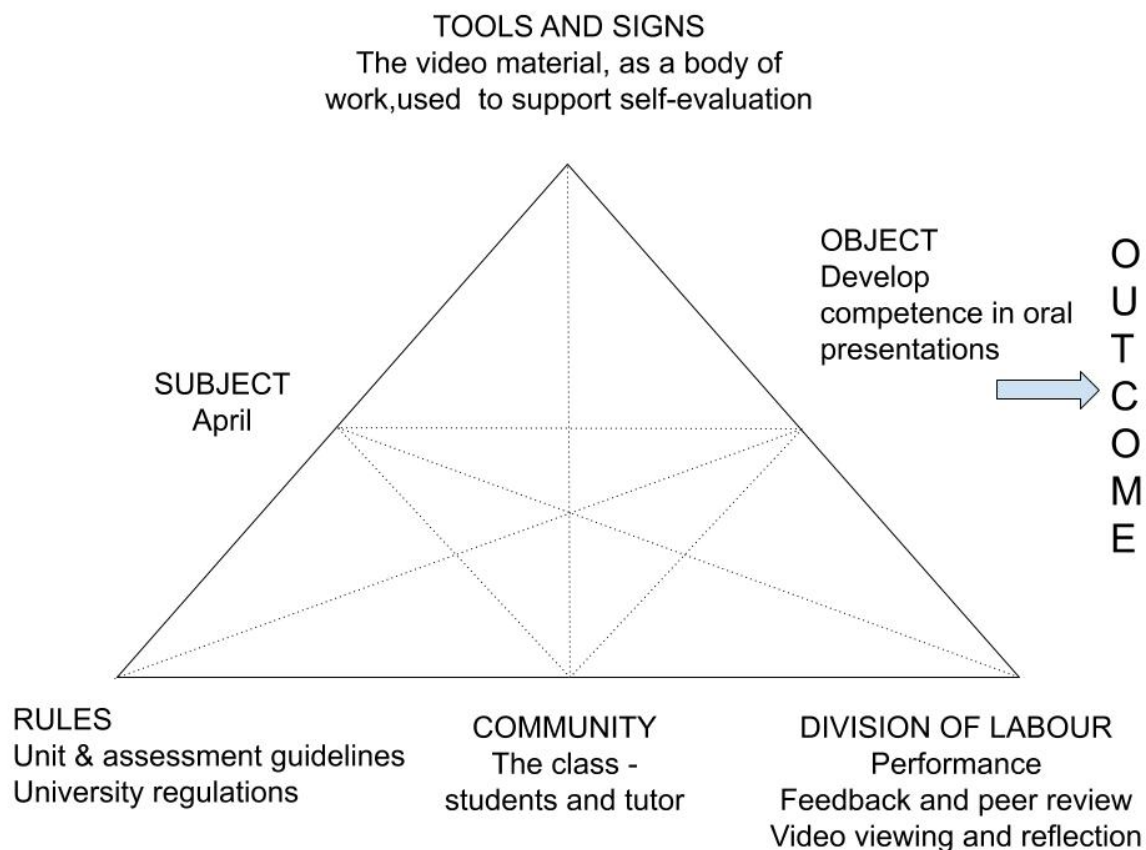
(April, Third Interview)

April's experiences suggest that the social aspects of the activity should be emphasised during the early stages of the unit (e.g. students working on and delivering speeches in small groups). Although recordings should be made of performances and feedback throughout. April's example suggests that student engagement with those recordings might be usefully delayed until each student has a body of material upon which to reflect. The following diagrams depict the difference between the activity April was experiencing at the time of the second interview (Figure 5.7) and what she experienced at the end of unit (Figure 5.8).



**Figure 5.7 April's experience of the video at the point of the second research interview**





**Figure 5.8 April's experience of the video at the end of the academic year**

### 5.7.2 Mia

The change in position for Mia is much less dramatic than April's but arguably no less significant. The key difference between Mia and April is that at no point in the interviews does Mia express significant concerns about watching the videos. Indeed, Mia reports that she would be motivated by curiosity.

I'd just be curious about how I did [chuckles],...

(Mia, First Interview)

Further, at the start of the year (before any videos have been recorded), Mia conceptualises the videos in collective terms.

Well, I think, if you've got, like, a whole kind of portfolio of them, you can see how you've, like, changed over time, which would be really interesting and it's kind of... good to see that you've improved over time. It's kind of like, 'Oh yeah, I'm actually not that bad at this. It's not that bad.'

(Mia, First Interview)

By the time of the second interview, Mia reports a slightly different conception of the video material based on her use of the material then available. This suggests that the main focus of her perception of the video was as a memory aid (Category 3) but also noting that it offers a different perspective (Category 4).

Mia: Yeah, I watched the first one [video], most of the first one, and then, like, all of the second one [chuckles].

Interview: And what did you watch – the performance and feedback or just the performance or...

Mia: Erm, I watched both. For the second one it was more feedback; I was more focused on the feedback for that one, but the first one...

Interview: Am I right in saying that wasn't as strong as the...

Mia: That wasn't as strong a one. That's why I wanted to look at the feedback, 'cos then, yeah... [chuckles].

Interview: And how did you find that?

Mia: It is kind of... more of a reminder, but then... [pause] yeah, kind of more reminding me. But then I guess, as well, like you're taking kind of a more outsider point of view from it, 'cos you're not actually sat there... at that time. So... yeah [chuckles], if that makes any sense [chuckles].

(Mia, Second Interview)

But, if you kind of get past the embarrassment of seeing yourself like all flustered and everything... and then-, 'cos you're kind of sat there thinking, 'I'm watching this now and cringing about what I was doing last time, so that next time I'm not doing that,' so it's... more constructive,...

(Mia, Second Interview)

By the third interview, Mia's perception of the video has shifted from Categories 3 to 4 to Categories 4 to 5. Mia's discussion of her perception of video as offering a different perspective has become more detailed and more focused on the social elements of making a speech.

Like, if you're at home practising or something, I don't know, you kind of... have two point of views, really: a point of view from the person actually doing the speech or performance or whatever, and... the person watching it. You kind of know more what the person watching it is looking out for, so you can adapt your performance... to be more... I don't know pleasing [chuckles] to the people watching, kind of thing. And that's good, 'cos it means... you know, you're always improving with yourself and... picking up on little things that you might do, that people in the audience will notice and mention, so you're kind of like eliminating things they might mention, which, in turn, means you're doing better, if that makes [chuckles] any sense.

(Mia, Third Interview)

This is coupled with the value of being able to use the videos to see development over time.

The patterns in the feedback, you can identify if there's, like, a recurring issue or like something you're always doing well. But then, also, of course, like watching back your performance, you can also pick it up yourself and see yourself and be like, 'Yeah, that's right, I am doing that. This is how I can change it,' or, 'this is how I can keep on improving it even more,' kind of thing.  
(Mia, Third Interview)

Indeed, seeing progress over time becomes a driver for watching the videos and engaging with the activity.

It's kind of, like, a bit of a boost to your confidence to see the progress,... and it kind of makes you want to do more, as well. You're like, 'Look at how great I am now'.  
(Mia, Third Interview)

There is also development of a particular technique in using the material.

Erm... I think because then, of course you listen to the feedback and then you go back... and see yourself... doing the speech, and, like, this is where that applies. So you're, kind of,... it's like you're the audience watching it and you're, like, picking out the things that... the person you would be watching is doing [chuckles]. So... it kind of, erm... I don't know, reinforces it in a way and makes you look for it... instead of just kind of passively watching them both; it makes you work a bit and then it kind of help-, it helps me to remember what I need to address next time, really.  
(Mia, Third Interview)

Notably the change in perspective coincides with Mia's feelings about working with the wider group. In the second interview, Mia reports, having recently completed a group exercise, a preference for working alone.

Erm... [pause] I would've kind of preferred to do it by myself, but I always find that I work better by myself.

(Mia, Second Interview)

However, by the third interview, Mia discusses how working with her peers impacts on her own performance. This includes watching people perform and hearing their feedback.

Yeah, I've gotten quite a lot from people that I'm, like, in the class with, actually, that are really helpful, and I thought, 'Yeah, I can definitely use that and keep on doing that.' And, also, listening to the feedback other people are giving to other members of the class, you also kind of pick up that and you're like, 'Actually, I could do that as well.' So, I don't know, it all, altogether it kind of just builds and makes sure you have, kind of, a lot of, like,... points for improvement that-, and it's good that you identify them yourself as well. So, like, when you're listening to other people giving other people feedback [chuckles],...

(Mia, Third Interview)

Mia describing using the performances of others as an evaluative tool to compare with her own performances.

I think because instead of, erm, just you being the one that's getting the feedback, it's-, in a way you kind of compare your performance with the

performance of another person; you kind of, like, see parallels between the two. So then, if someone gives feedback that you think is really helpful for a certain aspect of that person's performance, and you, yourself, think, 'Actually, I did that too,' you can take that feedback with you. And someone else might have not thought of it, when they were giving feedback to you, so it's like, yeah.

(Mia, Third Interview)

Mia offers an interesting example because she was clearly engaged with the idea of using the videos as a tool to help develop her skills from the start of the unit. It might be argued that Mia reflects the design of the activity from the outset. However, there is development through the course of the year. In relation to her perceptions of the video, there is a shift away from video being a memory aid to it being a way to show a change in perspective and change over time. At the same time Mia describes how she benefits from analysing the performances of other people. To understand this development further it is worth considering what is happening at the action level rather than using an activity system diagram.

In Mia's early uses of the videos her goal is simply to get some immediate incremental improvement by watching the performance and feedback of her previous video. Mia does not have a body of videos to use at this stage and therefore the video has limitations as a tool. At the earlier stages of the year, Mia does not perceive her learning as a process that includes her peers. Mia does get involved in working with her peers. However, her actions in doing this are driven by her goal to conform to the assessment rules. The actions that make Mia engage both with the video and with her peers develop through the course of the unit.

## 5.8 Absence of change

The examples of April and Mia along with the analysis of the individual categories of description suggest some relationship between engagement with the videos and being engaged with the peer group. In order to explore this relationship further, brief consideration was given to participants who did not significantly change their position through the three interviews (Table 5.2).

|             | Interview 1 |   |   |   |   | Interview 2 |   |   |   |   | Interview 3 |   |   |   |   |
|-------------|-------------|---|---|---|---|-------------|---|---|---|---|-------------|---|---|---|---|
| Categories  | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 1           | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Anthony (M) |             |   | X | X |   |             |   |   | X |   | X           |   | X | X |   |
| Cameron (M) |             | X | X |   |   | Unavailable |   |   |   |   | X           | X | X |   |   |
| Connor (M)  |             |   | X | X |   |             |   |   | X |   |             |   | X | X |   |

**Table 5.2 Categories of description identified by Anthony, Cameron and Connor in the research interviews**

For these three participants the benefit of the video is as a memory aid (Category 3). Cameron, in particular, perceives the video in these terms.

I generally watch videos if I'm doing a presentation that's similar, because I don't want to repeat my same mistakes, because, I mean, otherwise feedback's been, you know, almost like a disregard. So, if I watch a presentation I've done before, I see what I did wrong there and I try not to do that wrong this time. Erm, hopefully, eventually I'll do nothing wrong.

(Cameron, Third Interview)

Anthony does not watch the videos of his own performances but does find the feedback useful as a memory aid.

I probably haven't spent as much time looking at my own videos as I should've, 'cos I don't really try to pick apart the, the minute-to-minute, erm, 'cos I don't really see much use in it.

(Anthony, Third Interview)

Especially when you're, erm, practising or writing your next piece, erm, being able to access the feedback again, er, and sort of see... and, and sort of plan it for yourself for the next time, erm, is really useful. So I made this mistake, or, or they pulled me up on this mistake last time, how am I going to make sure that they don't pull me up on the same thing again?

(Anthony, Third Interview)

While not seeing the value of watching the videos of his own performance, Anthony does note that they potentially provide a different perspective. For example, answering a question in a mock trial.

Being able to relive moments like that and see how they play out from the perspective of someone else looking in, erm,... I think will be really useful for, for the course and was just really interesting, if, if, you know, for nothing else, er, really interesting to watch back.

(Anthony, Third Interview)

Connor also perceives the video as a means to get a different perspective. However, this is presented alongside the video's value as a memory aid.



Seeing where you've done wrong and going back to the video and actually watching yourself, again, at first, is a little bit kind of strange, but, you know, seeing where you've done wrong, thinking, 'Right, next time I, I see exactly I was using hand gestures, my hands in my pockets.' So, you know, having a place where you can actually see it as opposed to someone saying it, and you've probably forgotten actually what you, what you were doing, or you may think, 'Well, were my hands in my pockets? I thought they were-', you know, so seeing that, where you actually went wrong, was a good advantage.

(Connor, Third Interview)

These three participants share similar views about working with their peers. Of the three, Cameron sees the least value in giving and receiving feedback from peers.

I feel, if someone's-, I wouldn't say if they're like, if they're like-, if they're significantly worse than me and they give, like, a lot of feedback, it's kind of like... apply that to yourself, you know,...

(Cameron, Third Interview)

I don't like giving feedback because I feel I'm going to be too harsh and upsetting people, because... I am a bit of a perfectionist and I notice, like, small little things that I feel it's not really worth mentioning, so I change, but, at the same time, I kind of want to mention it.

(Cameron, Third Interview)

However, Cameron does note the value of watching others perform.

So, when you watch other people, you just pick up little things, things that you wouldn't normally notice, like hand placement, that kind of thing, and I apply it to myself. So I like watching other people.

(Cameron, Third Interview)

Connor's thoughts on the peer work suggest that the object of the activity is to pass the unit. Peer review does not fit comfortably with that object.

Do they really care what I think? To be honest, I'm not, again, the person who's, at the end of the day, going to be marking their, their final assessment or their, their mini moot. So do they really care what I think? But it is good to point out, from people the same age, going through the same thing as you, you know, where they've gone wrong, what they liked, what they didn't like.

(Connor, Third Interview)

Like Cameron, Anthony does see the value in watching others. However, the positive benefits of working with peers are presented in negative language.

It's quite good to watch because you can kind of pick out things that other people do well, more so, I think, than the, the things that other people do poorly, which... I think is harder to kind of take and remember and, you know, lock yourself into. I think, if you see someone doing something well, erm, you kind of want to steal that and, and put that into your own performance so that you can kind of imitate their success. Nobody really wants to, you know, prevent somebody else's failures in themselves, but you, everybody wants to imitate somebody else's success.

(Anthony, Third Interview)

To varying degrees all three of these participants are engaging with the activity. They each express their motivation to improve their public speaking. However, there appear to be several contradictions in the system. The main perception of the video is as a means to be reminded of errors and tutor feedback. In terms of the community and the division of labour, these participants see limited value in the giving and receiving of peer feedback. The focus is on the tutor feedback, both in the classroom and as part of video material. Although their interview profiles are slightly different to Ian's, they appear to share many on the same issues. There are no significant barriers to them watching the videos (although Anthony queries the value of watching his own performances). Their engagement with their peers is limited. The limitation appears to reflect a perception that engagement with the wider community in the activity is of limited value.

## **5.9 Discussion**

### 5.9.1 Introduction

Bourhis and Allen's (1998) conclusion, from their review of the literature, that students find viewing video of themselves both enjoyable and valuable is not entirely supported by the results of this analysis. Indeed, negative feelings relating to the emotional aspects of watching the videos and the perceived value of the videos as a learning tool operate as the two most significant barriers to engaging with the videos. Nonetheless, the prevailing perception from this study is that students view the video as a positive element in the learning activity. For some students the videos have value as a simple memory aid. For others the videos operate as a tool that changes their perception of their performances and allows them to better understand their development. Consideration needs to be given to what factors influence student

perception of the video and how the activity might be adjusted to allow video to better support student learning.

#### 5.9.2 Barriers to effective use of the video material

The experiences that Ren describes suggest that some students will find the prospect of watching themselves perform on video too uncomfortable. Fear as a barrier to engagement is something recognised in the general feedback literature (Carless & Boud 2018; Eva et al., 2012; Chong, 2021). Similarly, Charlie not recognising the video recordings as a potential source of feedback has parallels with the challenges of fostering engagement with feedback that is not provided by the tutor (McConlogue 2015).

In the cases of Ren and Charlie, there is a temptation to look at the contradictions in the system and conclude that the answer lies in the rules of the activity. Ren and Charlie were both ultimately influenced by the rules that required all students to engage with the videos in order to be able to pass the unit. However, it is clear from the analysis of the interviews that forcing students to watch the videos by making it a requirement of the unit does not necessarily result in the video material becoming a more effective learning tool. The limitations of enforcing engagement through rules can be seen in a number of the examples examined. Ren's goal was to get through the module and she was prepared to engage with the videos to that limited extent. Similarly, Charlie was prepared to engage with the videos as required. However, this did not seem to significantly alter his perception of the value of the videos. Anthony, Cameron and Connor offer an insight into the likely outcomes if engagement with the video is achieved mainly as a result of the rules requiring it. They are essentially happy to engage with the activity as presented in the classroom. They are neither moved to avoid engagement nor are they looking to engage more than the rules

demand. Based on these three students, it might be reasonable to conclude that for many engaged students the main quality of the video material is that it is a useful memory aid. Certainly, the rules can be tightened to increase engagement with the videos. However, it seems that enforcing engagement is unlikely to change the prevailing perception that the videos are no more than a useful memory aid (Category 3). Therefore, it is unlikely that rule enforcement alone will lead to the videos being perceived as one of the higher categories of description.

That students are reminded of their feedback and their performances may, in itself, be a valuable feedback tool. However, there is evidence in the interviews that the videos can offer much more than this. Nell and Ally show that students can experience the videos as something more than a memory aid. Further, the examples of April and Mia suggest that perceptions can be developed through the course of the year. Importantly, April provides an example of someone who at one point experiences the videos as something that she could not engage with at all. However, within the course of the unit she was able to shift that perception to see the videos as a valuable learning tool that showed both a different perspective and change over time. The analysis suggests that the principal element for unlocking the potential of the video as a learning tool is the social context and the community element of the activity system.

### 5.9.3 The role of community

Ian provides a good starting point for considering the role of community. It is clear from the interviews that Ian is an engaged student who wishes to improve his oral presentation skills. At the most basic level the video material operates as a memory aid that supports incremental improvement by permitting students to use the performance and the feedback to prepare for the next performance episode. Arguably

this could be viewed as a sophisticated development tool. Ian is using the video in a way that would satisfy Sadler's requirements for effective feedback (Sadler, 1989) in that Ian possesses a concept of the required standard for public speaking, is able to compare his performance to that standard and then take action to close the gap between his performance and his idea of the standard. However, the analysis of Ian's interviews suggests that within Category 3 something simpler and more mechanistic is happening. While Ian needs to have some conception of a standard and be able to analyse his own performance against that standard, his understanding needs only to extend to appreciating the tutor feedback and making general observations about performance. This is enough to improve for the next performance exercise but may not be an effective route to future self-evaluation of his own performances.

Some students took the use of video further and used the video material to evaluate their performances and make their own decisions about future development. The analysis of the activity system seems to suggest that the difference between Category 3 and Categories 4 and 5 relates to engagement with the social context. This accords with the wider feedback literature which suggests that the feedback process needs to be more than mechanistic and must be socially situated (Price et al., 2011). Certainly, the difference between Ian, Anthony, Connor and Cameron on one side and April, Nell, Ally and Mia on the other, is the extent that the latter group engaged with their peers. In respect of April, it is the community aspect of the activity, rather than the rules, that ultimately prompted her engagement with the video. The question then is how the activity can be adjusted to support this type of change. In order to understand the role that the community plays in developing students' views of the video material and how the activity might be enhanced we need to look back at the feedback literature and in particular how students find meaning in feedback.

#### 5.9.4 Video and meaning making

The video material is part of the feedback process within the activity. At one level, it can be viewed as something that is externally generated and provided to the student. It contains feedback from the tutor and peers and a recording of the student's own performance. In essence this is not unlike the return of a written assignment with tutor comments. As with tutor feedback on written work, the student receiving this feedback can note the issues raised and apply that feedback to the next episode. This type of transmissive feedback can support development but, without more involvement from the learner, the learning gains may be limited and episodic (Price et al., 2011). Students need to be able to make evaluative judgements about what they observe in their own work and in the work of others (McConlogue 2015; Tai et al, 2017). This type of learning happens as an internal process where the "learner generates the information" (Sadler, 1989, p. 122). However, this internal feedback (Boud & Carless, 2018) or generative feedback (Nicol, 2018) process needs to be supported.

The interviews suggest that at the start of the unit the students are, understandably, not well equipped to use the videos to generate internal feedback. In viewing the videos, students are being asked to engage in a new form of feedback activity. Their prior feedback experience is based on the idea of "the tutor as expert marker" (McConlogue 2015, p. 1504). They need to develop their feedback literacy (Molloy et al., 2020) to make use of the peer, self and tutor feedback contained in the videos. However, this is not simply a matter of gaining familiarity with a new source of feedback, they also need to develop an understanding of quality relevant to Law. The students are new to undergraduate law and their experience of formal public speaking training is limited. Their understanding of subject specific standards and methods of working is likely to be a barrier to their ability to engage with the video effectively at an early stage of the activity (Ajjawi et al., 2018; Esterhazy & Damşa,

2019). The students need to build their understanding of discipline specific notions of quality before being in a position to evaluate videos of their own performances. The interviews suggest that the way that this is best achieved is through working with their tutor and, crucially, with their peers to develop their understanding of standards. The examples of Nell and Ally suggest that there is a close relationship between engagement in peer learning opportunities and effective use of the video as a self-evaluative tool. April and Mia perhaps offer evidence that the peer learning activities are a significant factor in developing the use of the video material as a tool for supporting internal feedback and self-evaluation. For April, the opportunity to develop with a familiar peer group was the factor that allowed her to actually engage with the video material.

The importance of developing evaluative skills through safe peer group activities has support in the wider literature on feedback and evaluative judgement. The development of evaluative expertise needs to be a gradual process (Carless & Boud, 2018) and one that is “contextual, social and cultural” (Ajjawi et al., 2018, p. 9). Indeed, much of the focus in the literature is on the processes that build the ability to evaluate. For example, co-construction of rubrics and assessment criteria (Ajjawi et al., 2018), use of exemplars (Pitt, 2019), use of supported self-assessment (Boud et al., 2015) and peer review (Nicol et al., 2014). Pitt (2019) offers a particularly pertinent parallel with this study as it involves the use of exemplars to build understanding of disciplinary notions of quality before moving on to peer review of student work.

#### 5.9.5 Developing the activity

As the tutor and as the researcher, I suspect that my fundamental view underpinning the design of the activity was that encouraging engagement with the video material



would result in students developing their evaluative skills and developing public speaking in an ongoing self-evaluative way. This is not what the research reveals.

The different categories of description help to clarify elements within the activity. In particular, the perceptions of the video material help to clarify the nature of that material and define the object of the activity. Sadler identifies the role of higher education as “the transition from feedback to self-monitoring” (Sadler, 1989, p. 122). The object of this oral presentation competence development unit is not just to make each student performance better than the last but rather to create learners who can effectively self-evaluate their own performances and adjust their approach accordingly. That said, incremental development within the activity is important both to the student and to the building of the video material. The video material changes throughout the year. At the start of the year the students can only perceive it in theoretical terms because no videos have been recorded. Through the year, as each student builds a body of videoed performances, the mediating tool changes. The creation of individual videos might be viewed as intermediate goals within the wider activity. These videos are not the final product but are vital intermediate products. They are similar to the fabrication of the trapping equipment in Leont’ev’s conception of the hunting activity (Chapter 2.5.4). The mediating tool in the activity develops as the collection of performances and feedback grows. This collection of material becomes the mediating tool, rather than episodes of single performances (Murphy & Barry, 2016; Simpson et al., 2019), as it allows students to understand their own development against their growing understanding of quality. This allows the students to make the adjustments they need to their next performance, which will, in turn, form part of the body of material.

The dynamic and unstable nature of the object of the activity means that the object of the learning process is not necessarily what the teacher wants it to be. For example,

problems with design may mean that the motive/object of a learning activity becomes merely to pass the assessment rather than to learn and understand the subject topic. In this particular activity, the design needs to be adjusted to help students to develop their ability to evaluate their own performances even if their main goal is just to pass the unit. It is argued that this might best be achieved by emphasising peer learning at the early stages of the learning activity.

The results of this research suggest a number of adjustments to the activity that would offer a better prospect of creating something that supports self-evaluative oral presentation competence development. The students should have an opportunity to work with the tutor and with their peers to develop their understanding of law specific notions of quality in oral presentations. This should be approached using the existing tutor supported oral presentation activities conducted within a small group of peers. These activities should include tutor feedback and peer review. The performances and feedback should continue to be recorded. However, this research suggests that the students should not be asked to engage with their videos during the early stages of the unit.

There are several interrelated reasons for not forcing engagement with the video material at an early stage. The video material presents a challenging prospect for students. We have seen how both Ren and April struggled with engagement with the video material. Indeed, concerns about watching the videos was a prominent theme with most students. April's example suggests that the video became easier to view after she had become more comfortable through engaging with the peer learning activities. This is not simply a matter of the video becoming more comfortable as the activity becomes more familiar. It has more to do with significant changes in the nature of the activity which mean that engagement with the video material has become more valuable and, hopefully, less daunting for the students. The first

change is that the student will have, through working with the tutor and peers, developed a greater understanding of notions of quality and be better placed to be able to make judgements as to the quality of what they observe. The second change is that the video material, as the mediating tool, will also have changed fundamentally. It will not be a simple episode of videoed performance and feedback but something quite different. It will be a collection of performances and feedback over time that, in most cases, shows development and therefore be more comfortable for the students to engage with. The students will be better equipped to engage with the evaluation of their video material having developed their knowledge and experience through peer working in the early stages of the unit.

# Chapter 6 Concluding remarks

## 6.1 Introduction

I began the research for this thesis with the belief that “the whole province of oratory is within reach of everyone” (Cicero, 1892, p. 5). I have long rejected the notion, held by some in the legal profession, that proficient public speaking is an innate gift enjoyed by the few. This research looks at students at the earliest stage of their legal education. The findings suggest that the development of competence in both oral presentations and evaluation of performances of self and others is within reach of everyone. The thesis has focused on the use of video as a technological tool to support competence development. Perhaps the most significant factor in understanding how this technology can best be used is to shift the perspective away from the individual learner towards the collective tool mediated activity as a whole.

This chapter reviews the findings of this thesis and considers its contributions to knowledge both in terms of pedagogical practice and approaches to research. This research explores a gap in the literature around approaches to the use of video to support the development of oral presentation competence at the early stages of legal education. The knowledge gained from this small-scale study has applications to learning and teaching both in the context of undergraduate law and in wider legal education. The theoretical approach taken to conceptualising the research problem and developing the research methods also offers new insights into researching oral presentation competence development.

## 6.2 Summary of findings

This thesis posed three research questions:

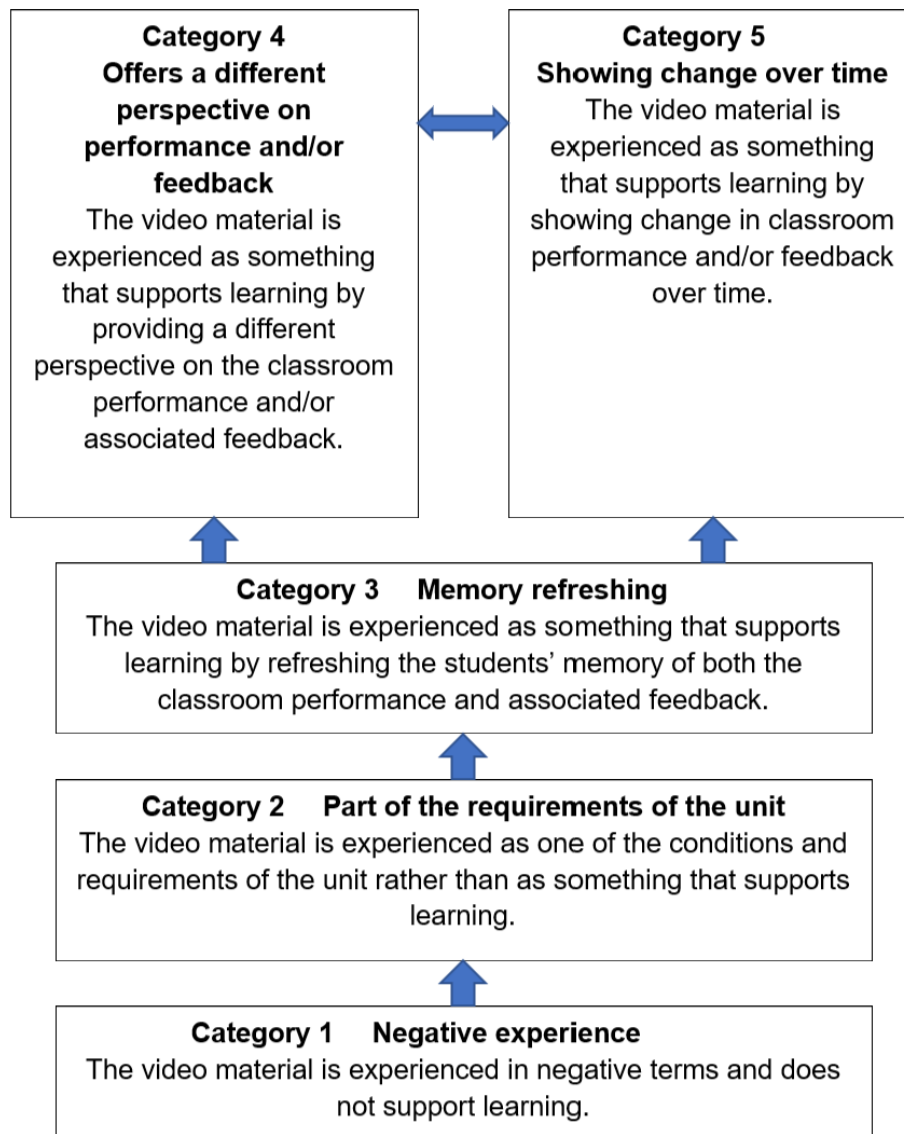
1. What are the qualitatively different ways in which students describe the experience of using video recordings of their presentation performances and video recordings of feedback on those performances as part of an oral presentation competence class?
2. What elements within the oral presentation competence learning activity can be identified to account for the change or absence of change in how students experience using video recording of their performances and feedback on those performances.
3. How can video recordings of presentation performances and video recordings of feedback on performances best be used to encourage and support student self-evaluation of their presentation competence development?

A phenomenographic approach was used to investigate how students experience using the video material. The analysis was extended beyond the categories of meaning produced from the phenomenographic investigation and looked at whether or not the perceptions of individual students shifted as they used the videos through the course of the unit. An activity theory based framework, with videos as the mediating tool, was then used to examine possible reasons for changes or the absence of changes in reported experience through the course of activity. The results of that analysis were then used to consider strategies for effective use of video to support students' self-evaluation of their oral presentation competence development.

#### 6.2.1 Stage1 - Research question 1

The phenomenographic analysis revealed five categories of description, see Figure

6.1.



**Figure 6.1 Hierarchy showing the qualitatively different ways of experiencing video in an oral presentation competence development unit**

These results suggest that the video material is perceived as a tool that supports learning. Three of the categories of description suggest learning benefits. At the most basic level the video material operates as a memory aid which supports incremental improvement as it permits students to use the performance and the feedback to prepare for the next performance episode. Some students took this further and experienced the videos as a means to change their perspective of their performance and better evaluate their performance. Reflecting on the hierarchy produced by the

phenomenographic analysis, Categories 4 and 5 represent a significantly different approach to the video material than that represented in Category 3. Category 3 suggests a mechanistic response to tutor feedback on a single performance episode. Categories 4 and 5 suggest a more critical approach to the video material and enhanced feedback literacy. However, phenomenographic analysis alone does not offer information about how this literacy might be developed.

#### 6.2.2 Stage 2 - Research questions 2 and 3

The activity theory analysis suggests that the video can help students to judge their own performances and make adjustments to future performances based on what they see on the video. The change in perspective that video provides is something that all but one of the participants mentioned. While the video material potentially afforded participants the opportunity to develop their oral presentation competence, the analysis also revealed that there were potential contradictions in the activity that operated as barriers to students accessing all that the video material can afford. The most fundamental barrier is simply that students may not make use of the video material at all. This may be the result of not seeing the value of the material or fear about watching themselves on video. While this issue might arguably be addressed by adjusting the rules of the activity to force engagement with the material, the research suggests that there might be more constructive approaches to resolving these contradictions. In particular, emphasising the social aspects of the development and holding back video viewing until there is a body of material that shows change over time.

The findings of the research indicate that the social aspects of the learning activity are important in helping students to break away from using the video as a memory aid and starting to see it as an opportunity to evaluate their own performances.

Indeed, participants whose main perception of the video material was as a memory aid tended to focus on tutor feedback and were more reluctant to engage in peer review. It is argued that the focus at the early stages of the learning activity should be on peer learning with less emphasis on students viewing video material of their own performances, although students should be free to review videos of their own performances if they wish. There are a number of related reasons for not focusing on the video material in the early stages of the unit. The first is that the students should be encouraged to focus on the development of relevant notions of quality through giving and receiving peer feedback. The development of notions of quality will support the development of the feedback literacy that the students need in order to ease their engagement with a new and challenging form of feedback. The development of feedback literacy is, itself, supported by the building of a library of performances and feedback before engaging with video material in earnest. Having multiple episodes of performance and feedback allows the students to take a broader view of their development.

### **6.3 Review of the theoretical framework**

In common with much activity theory based research, the theoretical framework for this study has provided “empirical utility” (Bligh & Flood, 2017, p. 148) to the analysis. Following Yamagata-Lynch’s view of this empirical utility (2010, p.5), the theoretical framework has allowed me to focus on the oral presentation competence activity as a manageable unit of analysis, break the activity into its elements to identify systemic implications, understand any systemic contradictions and tensions, and depict the findings diagrammatically. Bligh and Flood argue that activity theory’s analytical usefulness means that it “is rarely chosen to directly challenge prior conceptualisation of the research object, or because of interest in the theory per se” (Bligh & Flood, 2017, p. 148). However, in this thesis activity theory has been chosen as the



theoretical framework because of what it offers in terms of understanding of the nature of the social world and how it can be used to reconceptualise the oral presentation competence development activity.

The choice of activity theory is a product of the development of my own ontological and epistemological position (discussed in Chapter 1.4.2) and my dissatisfaction with prevailing views of the development of oral presentation competence within legal education. Within legal education oral presentation skills are principally viewed in individual terms. Allied to this view is the idea that legal education should be designed to hone the oral skills of students with existing ability rather than foster competence among those with little or no experience of public speaking. Activity theory shifts the focus away from the individual to view oral presentation competence development as a collective activity, not only engaging the speaker and the audience but also encompassing the social, cultural and historical context. Approached in this way, the research emphasises the importance of the social aspects of the activity. The ability to undertake effective self-evaluation of students' own performances is founded on skills developed while working collaboratively with peers through giving and receiving peer feedback.

Activity theory provided a new framework for conceptualising the learning activity. However, I did not want to lose the learner or their perspective on the activity. The learner is, of course, part of that wider activity. They will not only be changed by the activity but will also prompt change within the activity. The idea that the activity might be changed by the learner has a particular resonance in this research. The relationship between the individual and the video material is a highly dynamic one. Not only is the tool changed through the course of the year as more videos are added but the relationship between learner and the tool changes as the learner experiences the video in different ways.

Activity theory has provided both a lens to reconceptualise the development of oral presentation competence and the tools to explore what interventions can be used to develop the activity to support learners at the early stage of their legal studies. However, the activity, and the use of video in particular, could not be properly understood without taking account of the ways in which the video material is experienced by the learners. To address this concern, the first stage of the investigation sought to determine the qualitatively different ways in which the video material may be experienced by the learners. Introducing data from the subjective perspective of the learner potentially disturbs activity theory's external view of the collective activity. However, it is submitted that it is important to accept that each student, as the subject of the learning activity, may hold a different perspective on the activity and the tools used in that activity. The use of phenomenographic methods to identify the qualitatively different ways in which the video material can be experienced allows the activity system analysis to take account of these differences. The resulting activity theory analysis not only takes account of the different ways of experiencing the video material, it is also able to identify improvements that cater for these differences. It is submitted that, despite some epistemological incompatibility, the use of phenomenographic methods to identify the different ways of experiencing mediating tools in an activity might be valuable when using activity theory to explore other learning activities.

#### **6.4 Contribution and impact of this research**

This is a small-scale qualitative investigation into the early stages of oral presentation competence development among undergraduate law students. However, it is argued that the study makes an original contribution to theory, methodology and practice.

#### 6.4.1 Contribution to theory

There are two elements to the contribution to theory. The first is the use of activity theory to reconceptualise the oral presentation competence development as a collective subjective-objective tool mediated activity. Clearly oral presentations are ordinarily understood as a combination of performer and audience. However, activity theory allows the learning activity to be understood in a wider social, cultural and historical context. I am not aware of other research that has approached the oral presentation development activity from this perspective.

A further contribution to theory is in relation to the literature gap. Certainly, there are no studies exploring the use of video to support self-evaluation of oral presentation competence development among undergraduate law students. However, there is a broader gap that this study addresses. As discussed in the literature review, there are several strands of literature where the importance of self-evaluation and related learning theories are explored. These themes are common in the feedback literature, they are a feature in oral presentation competence development research, and they receive some attention in legal education research, particularly in relation to experiential learning. However, despite this commonality, the literature has not previously intersected in a significant way. This research attempts to apply the feedback learning theory to oral presentation competence development in a legal context and, in doing so, makes an original contribution to the wider feedback literature.

This research confirms some of the key planks of the feedback literature. In particular, it supports the notion that students need to develop evaluative judgement through “direct and authentic evaluative experience” (Sadler, 1989, p. 143). Once equipped with evaluative skill, the research confirms that the learner needs to “(a) possess a concept of the standard...being aimed for, (b) compare the actual...level of

performance with the standard, and (c) engage in appropriate action which leads to some closure of the gap” (Sadler, 1989, p. 121). The investigation of video recordings of performance and feedback provides a fresh perspective on the general feedback literature. In particular, the oral nature of the activity and feedback help to foreground the role of the social context in the development of evaluative expertise. This is most clearly illustrated by comparing the learning journeys of subjects in this study who engaged in peer learning and those that did not. Both groups would appear to be engaged in the three stages of the learning process set out by Sadler. However, those who developed their concept of the standard being aimed for through peer review appear better able to evaluate their own performance and close the performance gap. This suggests that the feedback supported learning process is accelerated where learners are able to build disciplinary notions of quality through working with peers rather than relying principally on tutor feedback on their own work. This has parallels with literature on the use of exemplars (Pitt, 2019) and peer review (Nicol et al., 2014). It is submitted that although focused on a narrow learning activity, the findings of this research have implications for the wider literature, particularly in terms of how social context contributes to student engagement with feedback, the development of evaluative judgement and the use of feedback to enhance student work and learning strategy.

The emotional challenge of engaging with feedback on written work is a common feature in the literature (Carless & Boud 2018; Eva et al., 2012; Chong, 2021). A video of a performance requires the student to not only see and hear themselves perform, it also confronts students with a perspective on their own work that they have not previously seen. Students not only face an emotional barrier to engaging with the video, they may also query the value of watching a performance and feedback episode of which they were a part. This research offers an insight into how to engage students with a challenging source of feedback. Certainly, engagement

can be enforced using the rules of the activity. However, the findings suggest that forced engagement is likely to result in the mechanistic use of tutor feedback to close the learning loop. A more constructive engagement with the video can be achieved by combining it with the development of evaluative skills using peer working.

Before a learner can effectively close the gap between their performance and that of the expected standard, they need to gain an understanding of that expected standard (Ajjawi et al., 2018; Esterhazy & Damşa, 2019). The video supported approach to presentation competence development was designed to help students to make evaluative judgements about what they observe in their own work and in the work of others (McConlogue 2015; Tai et al, 2017). However, until the students have developed an understanding of the relevant standard, they are likely to rely heavily on tutor feedback rather than on their own internal generative processes (Boud & Carless, 2018; Nicol, 2018; Sadler, 1989). It is noted that recent literature on evaluative judgement suggests that through “self-evaluations, students learn to generate internal feedback and gradually acquire expertise in making more sophisticated academic judgments” (Carless & Boud, 2018, p. 9). However, this research suggests that this position should be qualified to make clear that in order for students to be able to develop effective evaluative judgement they need to first develop a baseline understanding of quality in the discipline.

The findings would support the view that the opportunities for students to develop their understanding of quality need to be “contextual, social and cultural” (Ajjawi et al., 2018, p. 9). The peer activities in this unit offer the opportunities for generative feedback observed in the literature (e.g. Nicol et al., 2014) and “to be immersed in the experience of giving, receiving, and interpreting feedback” (Chong, 2021, p. 98). Students are able to use their interactions with peers (performing and watching performances) to internally build their notions of quality without being forced to

engage directly with the gap between their own performances and their developing understanding of the standard. This conclusion echoes other recent research into the value of exemplars (Pitt, 2019) and peer review (Nicol et al, 2014).

The findings also shed light on the nature of the video material as a learning tool. Engagement with the video material has different meaning to the learner at different stages in the learning process. Through the year, as each student builds a body of videoed performances, the mediating tool changes. What starts as simple episodes of performances and feedback builds to become a collection of performances and feedback over time. This change in the nature of the learning tool allows students to move from episodic improvement of their performances, based on tutor and peer comments, to the development of evaluative judgement based on their own analysis of a portfolio of videos. This research suggests that this change in the use of the feedback needs to be supported by developing evaluative experience through peer working.

#### 6.4.2 Contribution to methodology

This study has combined activity theory as a theoretical framework with elements of phenomenographic methodology. This combination has been used before, for example by Shreeve (2011) and Berglund (2004). However, for this research phenomenographic methods are being used as a research tool to enhance the results of the activity theory based analysis. This approach allows the exploration of the activity as a whole without losing sight of the different ways in which the activity might be experienced by the learners.

#### 6.4.3 Contribution to practice

The study has had an impact on the way in which oral presentation development has been delivered in the law school where the research took place. There are two aspects to this. The development of peer learning opportunities to support the development of evaluative judgement and the shift away from focusing on video in the early stages of the unit. This has been implemented both in the Level 4 The Art of Persuasion unit and in the Legal Advocacy units at Levels 5 and 6. This remains a developing process as the constraints of the Covid 19 pandemic since March 2020 have meant that classes have, in part, moved online. This has introduced new challenges both in terms of peer working and video production. However, this research helped to emphasise the role and importance of peer learning. Without these research findings, the peer activities might have been reduced rather than emphasised during the pandemic. For both normal classroom teaching and online delivery, this thesis offers a simple message for enhancing the oral presentation learning activity. While video is a valuable tool, students are unlikely to be ready to engage with videos of their own performances at an early stage of their studies. In the early stages the focus should be on tutor supported peer learning to enhance evaluative skills and develop notions of quality. This message has not only helped to shape classroom based oral presentation competence development classes, it has also provided the guiding principles for the move to online delivery.

As we emerge from the pandemic, I will look to develop more peer working opportunities for small groups of students in the early stages of the unit. Within these activities students will have an opportunity to focus on developing their understanding of quality in small, tutor supported, groups rather than as part of a full class. Although video recordings will be made, video review and reflection will not become the focus until the second teaching block. In the second teaching block presentations will be made to the wider group and students will be required to report on their experiences

of engaging with their videos. These interventions will be reviewed with a particular focus on whether they help students to experience the videos as described in Categories 4 and 5 of the phenomenographic hierarchy.

It might be argued that the findings of this research would be valuable to the vocational stages of legal education. However, I suspect that an approach that emphasises the social aspects of oral presentation competence development is unlikely to receive a very positive response from either vocation course providers or the professional bodies. The Hampel Method is essentially an approach that focuses on incremental changes through episodes of presentation and feedback. It is similar to the approach encapsulated in Category 3 of this research (where the video material is experienced as something provided to refresh the students' memory). This approach is likely to be less effective for students who are yet to develop their understanding of subject specific notions of quality. Indeed, approaches such as the Hampel Method risk a focus on form rather than developing understanding of quality in a legal practice context (Lubet, 1990; Lubet, 1987). However, this thesis and publications coming as a result of this research offer an opportunity to discuss the role that peer learning can play in the development of evaluative judgement and how video can be most effectively used as a tool in the oral presentation competence development activity.

## **6.5 Final reflections on rigour**

Rigour (Chapter 3.13), insider research (Chapter 3.5) and my own struggles with maintaining interpretative awareness (Chapter 3.10) are discussed elsewhere in this thesis. However, the results of the research have prompted me to reflect further on the limitations of the research and the issue of insider research. I am conscious that this is a small-scale study of a teaching intervention that is of my own design. Helping



students develop their oral presentation competence has been at the centre of my teaching since 2008. The use of video has been a significant part of my teaching strategy since 2012. I started this project with the belief that recording student performances and feedback offered a useful learning tool to the students. The conclusion of this research is that it is indeed a useful learning tool. Confirmation of my existing view causes me to reflect further on the trustworthiness of this research. I have sought to provide a full and open discussion of the approach I have taken, and I have supported my analysis with evidence from the research data such that the reader is able to draw their own conclusions as to trustworthiness. Questions around how far the findings can be transferred and confirmed in a different context is something that will be worth exploring through further research. Overall, I am satisfied that I have done all I can to use qualitative methods to research my own teaching intervention in a trustworthy way.

The key finding of this research is not simply that the video material is a useful learning tool but rather why it is useful and how it can be used more effectively. The role of social aspects of oral presentation development had not been a significant part of my overall teaching strategy. Peer review had always been part of the unit but its significance in the development process only started to emerge with an earlier research project (Barker & Sparrow, 2016). This led me to reconceptualise the learning activity as part of the theoretical framework for this research. However, the idea that the key driver for oral competence development and self-evaluation would be the social learning opportunities afforded by peer review sessions was not anticipated. Further, the recommendation that video should be held back to allow students to gain experience of evaluation and develop their understanding of quality in a legal context were not ideas that I had entertained until I conducted the activity theory analysis in stage 2 of the research. While I am not suggesting that unexpected

outcomes are any more credible than expected ones, I do find the unanticipated results of this research both satisfying and reassuring at a personal level.

## **6.6 Further research**

There are a number of strands for further research. The first would be to adopt the recommendations of this research by developing the peer review elements of the activity and holding back the video. A similar approach to research could be used to explore the success of the adjusted strategy. It would also be valuable to use similar methods to research students at the vocational stage of legal education.

The different ways in which students perceived their own public speaking competence was a tantalising source of interest. During the research process I was able to identify this as a disruptive line of thinking. I noted it and then put it out of my mind. However, this offers a valuable line of future research. I am particularly interested in the role of stereotype threat (anxiety associated with the prospect of confirming a negative stereotype (McGlone & Pfiester, 2015)), mindset theory, that is, whether students have a fixed or growth mindset (Nordin & Broeckelman-Post, 2019), and how these factors may impact on students' ability to evaluate their own performances. The most obvious manifestation of this might be students feeling that they are not likely to be good at public speaking because of a characteristic or difference. However, there is another side to this, some students may be overconfident in their own abilities which may also lead to inaccurate self-evaluation. How perceptions of self influence self-evaluation of oral presentation performance and whether interventions such as peer review and use of video can support the development of effective self-evaluation offers an interesting and valuable area for further research.



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# Appendix Ethics Documents

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## Stage 1 self assessment approval UREC reference RS2015/239

1 message

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**Ethics (RSO) Enquiries** <ethics@lancaster.ac.uk>  
To: "Barker, Charles" <c.barker2@lancaster.ac.uk>

19 July 2016 at 11:16

Dear Charles

Thank you for submitting your completed stage 1 self assessment form for **Technology and oral presentation skills teaching: Student experiences of using video as a tool to develop self-regulatory learning of oral presentation skills**. The Part B information has been reviewed by members of the University Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm that approval has been granted for this project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress) to the Research Ethics Officer;
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to the Research Ethics Officer for approval.

Please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Debbie Knight ([ethics@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@lancaster.ac.uk) 01542 592605) if you have any queries or require further information.

Kind regards,

Debbie Knight | Research Ethics Officer | Secretary, FASS-LUMS Research Ethics Committee | [fass.lumsethics@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:fass.lumsethics@lancaster.ac.uk) | Phone (01524) 592605 | Research Support, B3 Bowland North, Lancaster University, LA1 4YT



[www.lancaster.ac.uk/50](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/50)

## Participant Information Sheet

**Title of Project:** Technology and oral presentation skills teaching: Student experiences of using video as a tool to develop self-regulatory learning of oral presentation skills.

**Research Student:** Charles Barker

PhD research student at -

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**Supervisor:** Dr Julie-Ann Sime

Educational Research Department, County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD, UK

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_,

**Dear** \_\_\_\_\_,

I would like to invite you to take part in my PhD thesis research with the Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.

Before you decide if you wish to take part you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

### The purpose of the study

This research is for my thesis on the PhD in Technology Enhanced Learning programme with the Centre for Technology Enhanced Learning in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University.

My research aims to investigate variations in the perceptions among law students of the value of using videos of their oral presentations and videos of feedback on their performances in the development of oral presentations skills. The research will help to improve our understanding of how technology can be used to support the development of oral presentation skills.

Department of Educational Research, County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD, UK  
Tel: +44 (0) 1524 592685

## **What participation involves and how to withdraw if you no longer wish to participate**

### **Why have I been invited?**

You have been invited because you are a first year (Level 4) undergraduate law student currently taking The Art of Persuasion (U21666) unit as part of your LLB Law programme. You are therefore currently participating in a unit which uses video recording to support oral presentation skills teaching.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No, your participation is entirely voluntary.

The decision whether or not to participate in this research will not affect your grades in The Art of Persuasion or in any other unit in any way. Furthermore, your decision whether or not to participate will not offer you any advantage or put you at any disadvantage in the University. If you decide to participate, nothing you say in interview will affect your grades or your position within the University.

If you decide to take part but change your mind later you are free to withdraw at any time during the study and there is absolutely no obligation on you to continue nor penalty for withdrawing.

Please note that the timing of your withdrawal will determine what use may be made of your data. If your withdrawal is up to 2 weeks after you participated all data relating to and collected from your participation will be deleted/destroyed and not used in the study. You can still withdraw after 2 weeks of your participation, however the data relating to and collected from your participation may still be used as it may already have been anonymised, analysed and/or pooled with data from other participants.

## **What would taking part involve for me?**

I would like to interview you about how you perceive the role of video, both of your own presentation performances and of tutor feedback, in the development of your presentation skills. I would like to interview you three times during the course of The Art of Persuasion unit. Each interview should take between 15 and 30 minutes and will take place in a University room away from the School of Law. The interview will take place at a time that suits your convenience.

### **What will I have to do?**

Please get in touch with me by email to let me know that you are happy to take part and we will arrange a convenient time and place to meet.

## **Protecting your data and identity**

### **What will happen to the data?**

'Data' here means the researcher's notes, survey results, workshop outputs, audio recordings and any email exchanges we may have had. The data may be securely stored for ten years after the successful completion of the PhD *Viva* as per Lancaster University requirements, and after that any personal data will be destroyed. Audio recordings will be transferred and stored on my personal laptop and deleted from portable media. The laptop used will be encrypted and password protected. I will ensure that the laptop, other portable devices and paper documents containing data (e.g. your consent form) will be kept in a locked cabinet when not in use.

You can request to listen to the audio at the end of the interview and any parts you are unhappy with will be disregarded from the data. Data may be used in the reporting of the research (in the thesis and then potentially in any papers or conference presentations). Please note that if your data is used, it will not identify you in any way.

You have the full protection via the UK Data Protection Act. Additionally, as explained above, you can withdraw at any time during the study but the timing of your withdrawal will determine what use may be made of your data. If your withdrawal is up to 2 weeks after you participated all data relating to and collected from your participation will be deleted and not used in the study. You can still withdraw after 2 weeks of your participation, however the data relating to and collected from your participation may still be used in the study.

The completion of his study is estimated to be by January 2018 although data collection will be complete by June 2017.

Data will only be accessed by members of the research team and support services, this includes my supervisor and secretarial services for transcription. My supervisor will only see anonymised data to review my analysis and to verify that the data has been gathered. Audio recordings will be transcribed by a professional transcribing service who will be bound by a confidentiality agreement. Recordings will be given to the transcribing service on an encrypted mobile device which will be returned to me after the transcription and then destroyed.

#### **How will my identity be protected?**

A pseudonym will be given to protect your identity in the research report and any identifying information about you will be removed from the report. All pseudonyms will be securely stored and kept by myself.

#### **Who to contact for further information or with any concerns**

If you would like further information on this project, the programme within which the research is being conducted or have any concerns about the project, participation or my conduct as a researcher please contact:

Professor Paul Ashwin – Head of Department

Room: County South, D32, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YD, UK.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

This study has been reviewed and approved by members of Lancaster University Research Ethics Committee

**Charles Barker**



**Consent Form**

**Title of Project:** Technology and oral presentation skills teaching: Student experiences of using video as a tool to develop self-regulatory learning of oral presentation skills.

**Name of Researcher:** Charles Barker

|    |   | Please Tick |
|----|---|-------------|
| 1. | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated _____ for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.  |             |
| 2. | I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary. If for any reason I wish to withdraw during the period of this study, I am free to do so without providing any reason. I understand that if I withdraw after 2 weeks of my participation the data relating to and collected from my participation may still be used in the study. I understand that the interviews I give will be part of the data collected for this study and my anonymity will be assured. I give consent for all my contributions in the interviews to be included and/or quoted in this study. |             |
| 3. | I consent to the interviews being audio recorded.   |             |
| 4. | I understand that the information I provide will be used for a PhD research project and the combined results of the project may be published. I understand that I have the right to review and comment on the information I have provided.  |             |
| 5. | I agree to take part in the above study.  |             |

**Name of Participant:**

Signature

Date

**Name of Researcher:**

Signature

Date

Head of Department  
**Prof Carolyn Jackson**, BSc, PhD  
 Professors  
**Mary Hamilton**, BA, MA, PhD  
**Colin Rogers**, BA, PhD  
**Murray Saunders**, BA, MA, PhD  
**Malcolm Tight**, BSc, PhD  
**Paul Trowler**, BA, MA, Cert Ed, PhD

<http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/edres>

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