

Confucian Heritage Culture Students and transformative agency in EAP education: Co-designing a reading curriculum in a Change Laboratory research-intervention

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma.

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Abstract

Research on English-medium instruction (EMI) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) often portrays Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learners' silence or caution as evidence of limited agency, focusing mainly on how students adapt to teacher-designed pedagogy. Far less attention has been paid to how CHC learners act when they are invited to reshape that pedagogy themselves. This study addresses that shortcoming by examining how two CHC-majority cohorts developed transformative agency when positioned not as recipients of a curriculum, but as its co-designers.

Two Change Laboratory research-interventions—one face-to-face and one online—were embedded within a 15-week EAP reading course at a Japanese university, involving consecutive cohorts of Japanese CHC students in 2019 and 2020. Within this setting, students analysed tensions in the inherited curriculum, experimented with alternative tools and routines, and trialled their ideas through classroom enactment and focus groups. Video data, student-created artefacts, journal entries, and researcher notes were analysed using Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, particularly systemic contradictions and discursive manifestations of transformative agency, to trace how critique, imagination, commitment, and action emerged across both cohorts.

The findings show that, as students identified and addressed contradictions in the course activity, they demonstrated far more transformative agency than is commonly assumed for CHC learners. In the first intervention, students introduced new seminar structures, annotation routines, peer-feedback tools, and authentic-reading practices, and—in the focus group—proposed shifting to an unseen-text examination to assess genuine comprehension rather than memorisation. Participants in the second intervention then implemented and expanded these ideas: they developed Student-Led Workshops to replace the original Transmedia Presentations, co-created clearer rubrics, trialled new workshop and seminar routines, and participated in the first unseen-text exam. Across the work of the two cohorts, transformative agency shifted from questioning and modelling toward taking action and consolidation, with students independently refining tools, negotiating fairness in assessment, and stabilising shared preparation norms. This developmental movement aligns with the broader pedagogical trajectory traced in the

thesis—from transmission-focused study to dialogic co-construction and finally to multimodal autonomy.

The study contributes to understandings of CHC learner agency by conceptualising it as developing collectively and cumulatively within a purposeful pedagogical structure. It shows how agency can snowball across cohorts and how helping students expose and address contradictions in their tools and norms can stimulate meaningful redesign. It also reveals a cultural dynamic in the co-design process: although the tools students created enabled recognisably Socratic behaviours—questioning, critiquing, debating—the refinements they made reflected Confucian preferences for clarity, explicit criteria, and fair procedures, shaped partly by GPA pressures. Finally, the study demonstrates that students themselves drove a shift toward authentic, content-rich materials aligned with Soft-CLIL principles—an approach that, unlike typical top-down CLIL implementations, emerged from student demand rather than institutional mandate. Together, these contributions illustrate how structured, collaborative design processes can support sustainable, student-led curriculum innovation in EAP contexts.

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Brown, M. S., Evers, C., Fleming, D. H., Gilardi, F., & Reid, J. (2018). Transmedial projects, scholarly habitus, and critical know-how in a British university in China. *International Journal of Transmedia Literacy (IJTL)*, 3, 45–68.
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List of Abbreviations

CBI – Content-Based Instruction

An approach to language teaching in which subject matter content is used as the primary vehicle for language learning.

CHC – Confucian Heritage Culture(s)

A term referring to educational and cultural traditions influenced by Confucian values such as respect for authority, effort, and academic achievement.

CHAT – Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

A theoretical framework for analysing human learning and development as socially mediated, object-oriented activity situated in historical and cultural contexts.

CL – Change Laboratory

A formative intervention method grounded in CHAT that supports collective analysis and transformation of activity systems.

CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning

An educational approach in which subject content is taught through an additional language, integrating language and content learning objectives.

DWR – Developmental Work Research

A programme of interventionist research focused on supporting collective learning and transformation through analysis of activity systems.

EAP – English for Academic Purposes

An area of English language teaching concerned with developing the language and literacy skills required for academic study.

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

The teaching and learning of English in contexts where it is not the primary language of the surrounding society.

ELT – English Language Teaching

A broad term encompassing the teaching of English in a variety of educational and sociocultural contexts.

EMI – English-Medium Instruction

The use of English to teach academic subjects in contexts where English is not the majority first language.

ESAP – English for Specific Academic Purposes

A branch of EAP that focuses on the language practices of particular academic disciplines or fields.

FI – Formative Intervention

An interventionist research approach that aims to enable participants to analyse contradictions and generate new forms of activity rather than implement predefined solutions.

GPA – Grade Point Average

A numerical measure used to summarise a student's overall academic performance.

HEI – Higher Education Institution

An organisation that provides tertiary-level education, such as a university or college.

HESA – Higher Education Statistics Agency

The UK body responsible for collecting and publishing data about higher education.

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

Digital technologies used for communication, information processing, and learning.

L1 – First Language (Native Language)

The language acquired first by an individual, typically used as their primary means of communication.

L2 – Second Language (Target Language)

A language learned in addition to one's first language, often for academic or professional purposes.

MEXT – Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Japan)

The Japanese government ministry responsible for national education policy and administration.

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

An international organisation that conducts research and provides policy guidance on economic and social issues, including education.

SLS – Student-Led Seminar

A pedagogical format in which students take responsibility for preparing and facilitating seminar discussions.

SLW – Student-Led Workshop

A collaborative learning activity in which students design and lead interactive workshops for their peers.

TEFL – Teaching English as a Foreign Language

The professional field concerned with teaching English in non-English-speaking contexts.

TESOL – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

An umbrella term referring to the teaching of English to learners whose first language is not English.

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

A United Nations agency that promotes international cooperation in education, science, and culture.

ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

A concept introduced by Vygotsky describing the distance between what a learner can do independently and what they can do with guidance.

Chapter 1: **Introduction**

1.1 Introduction

The central problem addressed in this thesis is how students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts can move from being positioned as passive recipients of pedagogy to becoming active contributors who shape curriculum and learning practices. Much scholarship characterises CHC learners as displaying deference to authority, group harmony, and reluctance to critique (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Salili, 1996; Chan, 1999), resulting in the assumption—common in EMI and EAP contexts—that “making students active” means encouraging them to speak more or perform Western-style argumentation. Such framings obscure the structural and cultural features of activity systems that shape participation and risk treating agency as a fixed individual attribute to be measured rather than a capacity that can be cultivated. They also overlook evidence that CHC learners can and do exercise agency in relational, contextually meaningful ways (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Liang & Schartner, 2015; Williams, 2016; Zhu, 2021). In this thesis, I treat “Confucian Heritage Cultures” as a contested, heuristic label rather than a single, homogeneous cultural sphere, and I return in Section 2.3 to examine how the term has been variously defined and critiqued in the literature.

This project adopts a different orientation by approaching learner agency not as a static condition to be observed, but as a developmental phenomenon that can be intentionally nurtured and examined through pedagogical intervention. It investigates how students express transformative agency when they are invited not simply to participate in teacher-designed tasks but to analyse and redesign the tools, rules, and routines that structure their English for Academic Purposes (EAP) academic reading course. Grounded in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Engeström’s (2001) theory of expansive learning, the study engages students in a structured process of collective inquiry into their own learning conditions, exploring how contradictions within the inherited curriculum—misalignments between expectations, tools, and

participation norms—can become generative resources for development. When students collectively surface contradictions, critique existing routines, and model alternatives, they enact forms of agency that challenge deficit narratives and demonstrate how structure, when collaboratively negotiated, can enable rather than constrain participation (Haapasaari et al., 2016; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). The thesis therefore argues that CHC learner agency in EMI settings is best understood as collectively mediated, structurally enabled, and developmentally cumulative, rather than as an individual disposition. In this study, transformative agency does not take the form of rejecting structure or authority, but of collectively refining and re-mediating the tools, rules, and routines through which academic participation is organised.

1.2 Personal Motivation

My professional experience teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in China and Japan for more than twenty-five years has left me increasingly dissatisfied—both with how English-medium reading classrooms typically function in practice and with how these situations are often discussed in the literature. In classrooms, recurring tensions were difficult to ignore: limited student discussion, cautious participation, and assessment practices that rewarded recall rather than transfer, critique, or interpretive engagement. In academic discussions, these same phenomena were frequently explained through broad cultural characterisations that risked portraying students as inherently passive or constrained.

Many of these classroom patterns align with well-documented features associated with Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learning environments, including a strong emphasis on accuracy, respect for teacher authority, and risk-avoidant participation norms (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Tani, 2005). In Japanese EMI settings, such tendencies are often intensified by institutional pressures for interactive, discussion-based learning that sit uneasily alongside students' prior educational experiences (Aizawa & Rose, 2019, 2020; King, 2013; Wicking, 2019; Yashima, 2002)

What troubled me was not the existence of these tensions, but the tendency for them to be treated either as cultural deficits to be overcome or as static constraints to be managed, rather than as sites of potential pedagogical transformation.

Over more than a decade, I explored these tensions through a sequence of practice-based projects that gradually reshaped my understanding of learner agency. My early collaborative work with Professor Gilardi investigated how participatory digital cultures in China could be mobilised for learning (Gilardi & Reid, 2011). This led us to develop the Transmedia Teaching Framework, embedding multimodal, project-based collaboration into EAP and content courses. This led us to develop the Transmedia Teaching Framework, embedding multimodal, project-based collaboration into EAP and content courses (Reid & Gilardi, 2016; cf. Lacković, 2018, on multimodal inquiry and student-generated visuals in higher education).

While this approach encouraged creativity and peer interaction, later studies in a British university in China (Brown et al., 2017) revealed its limits: because the overall structure remained teacher-designed, it could unintentionally reproduce familiar hierarchies of authority, echoing observations that CHC learners often adapt to expectations but rarely influence their design (cf. Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015).

I extended this line of work into a *soft-CLIL* paradigm in an effort to deepen cognitive engagement while retaining a clear focus on academic language development (Reid, 2021). Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) generally refers to pedagogical approaches in which subject-matter content is taught through a second language, with language learning embedded within disciplinary study (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011). In contrast, the *soft-CLIL* approach adopted in this project did not involve teaching a full disciplinary syllabus in English, but instead used thematically rich, discipline-adjacent texts as vehicles for developing academic reading, discussion, and writing skills. Students engaged with authentic materials drawn from fields such as the social sciences and humanities, and completed tasks requiring analysis, synthesis, and interpretation, while linguistic scaffolding and language-learning objectives remained explicit (Coyle et al., 2010; Airey, 2020). Despite these design features, the overall structure of the course—including text selection, task sequencing, and assessment criteria—remained teacher-determined, limiting students' opportunities to interrogate or redesign the conditions of their participation.

Recognising this limitation was a turning point. Enhancing agency required more than designing engaging tasks—it required redistributing control over inquiry and change. If I wanted to investigate agency authentically, I needed to provide students with

opportunities to analyse their EAP activity system, surface tensions they experienced, and participate in co-designing solutions. This orientation resonates with broader calls in CHC research to move beyond deficit framings and to create environments in which students can enact culturally congruent, collaborative forms of agency (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Williams, 2016; Zhu, 2021).

As I grappled with these limits, I first encountered Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) through a recorded presentation on activity theory and expansive learning given by my supervisor, Brett Bligh. The lecture offered a way of understanding my EAP classrooms not simply as places where individual students succeeded or failed, but as historically developed activity systems in which tools, rules, roles, and institutional expectations jointly shaped what students could do and become. Its emphasis on contradictions as drivers of change, and on learning as a collective, expansive process, resonated with my growing conviction that the tensions I observed could not be resolved by refining individual tasks or cultivating isolated skills. Choosing CHAT as my overarching theoretical lens therefore marked a turning point in my academic journey: it shifted my focus from “making students more active” within inherited structures to examining how those structures themselves might be analysed, questioned, and redesigned with students.

The Change Laboratory offered a method for this shift. As a bottom-up, formative intervention grounded in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 2007; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013), it enables participants to co-analyse contradictions, co-design tools, and implement changes collectively, while crucially redistributing analytic and decision-making authority from the instructor to the student group. Rather than positioning learners as respondents to pre-defined pedagogical problems, the Change Laboratory frames them as co-researchers of their own activity system, responsible for identifying tensions, proposing alternatives, and evaluating the consequences of change. My motivation for undertaking this study is therefore both personal and professional: to extend my long-term programme of collaboratively oriented curriculum innovation by examining how CHC-majority students in my EMI EAP classrooms develop transformative agency when invited to redesign the very practices, tools, and routines that structure their learning.

1.3 Context of the Study

Eastbridge University (pseudonym) is a Japanese liberal arts institution where all first-year students complete an intensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme before progressing into discipline-specific English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses. The EAP academic reading course—central to this study—functions as a gateway to university-wide expectations for source-based reasoning, analytical writing, and seminar discussion. As such, it represents a strategically important site for pedagogical intervention, with the potential to influence both subsequent EMI practices and broader institutional understandings of student participation. However, students enter this programme from highly structured, exam-oriented secondary schooling, where English is typically learned through translation, memorisation, and accuracy-focused testing (MEXT, 2018; OECD, 2019). These prior experiences reflect well-documented CHC learning norms, including respect for teacher authority, close adherence to models, and caution in speaking without certainty (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Salili, 1996; Tani, 2005).

When students transition into EMI/EAP university classrooms, these orientations do not simply coexist with new expectations for interaction and critique; they are often reinforced by curricular structures that prioritise control, correctness, and individual performance. Although institutional discourse emphasises dialogic learning and active participation, the inherited academic reading curriculum largely reproduced conservative pedagogical norms. It relied on teacher-selected materials, tightly structured comprehension tasks, and assessment rubrics oriented towards accuracy and coverage rather than interpretation, risk-taking, or collaborative inquiry. As a result, the course did not so much reflect tensions between authoritative and dialogic practices, or between accuracy and exploratory engagement, as it systematically favoured the authoritative, accuracy-focused, and individual pole of each of these tensions (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; King, 2013; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Chen, 2018; Murray & Xu, 2019).

I introduced the Change Laboratory (CL) in response to this misalignment, with the explicit aim of creating a structured space in which these entrenched norms could be examined and reworked rather than implicitly reproduced. As an intervention method

grounded in activity theory, the CL invites participants to analyse contradictions within their work activity and to collaboratively design new tools and routines. In this study, the CL was intentionally used to redistribute analytic and design responsibility to students, positioning them not merely as participants in the academic reading course but as co-analysts of the activity system—examining how tools, rules, roles, and objects interacted—and as co-designers of pedagogical change. This intervention was guided by the aspiration that, by collectively interrogating inherited practices and experimenting with alternatives, CHC-majority learners could develop new, culturally congruent pathways for participation that moved beyond compliance with established norms toward transformative agency.

1.4 The Practice Setting: The EAP Academic Reading Course

This study was conducted at *Eastbridge University* (pseudonym), a Japanese liberal arts institution in which English-Medium Instruction (EMI) is the default language of study from the first year onward. All incoming undergraduates are required to complete an intensive English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme prior to entering discipline-specific EMI courses. Within this programme, the academic reading course examined in this study occupies a central and gatekeeping role: it is designed to induct students into university expectations for source-based reasoning, analytical reading, and seminar participation, and its assessment outcomes contribute directly to progression decisions and students' academic standing.

1.4.1 Institutional and programme context

The EAP programme runs intensively over a single semester and is positioned as a bridge between secondary schooling and full participation in EMI degree courses. Students are expected not only to improve linguistic accuracy but also to demonstrate emerging competence in academic practices such as synthesising sources, evaluating arguments, and contributing to discussion. Institutional discourse strongly emphasises “active learning” and student participation, reflecting broader internationalisation trends in Japanese higher education. However, these expectations often sit uneasily alongside students' prior educational experiences, creating tensions between institutional ideals and lived classroom practices.

The academic reading course targeted in this study is compulsory for first-year students and is taken concurrently with EAP writing and listening/speaking courses. While

nominally skills-based, it functions as a site where epistemic norms—what counts as understanding, critique, and legitimate participation—are implicitly communicated. As such, it provides a particularly revealing context for examining how learner agency is enabled or constrained within EMI/EAP environments.

1.4.2 Inherited course design prior to the intervention

Before the Change Laboratory interventions, the academic reading course followed a conventional, teacher-designed structure. Weekly lessons centred on textbook chapters or curated academic texts selected by the instructor. Reading tasks focused primarily on comprehension, identification of main ideas, and recognition of argument structure. While occasional discussion activities were included, these were typically tightly scaffolded and oriented towards confirming understanding rather than generating critique or alternative interpretations.

Assessment practices reinforced this orientation. Evaluation relied on quizzes, short written responses, and rubric-based assignments that prioritised accuracy, coverage of key points, and adherence to expected formats. Participation was formally encouraged but implicitly framed as responding appropriately to teacher-initiated questions rather than shaping the direction or criteria of academic work. Decisions about text selection, task design, discussion norms, and assessment criteria were made exclusively by the instructor, and students' role was to interpret and meet these expectations as successfully as possible.

Within this inherited design, “participation” was largely equated with visible compliance: completing tasks on time, producing correct answers, and contributing cautiously when invited. Opportunities for students to question task purposes, negotiate criteria, or redesign learning routines were minimal. While such a structure provided clarity and security, it also limited students' capacity to influence the forms of academic activity they were expected to engage in.

1.4.3 Student cohort characteristics

The student cohorts in this study were largely educated in Japanese secondary school systems shaped by high-stakes entrance examinations, tightly sequenced curricula, and a strong emphasis on accuracy and teacher authority. Prior to university, English

instruction typically centred on grammar translation, vocabulary memorisation, and test preparation, offering limited exposure to extended discussion or interpretive reading.

These students were not unmotivated or disengaged. Rather, they were accustomed to learning environments in which expectations were explicit, evaluation criteria stable, and risk-taking carried clear penalties. In EMI/EAP classrooms, this orientation often appeared as careful preparation, reluctance to speak without certainty, and heightened sensitivity to perceived assessment norms. While such patterns are well documented in research on Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learning contexts, in practice they interacted dynamically with the demands of English-medium academic work.

Notably, many students articulated a preference for clearer guidance, fairer assessment, and more predictable participation norms, rather than for open-ended freedom. This made the course a productive context for examining how agency might emerge not through the removal of structure, but through its collaborative redesign.

1.4.4 Rationale for the research setting

This academic reading course offered a particularly apt context for investigating the research problem for several reasons. First, it enrolled CHC-majority cohorts working under strong institutional pressure to demonstrate “active” participation in English, rendering tensions around agency especially salient. Second, in line with Ministry of Education policy, the EAP curriculum at Eastbridge University is formally divided into three components (Speaking and Listening, Reading, and Writing), yet in practice each strand integrates multiple skills. Within this structure, the Academic Reading course includes regular seminar discussions, group tasks, student presentations, and short written assignments alongside intensive work with academic texts. As a result, reading operates as a mediating practice that links language proficiency, cognitive engagement, and classroom interaction, allowing agency to be examined beyond surface indicators of oral participation.

Third, the course maintained stable core objectives across years, enabling student-generated tools and practices to be traced longitudinally across cohorts. Finally, the researcher’s dual role as course instructor functioned as both opportunity and

constraint. While institutional authority could not be set aside, the Change Laboratory methodology offered a structured means of redistributing analytic and design responsibility to students without relinquishing curricular accountability. These features position the course as a critical case for examining how CHC learners enact transformative agency when invited to analyse and redesign the activity systems shaping their learning. Rather than treating the classroom as a neutral backdrop, the study approaches it as a historically constituted practice whose tensions, once surfaced and collectively addressed, become resources for development

1.5 Research Context

Chapter 2 outlines two interconnected strands of literature that frame this study. The first concerns CHC learner agency, often described through behaviours such as deference, teacher-dependence, and risk avoidance (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Chan, 1999; Tani, 2005; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). More recent research, however, highlights relational and culturally congruent forms of agency, arguing that CHC learners can and do act agentively when participation is structured, purposeful, and socially meaningful (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Chan, 2019; Tanaka, 2018; Zhu, 2021).

While this body of work usefully complicates deficit accounts of CHC learners, it tends to conceptualise agency primarily as a response to pedagogical conditions, rather than examining how learners might actively participate in analysing and reshaping those conditions themselves.

The second strand examines pedagogical processes that support agency, including scaffolding, transparency, clear criteria, and opportunities for collaborative problem-solving (Airey, 2020; Macaro, 2018; Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). These studies collectively suggest that CHC learners are not passive but are often constrained by ambiguous expectations or misaligned participation norms in EMI/EAP settings. However, this literature typically positions pedagogy as something designed and adjusted by teachers or institutions, offering limited insight into how students themselves might act as agents in the design, negotiation, or transformation of curricular tools and practices.

While much of this scholarship focuses on how CHC learners adapt to existing curricula, fewer studies examine how they respond when invited to take part in *redesigning* the curriculum. This study addresses that oversight by examining how students enact transformative agency when they participate in a structured, expansive-learning intervention that offers them opportunities to question, model, refine, and implement new practices.

Two Change Laboratory cycles—**Intervention A (2019)** and **Intervention B (2020)**—were embedded in the same 15-week EAP reading course. Comparing the two allowed for analysis not only of how agency emerged within groups, but how student-generated tools and practices accumulated across cohorts.

1.6 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following three research questions:

- **RQ1. What contradictions in the academic reading curriculum are surfaced in the Change Laboratory?**
- **RQ2. How do CHC students express transformative agency when co-developing tools and practices?**
- **RQ3. How can student-led innovations influence the practices and tools of EMI/EAP education over time?**

These research questions were shaped by the concerns raised in Section 1.5 regarding how learner agency and pedagogy are typically conceptualised in EMI/EAP research. Much of the existing literature focuses either on learner behaviour or on pedagogical conditions designed by teachers and institutions. RQ1 responds to this tendency by directing attention away from individual students and towards the academic reading curriculum itself, treating it as a historically developed activity system in which structural tensions can be identified and examined empirically. By focusing on contradictions, the question foregrounds the ways in which curricular arrangements shape, and sometimes constrain, possibilities for participation.

RQ2 reflects the study's primary interest in agency as something that develops through collective action rather than individual disposition. Instead of asking whether students become more active within pre-existing structures, this question examines how CHC

learners express transformative agency when co-developing tools and practices. In doing so, it addresses a limitation in much of the CHC agency literature, which tends to conceptualise agency as a response to pedagogical design rather than as a capacity exercised in analysing and reshaping the conditions of learning themselves.

RQ3 looks beyond immediate classroom activity to consider what happens to student-led innovations once they are introduced into the course. Rather than framing curriculum change as a teacher-led process, this question explores how innovations generated through the Change Laboratory can shape the practices and tools through which EMI/EAP education is organised across time and cohorts. The use of *can* reflects the exploratory and interventionist nature of the study, recognising that such innovations do not produce uniform outcomes but open up developmental possibilities that may be taken up, adapted, or stabilised in different ways.

These questions also reflect the priorities outlined in Section 1.2, where dissatisfaction with both deficit framings of CHC learners and the limits of top-down pedagogical innovation motivated a shift towards redistributing analytic and design responsibility to students. By focusing on contradictions, collective agency, and the longer-term consequences of student-led redesign, the research questions provide a coherent framework for examining how CHC-majority students participate in transforming the practices that organise their academic learning.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study makes four contributions to research on English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), particularly in relation to learner agency, curriculum change, and pedagogy in Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) contexts.

1.7.1 Conceptual Contribution

First, the study contributes to ongoing debates about CHC learner agency in EMI/EAP by offering a more grounded account of how agency is enacted in practice. Rather than treating agency as an individual trait that becomes visible through overt participation, the findings show how agency emerges through collective engagement with curricular tools, rules, and routines. In doing so, the study challenges deficit interpretations of

silence or caution (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; King, 2013; Zhu, 2021) and redirects attention towards the structural and interactional conditions under which CHC students are able to act agentively.

1.7.2 Theoretical Contribution

The study also contributes to theoretical discussions in EMI/EAP by showing how ideas drawn from expansive learning can help make sense of curriculum change and learner agency in English-medium academic settings. Using contradictions as an analytic focus allows the study to trace how participation is shaped by existing curricular arrangements, and how student involvement in questioning, modelling, and implementing new practices supports the development of agency. In this way, activity-theoretical concepts are brought into dialogue with familiar concerns in EMI/EAP research, such as participation norms, assessment practices, and the organisation of academic work.

1.7.3 Methodological Contribution

From a methodological perspective, the study demonstrates how the Change Laboratory can be adapted for use in time-limited EMI/EAP courses, including semester-long academic reading programmes. By embedding the intervention within regular teaching, the research shows how it is possible to support curriculum redesign while also generating detailed empirical data. This is particularly relevant in EMI/EAP contexts, where tight schedules and institutional constraints often limit the scope for sustained pedagogical experimentation.

1.7.4 Pedagogical Contribution

Finally, the study offers practical insights for EMI/EAP pedagogy. The findings suggest that clearly structured but collaboratively negotiated tools—such as rubrics, feedback checklists, and seminar formats—can support rather than inhibit learner agency. Rather than reducing structure in the name of participation, the study shows how student involvement in shaping these tools can lead to more meaningful engagement with academic reading and discussion. These insights provide concrete guidance for teachers

working with CHC-majority cohorts who are seeking to balance clarity, fairness, and opportunities for student-led change.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The remainder of this thesis is organised into six chapters, each of which builds on the arguments and research problem outlined in this introduction. The structure is designed to move from the theoretical and contextual foundations of the study, through the methodological design and empirical findings, to the contributions and implications for research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review situates the study within scholarship on Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) learners, English-Medium Instruction (EMI), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

Section 2.3 *Learner Agency among Confucian Heritage Culture Students* examines how CHC students' agency has been conceptualised in higher education, often through deficit perspectives, and highlights studies that have begun to complicate this view.

Section 2.4 *Educational Processes that Enhance Learner Agency in CHC Students* reviews pedagogical and institutional practices—such as culturally responsive teaching, collaborative learning, and structured support—that aim to foster agency. Across these strands, existing research pays limited attention to how students themselves take part in shaping or redesigning the curricula they engage with. This observation provides the conceptual point of departure for the present study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework outlines the conceptual basis of the study. It introduces Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as the overarching framework, explains Engeström's (2001) theory of expansive learning, and details Haapasaari et al.'s (2016) typology of transformative agency expressions. Together these concepts provide a lens for understanding how contradictions can act as resources for learning, how agency is expressed through collaborative redesign, how curriculum and participation practices are reshaped in the process and how this guides designing this intervention.

Chapter 4: Research Design describes the methodological approach. It explains the rationale for using the Change Laboratory (CL) as a formative intervention, details how the methodology was adapted to an EMI/EAP context, and sets out the design of the two interventions (Intervention A, conducted in person, and Intervention B, conducted online). The purpose of examining two successive Change Laboratory cycles is not to compare face-to-face and online formats, but to trace how student-led changes to tools and practices accumulated and developed across cohorts over time. The chapter also discusses data collection methods (transcripts, journals, artefacts, researcher notes) and the analytical procedures used to trace contradictions, expressions of agency, and curriculum changes.

Chapter 5: Findings presents the empirical results of the study. It shows how students surfaced contradictions in the academic reading curriculum, expressed different forms of transformative agency, and co-developed new tools and practices. The chapter highlights specific examples of innovations (e.g., peer review checklists, redesigned seminar formats, authentic reading selections) and analyses how these influenced not only the curriculum but also classroom patterns of participation. Findings from both Intervention A and Intervention B are integrated to show developmental trajectories across contexts.

Chapter 6: Discussion interprets the findings in relation to the research questions and theoretical frameworks. It identifies six key contributions to knowledge: (1) reframing CHC learner agency as a snowballing, collective process rather than an individual trait; (2) demonstrating how transformative agency can accumulate across successive cohorts in a semester-long EAP programme; (3) showing how curriculum tools such as seminar sheets, workshops, and rubrics mediate and trigger agency; (4) evidencing how contradictions in the activity system act as productive catalysts for expansive learning; (5) illustrating how assessment culture can be reshaped through student-led negotiation of criteria and grading practices; and (6) arguing that clear rules, roles, and expectations can structure and enable, rather than constrain, CHC students' agency. The chapter also reflects critically on the strengths and limitations of the study, and situates its findings within broader debates in EMI, EAP, and higher education.

Chapter 7: Conclusion summarises the main findings and contributions of the research, drawing together the empirical, theoretical, and methodological significance

outlined in earlier chapters. It reflects on the implications of the study for policy and practice, especially in EMI universities, and suggests avenues for future research on contradictions, agency, and curriculum design in higher education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review situates the study within scholarship on learner agency, Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC), and English-Medium Instruction (EMI). It traces key developments across these fields and clarifies the intellectual contribution the study advances.

Section 2.2, *Conducting the Literature Review*, describes the systematic process used to identify, select, and code sources. It also explains how two central thematic strands—constraints on agency and educational processes that enhance agency—were inductively refined through iterative reading and critical analysis.

The review is organised in two main parts. Section 2.3, *Learner Agency among Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) Students*, examines how cultural values such as obedience to authority, group conformity, and perfectionism are historically and institutionally produced rather than treated as essentialised traits. Section 2.4, *Educational Processes that Enhance Learner Agency*, evaluates pedagogical and institutional approaches designed to support autonomy, criticality, and self-direction among CHC learners.

Together, these sections establish the rationale for an intervention that reframes agency not as an individual attribute to be cultivated by teachers, but as a socially mediated, developmental process co-constructed by learners themselves. This orientation informs the adoption of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), expansive learning, and the Change Laboratory methodology, introduced in the following chapter.

Across these strands, the review highlights recurrent misalignments between CHC learners' orientations and the curricular tools, assessment practices, and participation norms that characterise EMI EAP settings. In this thesis, such misalignments are conceptualised as contradictions in the activity-theoretical sense—that is, as systemic tensions within and between elements of the academic reading activity system rather than as individual learner deficits—and they provide the analytic focus that underpins

the research questions introduced in Chapter 1 and the CHAT framework outlined in Chapter 3

2.2 Conducting the Literature Review

The decision to focus on two core themes—(1) learner agency among Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) students and (2) educational processes that enhance agency—was informed by both deductive and inductive processes. The first area was anticipated, since my teaching experience and earlier publications had already highlighted four recurring areas: *obedience to authority*, *passivity*, *memorization*, and *group harmony*. The other themes such as fear of failure and diligence (section 2.3.6) and incremental view of learning (section 2.3.7) were derived and named by myself based on literature review. The second theme emerged more inductively, as my analysis of 57 reviewed studies revealed recurring pedagogical processes that supported or strengthened agency, even when labelled differently.

The first theme, learner agency among CHC students, was therefore both a search priority and a recurrent concern in the literature. While often described as academically passive, these learners were also shown in the literature to exercise agency in more complex ways, including active participation and subtle resistance that challenged stereotypes of silence or compliance.

The second theme, educational processes that support agency, was identified through comparative analysis of the same studies. From this, I identified five key pedagogical strategies that addressed the perceived limitations of CHC student agency and created new conditions for participation and learning

The literature base for this study was constructed by building on my existing familiarity with research on CHC learners, EMI, and EAP developed through earlier teaching and publications, and by systematically extending this base through targeted database searches. I conducted targeted searches in Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and my home institution's library portal. Across all searches I alternated between labels such as "Confucian Heritage Culture," "East Asian students," and "Japanese students" and "English-Medium Instruction", "EAP", "University Participation" to capture variation in terminology. Search terms reflected both predetermined areas and emergent themes:

Predetermined areas (deductive):

- "obedience to authority"
- "passivity"
- "memorization"
- "group harmony"

Emergent themes (inductive):

- "student agency"
- "autonomy" AND "English-Medium Instruction"
- "EAP" AND "student engagement"
- "participatory curriculum" AND "agency"
- "intercultural competence" AND "higher education"
- "transformative learning"
- "collaborative learning" AND "student agency"
- "reflective practice"

Boolean operators and filters (e.g., peer-reviewed, education/applied linguistics) were applied, and snowballing of citations captured additional relevant sources. Abstract screening was followed by full-text review, with passages extracted into NVivo for thematic coding. Both inductive codes (emergent patterns) and deductive codes (aligned with the four predetermined areas and my own publications: Reid, 2016; 2019; 2021) were applied.

Ultimately, 57 papers were reviewed in depth from an initial pool of over 120.

2.3 Learner Agency among Confucian Heritage Culture students

Learner agency—the capacity for students to actively shape their own learning trajectories—has become a central concern in contemporary educational research, particularly within English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts where autonomy, critical engagement, and visible participation are often treated as indicators of successful learning (Lea & Street, 1998; Marginson, 2014; Wegerif, 2008). For students educated within Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) systems, however, the expression of agency is frequently mediated by prior schooling experiences, cultural norms, and institutional expectations, leading to

persistent debates about participation, silence, and learner responsibility (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Ryan & Louie, 2007; King, 2013; Tani, 2005).

In conceptual terms, the study adopts a relational, ecological view of student agency in which agency is not a fixed inner trait but an emergent achievement of persons-in-context. Drawing on authors such as Biesta and Tedder and Priestley et al., agency is understood as arising from the interplay between students' past experiences, present resources, and imagined futures within particular structural and cultural conditions (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). From this perspective, agency becomes visible when students selectively respond to, reinterpret, and sometimes reshape the constraints and affordances of their learning environments.

At the same time, the umbrella term “Confucian Heritage Culture” is itself a contested construct rather than a neutral descriptor. Different authors mobilise it in divergent ways—for example, to link high academic achievement to particular “Confucian” approaches to effort and learning, to explain didactic classroom practices and hierarchical teacher–student relations, or to account more generally for perceived passivity among East Asian students (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 1996; see also summative discussion in O’Dwyer, 2017). Other scholars have explicitly criticised or rejected the label “Confucian Heritage Culture” (and related formulations such as “CHC background”) for reifying diverse contexts, relying on deficit framings, and obscuring the dynamic, changing nature of learners’ cultures of learning (Ryan & Louie, 2007; Tran, 2013; O’Dwyer, 2017; see also Yuan, 2023). In this thesis, I therefore use the term “CHC” pragmatically, as a contested but useful shorthand for clusters of historically sedimented educational norms in parts of East and Southeast Asia, while treating it as analytically provisional rather than as a fixed cultural essence; my focus is on how such norms are invoked, mediated, and transformed in specific EMI/EAP settings, rather than on attributing stable traits to “CHC learners.” In using the term “Confucian Heritage Cultures” (CHC) here, I treat it as a broad, heuristic label for educational traditions influenced by Confucian thought; however, I do not treat it as a single, unified culture. Studies of Chinese, Japanese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese systems show that Confucian values are institutionalised differently in each context, shaped by distinct policy histories, examination regimes, and school structures (e.g. Befu, 2001; Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001; Lin, 2016; Yang,

2015; Marginson, 2014). From this perspective, CHC is better understood as a family of related but heterogeneous traditions rather than a homogeneous bloc, and recent work cautions against essentialising CHC learners or assuming a single “Confucian” learning style (Ryan & Louie, 2007; Shi, 2006).

This section synthesises findings from 57 peer-reviewed studies focusing on CHC learners in EMI, EAP, and Western higher-education settings. Using systematic coding and thematic analysis, I analysed how learner behaviour and participation were framed across this body of literature. Through this process, I identified six dominant themes that recur in explanations of CHC learner agency. These themes were inductively coded across the corpus and then analytically named, based on repeated patterns in how agency was described, constrained, or evaluated. While individual authors use different terminology and theoretical lenses, these six themes appeared consistently across national contexts, research designs, and disciplinary traditions.

The six dominant themes identified are:

- **Obedience to Authority (52 papers)** – Hierarchical teacher-student relationships can inhibit autonomous learning and discourage questioning or independent thought.
- **Rote Memorization (49 papers)** – While often misunderstood in Western contexts, repetition remains a central and culturally endorsed learning strategy in CHC systems.
- **Group Conformity & Social Harmony (48 papers)** – Norms favouring harmonious interaction often deter open debate and discourage behaviours that could disrupt collective cohesion.
- **Fear of Failure & Perfectionism (50 papers)** – Concerns over losing face and high performance expectations can suppress risk-taking and promote self-censorship.
- **Diligence & Incremental Learning (46 papers)** – Confucian ethics emphasise persistent effort and steady progress over innate ability as the pathway to mastery.

- **Passivity (50 papers)** – Frequently reinterpreted as reflective silence or cultural restraint rather than disengagement, this theme challenges Western assumptions about verbal participation as a proxy for learning.

These themes do not operate in isolation. Instead, they interact to shape how CHC learners' classroom behaviour is interpreted, evaluated, and frequently problematised in EMI and EAP contexts. To make these patterns visible, Table 2.1 maps each reviewed study against the six dominant themes, alongside student nationality and research methodology. The table is intended as an analytical tool rather than a quantitative summary. Read horizontally, it shows how individual studies often mobilise multiple themes simultaneously; read vertically, it reveals the persistence of particular framings—most notably obedience to authority, memorisation, and passivity—across contexts. This mapping informed both the identification of the dominant themes and the organisation of the discussion that follows.

Across much of the literature, these six themes are framed primarily as constraints on learner agency, particularly when CHC students enter EMI or Western academic settings. Many studies emphasise contrasts between Confucian-influenced learning traditions—commonly associated with structure, effort, respect for authority, and social harmony—and Western pedagogical models that privilege autonomy, critical questioning, and verbal participation (Biggs, 1996; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Wing On, 1996; Tweed & Lehman, 2002). From this perspective, behaviours such as silence, reliance on memorisation, or reluctance to challenge teachers are often interpreted as indicators of passivity or disengagement (Ryan & Louie, 2007; King, 2013; Chan, 1999).

At the same time, several studies caution against treating these patterns as fixed cultural attributes. They argue instead that many of the behaviours described are contextually produced and institutionally reinforced, shaped by assessment regimes, classroom structures, and implicit participation norms (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Gao, 2010; Wicking, 2019). From this standpoint, what appears to be a lack of agency may reflect rational responses to ambiguous expectations or high-stakes environments rather than inherent passivity.

Beyond these dominant constraints, the analysis also identified five supplementary themes that further illuminate learner agency in CHC contexts. These are discussed in Section 2.3.7. The following sections (2.3.1–2.3.6) examine each of the six dominant themes in turn, treating them not as stable learner characteristics but as constructs shaped by particular research framings. The discussion traces how these themes come to be positioned as impediments to agency and where tensions or alternative interpretations begin to surface. Table 2.1 serves as a reference point for this analysis.

Table 2-1 Comparative Analysis of Reviewed Studies on Learner Agency in CHC Contexts

| Citation | Obedience to Authority | Rote Memorization | Group Conformity & Social Harmony | Fear of Failure & Perfectionism | Diligence & Incremental Learning | Passivity | Nationality of Students | Study Type & Methodology |
|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Aizawa & Rose (2019) | Discusses top-down EMI policy and students' limited power to question institutional decisions. | N/A. | Institutional emphasis on standardisation reflects broader cultural conformity. | Students avoid risks in EMI contexts due to pressure to perform in English. | Acknowledges students' effort to adapt despite institutional mismatches. | Students portrayed as passive recipients of EMI policy. | Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Aizawa & Rose (2020) | Acceptance of EMI policies without challenge. | N/A. | Students avoid standing out to maintain harmony. | Language barriers contribute to anxiety. | Students work hard to adapt to EMI. | Language challenges reduce participation. | Japanese | Empirical, Mixed Methods |
| Bailey (2005) | Highlights Chinese students' expectations of strong guidance and directive teaching in the UK. | Emphasises students' preference for structured and repeatable knowledge delivery. | Cultural desire for harmony results in reduced class participation in diverse contexts. | Chinese learners' reluctance to speak linked to fear of making mistakes. | Persistence despite cultural and pedagogical disconnects in UK settings. | Students may appear passive due to misaligned classroom norms. | Chinese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Befu (2001) | Explores hierarchical social structures in Japan influencing institutional and interpersonal roles. | Mentions Japanese educational values favouring repetition and uniformity. | Group identity and consensus highly valued in Japanese discourse. | Japanese perfectionism in communication inhibits spontaneous interaction. | Describes a deeply ingrained ethic of diligence in Japanese schooling. | Passivity rooted in Japan's emphasis on social order and restraint. | Japanese | Theoretical, Anthropological |
| Biggs (1996) | Explains how CHC students' deference to authority shapes learning strategies. | Argues memorisation in CHC is misunderstood; it's part of deep learning. | Highlights cultural prioritisation of group over self in learning contexts. | CHC learners aim for precision and avoid risks to maintain academic face. | Highlights high effort as a virtue in CHC culture, fostering steady learning. | Perceived passivity is a misinterpretation of reflective learning. | Chinese | Theoretical, Cultural Analysis |

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|----------------------------|--|--|---|---|---|---|----------|--------------------------------|
| Brown et al. (2019) | Students rely on instructor guidance, showing deference to authority. | Implied shift needed from rote to analytical skills. | N/A. | Anxiety over underperformance in EML. | Highlights importance of ongoing skill development. | Overreliance on teacher guidance. | Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Chan (1999) | Emphasises hierarchical teacher-student relationships in Chinese classrooms. | Explores memorisation as a legitimate and strategic learning method. | Learners avoid standing out to preserve group cohesion. | Perfectionism linked to social expectations in the classroom. | Hard work central to student identity in CHC contexts. | Learners appear passive but actively process material. | Chinese | Theoretical, Cultural Analysis |
| Chen (2018) | Discusses tension between institutional control and teacher autonomy. | Traditional methods emphasise memorisation over exploratory learning. | Group-oriented classroom culture often limits individual expression. | Fear of failure linked to group image and respect for norms. | Students persistently work toward gradual academic improvement. | Passive classroom behaviour shaped by respect and group values. | Chinese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Cortazzi & Jin (1996) | Highlights strong teacher authority in Chinese classrooms influencing participation. | Notes widespread memorisation practices as part of learning culture. | Classroom harmony is valued over individualism in CHC contexts. | Mistake avoidance is common due to fear of losing face. | Emphasises persistence and repetition in skill development. | Cultural silence may appear passive but is often strategic. | Chinese | Theoretical, Cultural Analysis |
| Cross & Hitchcock (2007) | Chinese students in the UK defer to lecturer roles, affecting engagement. | Some students struggle to adapt away from memorisation-focused learning. | Students avoid conflict or strong opinions to maintain group cohesion. | Students fear embarrassment or poor performance in UK classrooms. | Hard work seen as key to academic transition success. | Perceived passivity linked to unfamiliarity with UK participation styles. | Chinese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Fukuzawa & LeTendre (2001) | Japanese students follow structured schedules shaped by social expectations. | Memorisation is embedded in school routines and cultural norms. | Japanese students prioritise social balance in peer and family relations. | Pressure to succeed in all areas creates anxiety and perfectionism. | Japanese adolescents juggle demanding study and social lives. | Students conform outwardly, masking personal strategies. | Japanese | Empirical, Ethnographic |
| Galloway & Rose (2013) | Aspirations influenced by institutional narratives reflect compliance. | N/A. | Peer-aligned aspirations reflect harmony values. | Fear of underperforming in foreign contexts. | Students committed to long-term English goals. | Not a major theme. | Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |

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|---------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Galloway & Rose (2015) | Students follow institutional EMI pathways without contest. | Not central but implies need for communicative engagement over rote learning. | EMI group culture creates aspirational alignment. | EMI creates aspiration-related anxiety. | Students show commitment to long-term EMI preparation. | Students show aspirational agency despite passive presentation. | Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Galloway & Ruegg (2020) | Students follow EMI mandates without question, showing institutional deference. | Encourages shift from memorisation to critical skills. | Not explicitly addressed. | High EMI expectations generate anxiety. | Highlights importance of steady academic improvement. | Need for more active participation strategies. | Mixed (CHC) | Empirical, Mixed Methods |
| Gao (2010) | Authority figures mediate learner strategy choices. | Describes shift from strategic repetition to active strategy use. | Peer alignment influences strategy uptake. | Fear drives strategy use but limits experimentation. | Agency built through gradual, reflective development. | Strategic silence may be misunderstood as passivity. | Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Hino (2012) | Learners navigate global roles while balancing individual voice and institutional norms. | Encourages agency through communication rather than recall. | ELF participation involves navigating cultural group expectations. | Learner agency includes managing uncertainty and linguistic imperfection. | Encourages active learning over passive consumption of input. | Passivity challenged through ELF agency frameworks. | Japanese | Theoretical, Applied Linguistics |
| Hofstede (2011) | Identifies power distance as a core dimension in East Asian cultures. | Recognises its prevalence in collectivist education systems. | Collectivist cultures prioritise harmony over individualism. | Fear of failure common in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. | Diligence emphasised in long-term orientation cultures. | Passive behaviour misinterpreted due to cultural dimensions. | Chinese, Japanese, Korean (General CHC) | Theoretical, Cultural Psychology |
| Jensen & Schroeder (2020) | Mentions students' respect for instructors within Confucian traditions. | CHC learners balance memorisation with adaptation to Western learning. | Emphasises bicultural navigation between conformity and individuality. | Perfectionism influenced by family and societal expectations. | CHC students praised for sustained effort and resilience. | Apparent passivity masks strategic adaptation. | Chinese, Korean | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Jiang et al. (2021) | Silence often reflects respect for authority, not disengagement. | Silence linked to internal processing and memorisation strategies. | Silence maintains harmony in group-based classrooms. | Students remain silent to avoid making mistakes. | Learning seen as ongoing, not just outcome-based. | Silence misread as disengagement, often reflective. | Chinese | Theoretical, Cultural Analysis |

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|-----------------------|---|--|--|---|--|--|-----------------|---|
| Jin & Cortazzi (2006) | Teacher-led structures dominate traditional learning cultures. | Memorisation central in traditional Chinese classrooms. | Learning communities prioritise group success. | Failure considered shameful in traditional Chinese contexts. | Persistence and repetition valued in skill development. | Traditional learning fosters listening before acting. | Chinese | Theoretical, Educational Analysis |
| Kawasaki (2016) | Anxiety shaped by social hierarchy in schooling. | Students rely on drill-based test preparation. | Anxiety arises from pressure to conform. | Academic pressure contributes to test-related anxiety. | Students dedicate long hours to entrance exam preparation. | Surface passivity masks intense internal effort. | Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Kim & Park (2017) | Higher deference linked to East Asian learning readiness. | Memorisation used strategically in self-directed learning. | Self-directed learning styles shaped by group norms. | Fear of mistakes inhibits autonomous language use. | Effort over ability seen as route to mastery. | Low participation misunderstood as lack of engagement. | Korean, Chinese | Empirical, Quantitative |
| King (2013) | Cultural deference contributes to silence in classrooms. | Silence may mask reliance on memorization strategies. | Silence supports classroom harmony. | Fear of losing face underpins silence. | Students see progress as effort-based. | Persistent silence interpreted as passive learning. | Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Li & Liu (2011) | Teacher control impacts willingness to speak or ask questions. | Students rely on memorisation for exam success. | Harmony norms inhibit questioning and class participation. | Fear of mistakes reduces classroom communication. | Incremental improvement highly valued. | Students may appear passive but possess internal goals. | Mixed (CHC) | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Li (2005) | Chinese learners influenced by role-based social expectations. | Western critique of rote learning challenged as narrow. | Virtue-based learning places emphasis on communal values. | Performance is linked to personal and family honour. | Learning framed as moral self-cultivation. | Quiet learning styles misjudged in Western contexts. | Chinese | Theoretical, Comparative Psychology |
| Li (2021) | Initially deferential, later develop independent strategies. | Shift from memorization to communicative learning. | Learners balance individual and group expectations. | Concern about making mistakes in EMI context. | Strong commitment to learning progress. | Initial passivity transforms over time. | Chinese | Empirical, Longitudinal Qualitative |
| Lin (2016) | Challenges traditional top-down models, promoting dialogic spaces for learner autonomy. | Critiques overreliance on memorization; promotes deep conceptual engagement. | Acknowledges group conformity pressures; promotes inclusive participation. | Addresses fear of mistakes through scaffolding and supportive environments. | Emphasizes scaffolding for gradual, meaningful progress. | Actively challenges passivity by promoting student voice and agency. | Hong Kong/China | Theoretical, Conceptual with Case Illustrations |

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|------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|--|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Marginson (2014) | Highlights structural constraints faced by international CHC learners in shaping their educational selves. | Not a central focus, but notes shift from passive reproduction to self-formation. | Self-formation includes negotiation of cultural norms like harmony and modesty. | Students fear reputational damage in international settings. | Self-formation involves sustained effort over time. | Challenges view of CHC learners as passive; highlights evolving agency. | Chinese, Japanese | Theoretical, International Education |
| Murray & Xu (2019) | Agency fostered through relational teacher support rather than hierarchical control. | N/A directly. | Teacher relationships help students balance individuality with group belonging. | Support systems reduce anxiety and perfectionism. | Agency seen in students' continuous efforts in language learning. | Agency is relational and scaffolded, not passive. | Japanese, Chinese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Ota & Giles (2013) | Situational deference to authority linked to anxiety in Japanese classrooms. | Mentions teacher-centred classroom structure common in Japan. | Students limit speech to preserve group balance. | Fear of public error contributes to silence. | Effort highly valued despite anxiety challenges. | Quietness often mistaken for disengagement. | Japanese | Empirical, Quantitative |
| Reid (2021) | Highlights challenge of hierarchical norms; encourages learner-driven, transmedia approaches. | Moves learners beyond memorization toward creative, multimodal engagement. | Addresses tension between group harmony and individual voice in bicultural contexts. | Identifies fear of failure as a barrier to participation; transmedia seen as reducing this fear. | Promotes step-by-step skill development through multimodal projects. | Directly tackles passivity by repositioning students as knowledge producers. | Japanese/East Asian | Empirical, Qualitative Case Study |
| Rose & McKinley (2018) | Students comply with institutional EMI initiatives. | Not directly addressed. | Individualistic EMI approaches contrast with harmony norms. | Fear of failure in internationalised classrooms. | Diligence framed as cultural strength. | Passive acceptance of institutional change. | Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Ryan & Louie (2007) | Questions East-West assumptions about teacher dominance in CHC. | Challenges idea that CHC relies only on memorisation. | Calls for rethinking assumptions that group norms inhibit intellectual engagement. | Argues perfectionism is not exclusive to CHC but culturally shaped differently. | Praises CHC work ethic as misread in Western scholarship. | Argues passivity is misread; CHC learners actively interpret knowledge. | Chinese | Theoretical, Educational Philosophy |
| Salili (1996) | Explores learners' internalisation of authority and its | Memorisation reframed as part of responsibility-taking, not | Harmony and social image shape students' | Learners feel guilt rather than shame when responsibility is internalised. | Focuses on incremental improvement as | Responsibility accepted quietly, not with outspoken initiative. | Chinese | Theoretical, Cultural Psychology |

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|---------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|--|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| | impact on responsibility. | mindless repetition. | perception of personal effort. | | responsibility and virtue. | | | |
| Savery (2006) | Focus not on authority but on student problem-solving autonomy. | Contrasts PBL with rote methods, promoting deep learning. | Not directly relevant. | Encourages risk-taking and mistake-making. | PBL promotes gradual mastery through real-world tasks. | Challenges notion of passivity through active learning. | Not CHC specific | Theoretical, Pedagogical Review |
| Shi (2006) | CHC students negotiate traditional expectations with new influences. | CHC students blend memorisation with independent analysis. | Classroom conduct shaped by harmony and peer norms. | Students fear disappointing traditional expectations. | Persistence central to CHC learning adaptations. | CHC students often appear passive but adapt deeply. | Chinese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Smith & Hu (2013) | Confucian emphasis on teacher expertise questioned in modern contexts. | Questions over-reliance on traditional rote practices. | Teachers teach to meet community, not just individual needs. | Teacher pressure may induce perfectionist student attitudes. | Effort over ability highlighted in Confucian philosophy. | Outward calm masks cognitive engagement. | Chinese | Theoretical, Teacher Education |
| Takayama & Lingard (2019) | Critiques institutional control and performance pressure in Japanese schooling. | Japanese system promotes standardised, data-driven routines. | Datafication enforces conformity to test-based norms. | Perfectionist culture linked to test anxiety and mental health. | Schooling demands constant incremental improvement. | Students behave passively due to systemic standardisation. | Japanese | Theoretical, Policy Critique |
| Takei (2008) | Authority structures seen in classroom routines and role expectations. | Memorisation part of formal hidden curriculum. | Students behave to maintain group respect and reputation. | Conformity and fear of failure foster hidden curricula. | Daily discipline and structure build academic success. | Passive demeanour encouraged by school rituals. | Japanese | Empirical, Ethnographic |
| Tanaka (2018) | Pressure from authority figures leads to perfectionistic distress. | Test-driven environments reinforce memorisation habits. | Adolescents struggle with conformity and societal pressure. | Explores link between mental health issues and academic perfectionism. | Explains chronic overwork among struggling students. | Passivity linked to emotional burden of school failure. | Japanese | Empirical, Quantitative |
| Tani (2005) | Asian students defer to instructors, suppressing classroom speech. | Classroom silence partly due to dependence on recall. | Speech inhibited to preserve classroom harmony. | Students worry about giving wrong answers publicly. | Students seen as diligent despite in-class silence. | Silence often strategic, not disengaged. | Chinese, Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |

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|------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|--|----------|----------------------------------|
| Tweed & Lehman (2002) | Explains how teacher authority structures shape learner dependence. | Memorisation seen as preparation for deep understanding. | Learning for social harmony embedded in Confucian practice. | Failure seen as moral weakness to be avoided. | Effort praised as virtue enabling eventual insight. | Passivity interpreted as discipline rather than disengagement. | Chinese | Theoretical, Cultural Psychology |
| Wang (2006) | Authority respected as facilitator of knowledge transfer. | Memorisation coexists with analysis in CHC settings. | Group belonging central to learner motivation. | Fear of losing face inhibits questioning. | Learning is slow, layered and self-paced. | Quiet learning misunderstood in Western settings. | Chinese | Theoretical, Cultural Education |
| Wang (2019) | Learners rely on teacher modelling to guide speaking development. | Encourages movement away from memorised responses to structured speaking. | Learners collaborate using shared conceptual maps, supporting group harmony. | Learners hesitant to speak due to fear of error in performance. | Concept mapping supports gradual improvement in speaking fluency. | Initial hesitancy overcome by structured speaking tools. | Chinese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Wang, M. (2019) | Avoid speaking to not challenge authority. | Rote learning limits speaking confidence. | Fear of disrupting harmony promotes silence. | Fear of errors contributes to silence. | Students value effort-based growth. | Cultural passivity limits interaction. | Chinese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Watkins & Biggs (1996) | Learners often internalise expectations from elders/teachers. | Clarifies that memorisation doesn't equal shallow learning. | Collectivism and peer alignment guide classroom dynamics. | Fear of shame is a major performance driver. | Deep learning framed as outcome of sustained effort. | Silent engagement common and culturally valid. | Chinese | Theoretical, Edited Volume |
| Wen & Clément (2003) | Teacher-student hierarchy limits communication. | Traditional methods limit spontaneous speaking. | Harmony needs reduce communicative risk-taking. | Fear of mistakes lowers communication willingness. | Persistence is key to language development. | Passive behaviour results from cultural scripts. | Chinese | Empirical, Quantitative |
| Wicking (2019) | Students accept traditional assessment methods from authority figures. | Traditional assessments encourage memorization. | N/A. | High-stakes tests increase fear of failure. | Students value gradual improvement. | Assessment system limits active engagement. | Japanese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Williams (2016) | Authority of teacher influences student positioning in classroom. | Memorisation present but countered with context-based engagement. | Conformity shapes language use and participation. | Error avoidance prominent among CHC students. | Persistence and effort critical to success. | External passivity masks adaptive engagement. | Chinese | Empirical, Qualitative |
| Wing On (1996) | Conceptions of learning emphasise | Memorisation integral to achieving | Group identity stronger than self- | Failure damages group standing, not just self. | Growth through repetition aligns | Listening valued above speaking in | Chinese | Theoretical, Cultural Psychology |

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|----------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|---|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| | deference to established wisdom. | understanding, not avoiding it. | expression in CHC. | | with self-discipline. | Confucian pedagogy. | | |
| Yamada (2015) | Authority-induced pressure linked to emotional strain. | Students engage in heavy memorisation under pressure. | Social pressures promote emotional restraint. | Emotional cost of perfectionism in Japanese system. | Hard work embedded in student identity. | Passivity hides stress and coping mechanisms. | Japanese | Empirical, Quantitative |
| Yang (2015) | Recognizes initial deference to authority; CLIL fosters greater learner autonomy over time. | Describes gradual shift from rote learning to conceptual engagement. | Notes importance of peer collaboration within Taiwanese CLIL settings. | Acknowledges performance anxiety; CLIL shown to mitigate it by building confidence. | Demonstrates steady academic improvement among CLIL students. | Documents reduction in passivity through active learning tasks. | Taiwanese | Empirical, Quantitative |
| Yang & Gosling (2014) | Identifies teacher authority as influential; motivating lesson features reduce overdependence. | Lessons designed to discourage mechanical memorization and foster engagement. | Group motivation strategies encourage collaborative learning. | Links lesson quality to reduction in fear of failure and increased motivation. | Incremental progress tied to interactive, motivational lesson design. | Shows that dynamic lesson features decrease student passivity. | Taiwanese | Empirical, Mixed Methods |
| Yashima (2002) | Deference impacts communication risk in EFL settings. | Strategic memorisation hinders spontaneous communication. | Peers influence WTC through norms of appropriateness. | Mistake avoidance limits communicative participation. | Persistence valued even in silence. | Silence reflects anxiety, not lack of agency. | Japanese | Empirical, Quantitative |
| Yi (2016) | Education framed as moral obligation guided by elders. | Emphasises tradition of repetition as moral discipline. | Confucian values promote duty to community over self. | Avoiding shame prioritised over embracing failure. | Learning is moral cultivation, not performance. | Passivity linked to role fulfilment, not disinterest. | Chinese | Theoretical, Comparative Education |
| van Egmond & Kühnen (2014) | Collectivist cultures correlate with higher respect for authority. | East Asian students show higher use of repetition strategies. | Western students more individualist; CHC learners avoid standing out. | Fear of failure suppresses creative engagement. | CHC students prefer gradual progress over risk. | CHC learners may appear passive in Western classrooms. | Chinese, Japanese | Empirical, Quantitative |
| Zhu, X. (2021) | Students adapt Confucian obedience within critical thinking goals. | Balance between CHC recall and UK analytic expectations. | Students must balance peer norms with personal views. | Fear of critique affects classroom openness. | Students show adaptive persistence across cultures. | CHC students negotiate silence with UK norms. | Chinese | Empirical, Qualitative |

2.3.1 Obedience to Authority

Of the 57 studies reviewed, 52 addressed the theme of obedience to authority in some form, underscoring its centrality in discussions of learner agency in Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) contexts. These studies consistently describe classroom dynamics shaped by traditions of deference, where teachers are regarded as the ultimate source of knowledge and students are expected to adopt a receptive, rather than participatory, role (Aizawa & Rose, 2020; Wicking, 2019; King, 2013). This cultural emphasis on respect often discourages students from asking questions or challenging instruction (Jiang et al., 2021; Yashima, 2002).

In Japan, this orientation is reinforced by a national education system that prioritises standardisation and order (Takayama & Lingard, 2019), and where silence and attentiveness are culturally associated with moral character and academic discipline (Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Wing On, 1996).

Multiple studies highlight how this disposition is internalised early and rarely questioned, leading students to equate obedience with academic diligence (Chan, 1999; Kim & Park, 2017). Structures such as student councils or senpai–kohai hierarchies—while ostensibly promoting student leadership—tend to reinforce top-down authority and reward compliance over initiative (Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001; Rohlen, 1983; Takei, 2008). Such arrangements, as Gao (2010), Rose and McKinley (2018), and Williams (2016) note, reproduce classroom authority structures rather than empowering students.

Silence, another common feature, is often misunderstood in EMI settings. King (2013) observed that in Japanese university English classes, students tended to give only brief responses within rigid Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) patterns—where teachers initiate, students respond, and teachers immediately evaluate—leaving little room for open dialogue or exploratory thinking. Yashima (2002) links such behaviour to learners' efforts to avoid standing out and potentially losing face.

Yet Western educators often lack the cultural awareness to interpret these behaviours appropriately. Smith and Hu (2013) argue that such instructors may mistake culturally appropriate silence for disengagement, while Hino (2012) notes that without relational support, students are unlikely to feel secure enough to participate openly. Tweed and Lehman's (2002) Confucian–Socratic framework likewise explains these behaviours to Western audiences and argues for bicultural fluency among both students and teachers, rather than treating CHC practices as deficits (Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

2.3.2 Rote Memorization

Forty-nine of the studies reviewed engage with memorisation as a defining feature of education in Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) contexts. While memorisation is often dismissed in Western pedagogies as mechanical or lower-order learning, CHC traditions have historically framed it as a foundation for mastery, self-discipline, and moral development (Biggs, 1996; Wing On, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). In these settings, rote learning is not necessarily understood as disengaged repetition, but as a valued means of internalising knowledge in disciplined and socially sanctioned ways (Chan, 1999; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006).

Several studies nevertheless argue that this emphasis becomes problematic when it constrains opportunities for analytical thinking or limits students' capacity to make autonomous choices about how and what they learn. Aizawa and Rose (2020) observe that in Japanese EMI classrooms, students often rely on memorised phrases and strategies when presenting in English, but struggle when required to articulate personal or critical perspectives. King (2013) similarly reports that students educated through grammar-translation approaches tend to perform well in accuracy-focused tasks, yet hesitate in spontaneous discussion or interpretive work requiring synthesis and evaluation.

These tendencies are reinforced by limited curricular flexibility. Wicking (2019) and Gao (2010) note that exam-oriented systems in Japan and China offer few opportunities for students to select topics, pose questions, or pursue areas of personal interest. While such structures facilitate large-scale assessment, they can encourage a view of learning as compliance rather than inquiry. Rose and McKinley (2018) argue that these systems

privilege procedural mastery over exploratory engagement, a stance further reinforced by societal and parental expectations tied to narrowly defined academic benchmarks.

Students frequently regard memorisation as the safest route to success. Kim and Park (2017) and Li (2005) report that learners often favour strategies that ensure performance in high-stakes assessments, even when they recognise the limits of these approaches for deeper understanding. This preference is sustained by institutional norms that reward reproduction over innovation and discourage deviation from established models (Smith & Hu, 2013; Hino, 2012).

At the same time, several scholars caution against treating memorisation as inherently antithetical to agency. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) argue that it can function as a scaffold for more complex engagement when combined with discussion or reflection, while Shi (2006) shows that many CHC students develop critical capacities once trust and academic security are established. Taken together, these accounts suggest that memorisation itself is not incompatible with agency; rather, agency is constrained when curricula provide few opportunities for learners to move beyond reproduction towards interpretive or generative activity.

2.3.3 Group Conformity & Social Harmony

Forty-eight of the reviewed studies address the influence of group conformity and the prioritisation of social harmony on learner behaviour and agency in Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) contexts. In these settings, collective cohesion is often valued over individual expression, and students are socialised to avoid behaviours that might disrupt the group or attract undue attention (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Wing On, 1996; King, 2013). While this orientation can foster solidarity and mutual responsibility, it may also constrain critical dialogue, risk-taking, and the development of personal voice—features commonly associated with learner agency in Western pedagogical frameworks (Yashima, 2002; Ryan & Louie, 2007).

Several studies note that CHC students often refrain from asking questions or expressing disagreement in class, not due to lack of interest, but in order to preserve group harmony and avoid causing others to lose face (Jiang et al., 2021; Kim & Park, 2017). In group work, learners may prioritise consensus or silence over challenging a

peer's position (Shi, 2006; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), while in whole-class discussion they are more likely to speak when directly invited by the teacher rather than volunteering contributions (King, 2013; Wicking, 2019).

This dynamic is reinforced not only by teacher authority but also by peer surveillance. Fukuzawa and LeTendre (2001) and Rohlen (1983) describe how Japanese school environments sustain social order through peer-enforced norms of cooperation and restraint, rewarding conformity and discouraging assertiveness. As Takei (2008) observes, even minor departures from group expectations can carry social costs, strengthening incentives to conform. Although not cited explicitly in the literature, this orientation is aptly captured by the Japanese proverb *deru kugi wa utareru* (“the nail that sticks up gets hammered down”), which reflects a widely shared expectation to avoid standing out.

Such social values also shape classroom communication. While the term *keigo* (honorific speech) does not appear in the reviewed studies, hierarchical language practices are discussed in relation to power relations between teachers and students (Chan, 1999; Smith & Hu, 2013; Hofstede, 2011; Ota & Giles, 2013). These norms reinforce authority structures and encourage students to position themselves as subordinate in classroom discourse, limiting the expression of dissent or critical engagement—particularly in EMI contexts where independent contribution is expected.

Institutional practices further reinforce these tendencies. Gao (2010) and Aizawa and Rose (2020) report that in EMI classrooms, CHC students often prefer structured tasks with clearly defined roles and expectations, and may resist open-ended or controversial discussion formats. While such preferences are sometimes interpreted as a lack of confidence or preparation, Smith and Hu (2013) and Hino (2012) argue that they more accurately reflect culturally appropriate participation, privileging listening and measured contribution over spontaneous opinion-sharing.

Importantly, several studies show that learners are not unaware of these dynamics but actively manage them. Zhu (2021) found that East Asian students in UK universities adjust their participation in response to classroom social dynamics, weighing whether contributions will be perceived as disruptive or collaborative. Li (2005) and Chan

(1999) similarly suggest that silence can be strategic rather than passive, used to observe, reflect, or maintain social relationships.

Overall, while the prioritisation of harmony can provide stability and predictability, it may also constrain the forms of critical engagement, peer negotiation, and personal expression valued in EMI and Western academic contexts. The literature therefore points to conformity not as a fixed cultural norm, but as a strategic orientation shaped by peer relations, task design, and perceived interpersonal risk.

2.3.4 Fear of Failure and Perfectionism

Fifty of the studies reviewed address fear of failure and perfectionism as constraints on learner agency among students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs). Rooted in cultural values that emphasise effort, achievement, and the avoidance of shame, these tendencies often manifest as self-censorship, reluctance to take risks, and a heavy psychological burden attached to academic performance (Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Wing On, 1996; Li, 2005). Rather than supporting experimentation or exploratory learning, the classroom is frequently experienced as a space in which students seek to minimise error and avoid public embarrassment (Yashima, 2002; King, 2013; Shi, 2006).

Many studies show how this fear constrains participation, particularly in EMI settings where students are expected to speak spontaneously in a second language. King (2013) observed that Japanese students often remain silent in English classes not because of limited ability, but due to anxiety about making mistakes in front of peers. Wicking (2019) similarly reports that students rely heavily on memorised scripts and avoid improvisation in presentations as a strategy for managing perceived risk.

This anxiety is closely connected to the concept of face, understood as a social–psychological mechanism for maintaining reputation and group belonging. Jiang et al. (2021) note that CHC students may avoid speaking up to prevent disrupting group harmony or appearing incompetent, particularly in competitive academic environments. Rose and McKinley (2018) and Ryan and Louie (2007) argue that EMI contexts often intensify these pressures by placing students in unfamiliar discursive settings where

expectations for originality, critique, and self-expression are implicit rather than clearly articulated (see also Yashima, 2002).

Several authors trace these perfectionist orientations to early educational socialisation. Tanaka (2018) and Takei (2008) describe how entrance examination systems and hierarchical schooling structures cultivate a focus on correctness and error avoidance, rewarding precision over creativity (see also Hashimoto, 2015). While such approaches may be effective within test-driven systems, they can restrict the development of learner agency in contexts that prioritise self-directed inquiry and interpretive engagement.

Importantly, fear of failure is not treated in this literature as a purely individual disposition. Kim and Park (2017) show that East Asian students often combine high motivation and strong work ethic with a reliance on external validation. Their behaviour reflects tensions between cultural values and educational expectations, particularly where academic success is closely linked to family honour or national identity (Li, 2005; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Biggs, 1996).

At the same time, several studies suggest that perfectionism need not be inherently disabling. Shi (2006) and Gao (2010) argue that when classroom environments foster psychological safety and make evaluative criteria explicit, students become more willing to take intellectual risks and engage critically. Gu and Schweisfurth (2015) likewise show that CHC learners take up more agentic roles when expectations are negotiated and feedback is dialogic. Such shifts, however, require pedagogical approaches that move beyond performance-oriented assessment towards supportive feedback, trust-building, and the normalisation of trial and error

Overall, fear of failure and perfectionism emerge as deeply embedded features of CHC learning contexts that pose substantial challenges for fostering learner agency, particularly in EMI settings. The literature consistently suggests that these behaviours are best understood not as internalised deficiencies, but as rational responses to assessment regimes and participation norms that penalise error and elevate performance.

2.3.5 Diligence and Incremental View of Learning

Forty-six of the reviewed studies address diligence—the belief in sustained effort over time—as a defining feature of educational practice among students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC). Learning is commonly understood not as a function of innate ability, but as the outcome of consistent effort, reflecting Confucian values of self-cultivation and perseverance (Li, 2005; Chan, 1999; Wing On, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). CHC students therefore tend to attribute academic success to hard work rather than talent (Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Biggs, 1996; Kim & Park, 2017), a stance associated with high motivation and persistence (Biggs, 1996; Gao, 2010).

Empirical studies document the extent of this commitment. CHC students frequently sacrifice sleep and leisure for study (Tanaka, 2018; Yashima, 2002) and persist despite linguistic and communicative challenges in EMI contexts (Wicking, 2019; Aizawa & Rose, 2020). This contrasts with dominant Western educational discourses that place greater emphasis on natural aptitude, individual interest, and independent inquiry (Smith & Hu, 2013; van Egmond & Kühnen, 2014; Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

At the same time, a strong reliance on effort can constrain learner agency. Several studies report that CHC students often prefer structured, teacher-dependent learning environments (King, 2013; Shi, 2006; Chen, 2018) and may struggle with tasks requiring independent judgement or self-direction (Hino, 2012). When diligence is framed as a moral obligation (Li, 2005; Zhu, 2021), it can also generate high levels of stress and lead students to persist with ineffective routines rather than adapt strategies (Tanaka, 2018; Takei, 2008; Kim & Park, 2017; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015).

Aizawa and Rose (2020) and Rose and McKinley (2018) caution that students who demonstrate diligence but lack experience in self-directed learning may encounter difficulties in Western academic settings. While structured CHC learning models offer predictability and stability, they can inhibit agency in systems that reward flexibility, initiative, and exploratory engagement (Murray & Xu, 2019).

Several authors therefore argue for pedagogical approaches that build on CHC students' strengths—methodical effort, endurance, and resilience—while supporting the development of adaptability and autonomy (Jensen & Schroeder, 2020; Zhu, 2021;

Tweed & Lehman, 2019). When learning trajectories allow students to influence goals, methods, or pacing, diligence need not reinforce compliance alone, but can instead provide a foundation for the exercise of agency.

2.3.6 Perception of Passivity

The patterns discussed in Sections 2.3.2 to 2.3.6—obedience to authority, emphasis on memorisation, group conformity, fear of failure, and diligence—frequently intersect in the literature and collectively contribute to the widespread portrayal of CHC learners as passive within Western educational discourse.

Fifty of the reviewed studies address passivity explicitly, many emphasising that it is often misinterpreted. Behaviours such as silence or deference are frequently read as disengagement, yet are more accurately understood as expressions of culturally grounded norms of respect, reflection, and social harmony (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; King, 2013; Jiang et al., 2021; Tani, 2005; Hofstede, 2011; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). Silence, in particular, may serve strategic functions, supporting internal cognitive processing or preserving group cohesion (Ryan & Louie, 2007; Cross & Hitchcock, 2007; Gao, 2010; Zhu, 2021).

Several studies argue that apparent passivity often masks substantial cognitive engagement rather than signalling a lack of ability or interest (Biggs, 1996; Chan, 1999; Shi, 2006; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Hofstede, 2011; Zhu, 2021). At the same time, highly structured and teacher-centred classroom environments common in many CHC contexts can reinforce passive forms of participation and limit opportunities for initiative and self-direction (Chen, 2018; Murray & Xu, 2019; Brown et al., 2019; Aizawa & Rose, 2019).

Cultural pressures associated with fear of failure, the maintenance of harmony, and the avoidance of public error further sustain passive classroom conduct (King, 2013; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Wen & Clément, 2003; Wang, 2019, Yashima, 2002). Some research also highlights the emotional strain generated by intense academic expectations, suggesting that engagement may be obscured by withdrawal or silence (Tanaka, 2018; Takei, 2008; Yamada, 2015).

However, the literature also risks valorizing silence and passivity by treating them primarily as strategic or culturally appropriate responses, without sufficient attention to their psychological costs or to the ways they may constrain opportunities for agency development (Ryan & Louie, 2007; King, 2013; Zhu, 2021). Defensive accounts of passivity can obscure how such patterns may disadvantage CHC students in globalised academic environments that reward visible participation and initiative.

These studies suggest that passivity is best understood not as a learner deficit, but as the product of historically sedimented classroom practices and evaluative norms that privilege restraint over initiative.

2.3.7 Emerging Themes and Alternative Readings of Agency

As noted earlier in this chapter, I approach student agency as a relational, ecological achievement rather than a fixed inner trait, emerging from the interplay between learners' histories, present resources, and future-oriented projects within particular structural and cultural conditions (Biesta & Tedder, 2007; Priestley et al., 2015). The alternative readings discussed in this subsection build on that view by highlighting how CHC learners exercise agency not only through visible participation but also through subtle forms of adaptation, negotiation, and quiet resistance to existing norms. This relational conception of agency provides the basis for the CHAT-informed notion of transformative agency developed in Chapter 3, where agency is examined in terms of how students begin to question, reconfigure, and redesign elements of the academic reading activity system.

Alongside the six dominant themes explored in Sections 2.3.1 to 2.3.6, within the same corpus of 57 reviewed studies, I coded **five supplementary themes** that broaden how learner agency in Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) contexts can be understood. While these themes appear in a smaller subset of the literature, they provide valuable insights into how students actively negotiate constraints, form relationships, and adapt to institutional and intercultural demands.

Agency through cultural adaptation is identified in six papers (Aizawa & Rose, 2020; Gao, 2010; Li, 2005; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Zhu, 2021).

These studies describe how CHC students construct hybrid academic identities, selectively blending Confucian norms with Western expectations. This theme most closely links to Section 2.3.5 on group conformity and social harmony, showing that students are not simply conforming, but strategically navigating multiple cultural frameworks. For example, Zhu (2021) illustrate how East Asian students adjust their participation styles based on perceived classroom norms, while Tweed and Lehman (2002) argue that Confucian learners adapt to Western classrooms by reframing effort, hierarchy, and learning goals in culturally meaningful ways.

Relational agency and pedagogical mediation, present in four studies (Chan, 1999; Hino, 2012; Kim & Park, 2017; Smith & Hu, 2013). These works demonstrate that agency is often shaped by interpersonal trust, teacher encouragement, and relational dynamics—particularly in contexts where hierarchy or perceived passivity (Sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.8) might otherwise discourage self-expression. Rather than treating deference as a fixed cultural trait, these studies show how teacher behaviours and classroom relationships can either constrain or activate student voice and autonomy.

Language-based inhibition to agency emerges as a third supplementary theme in four papers (Jiang et al., 2021; King, 2013; Wicking, 2019; Yashima, 2002). These studies argue that silence or hesitation in EMI classrooms is frequently driven by linguistic insecurity rather than cultural reticence. This theme adds nuance to Sections 2.3.6 and 2.3.8 on fear of failure and passivity, revealing how students may withdraw from participation not due to disengagement, but due to anxiety about making mistakes in a second language or being publicly evaluated.

The moral dimensions of learning motivation, identified in five studies (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Li, 2005; Tanaka, 2018; Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Zhu, 2021). These works reinforce and deepen Section 2.3.7 on diligence and incremental learning by showing that academic perseverance is often framed not merely as a personal attribute, but as a moral responsibility to family, teachers, or community. This ethical framing helps explain why students may sustain effort even in environments that offer limited opportunities for autonomy or self-direction.

Systemic constraints on agency are discussed in four studies (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Gao, 2010; Takei, 2008; Tanaka, 2018). These analyses highlight how structural

features—such as rigid curricula, high-stakes examination systems, and institutional routines—can severely limit learner initiative. This theme directly complements Sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.6, where authority structures and performance pressures restrict opportunities for students to act agentively, regardless of individual motivation or effort.

These supplementary themes help explain how students work within and around the constraints described earlier. They show that agency in CHC contexts is often enacted indirectly: through careful cultural adaptation, through relationships with teachers, through managing linguistic risk, and through moral commitments that sustain effort even in restrictive systems. Read this way, learner agency is not absent but situational and negotiated, shaped by the interaction between institutional structures, pedagogical practices, and students' own interpretations of what it means to be a “good learner.” This perspective moves the discussion beyond simple deficit framings and sets up the shift in Section 2.4 toward educational processes that can create more favourable conditions for agency to be expressed and developed.

2.3.8 Summary

Section 2.3 has reviewed 57 academic studies examining how learner agency among students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) is shaped, constrained, and enacted, particularly in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and Western higher education contexts. Across Sections 2.3.1 to 2.3.7, the literature consistently highlights the influence of cultural norms such as deference to authority, preference for structured learning, concern for group harmony, and the moral framing of diligence. These orientations are frequently shown to limit spontaneous participation and critical dialogue, especially where Western pedagogical assumptions predominate.

At the same time, much of this literature tends to essentialise these patterns, portraying CHC learners as uniformly passive or risk-averse. Such accounts often underplay how students negotiate—and at times rework—these dispositions in response to institutional arrangements and interpersonal conditions, as already discussed in Sections 2.3.1–2.3.6. The supplementary themes identified in Section 2.3.7, particularly agency through cultural adaptation (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Zhu, 2021) and relational agency (Chan, 1999; Smith & Hu, 2013), offer a more dynamic account. They show that agency is not

absent but contingent, emerging through interaction, support, and opportunities for meaningful participation.

Building on these insights, this thesis reframes impediments to learner agency not as essentialised cultural traits but as historically and socially situated contradictions within the academic reading activity system. This reframing directly informs the research questions. If apparent passivity is understood as a response to systemic tensions rather than fixed learner characteristics, the first analytical task is to identify the contradictions embedded in the inherited curriculum and how students experience them (RQ1).

Similarly, if agency is conceived as relational and contingent—emerging through access to tools, trust, and participatory space—it becomes necessary to examine how CHC students express agency when positioned as co-designers rather than recipients of pedagogy (RQ2). Finally, if agency is enacted collectively rather than individually, analysis must extend beyond momentary participation to the longer-term effects of student-led innovations on curricular practices and participation patterns (RQ3).

Together, these questions translate the insights of this chapter into an activity-theoretical agenda, shifting the focus from cultural explanation to transformation at the level of practice. They establish a stepwise logic for the study: from identifying contradictions, to tracing manifestations of transformative agency (Haapasaari et al., 2016), to examining how student-led redesign reshapes the tools and practices of EMI/EAP education over time. This logic underpins the design of the Change Laboratory interventions and frames the analysis in the chapters that follow.

2.4 Educational processes that enhance Learner Agency in CHC students

Drawing on the thematic analysis of the 57 reviewed studies, I identified five educational processes that the literature associates with the development of learner agency among CHC students in English-medium instruction (EMI) settings. These processes span both classroom pedagogy and wider institutional arrangements. Table 2.2 summarises each theme, indicating the number of studies in which it appears and outlining its contribution to supporting agency.

Where Section 2.3 examined how agency is constrained, this section turns to practices that enable it. The reviewed studies show that approaches such as dialogic pedagogy, scaffolded participation, relational support, curricular flexibility, and intercultural collaboration can create conditions in which students begin to act agentively. These processes prefigure the dynamics analysed in the Findings and Discussion chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), where tensions within the academic reading curriculum were not only identified but mediated through collaborative redesign. They also establish a conceptual link to the Conclusion (Chapter 7), in which students' emerging transformative agency is interpreted as arising from some of the factors described in these pedagogical and institutional supports.

Table 2-2 Key Educational Processes Supporting Learner Agency among CHC Students

| Theme | Number of papers | Description |
|---|-------------------------|--|
| Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and the Validation of Diverse Motivational Frameworks | 24 | Effective agency-building pedagogy for CHC students begins by recognising and integrating culturally embedded motivations such as filial piety, diligence, and moral cultivation. |
| Constructivist and Reflective Learning Processes for Agency Development | 22 | Constructivist approaches and structured reflection foster agency by aligning inquiry-based learning with Confucian ideals of incremental mastery and self-cultivation. |
| Facilitating Active Participation through Culturally Sensitive Communication Strategies | 13 | Culturally sensitive communication strategies promote active classroom engagement by lowering risk and reframing participation as collaborative rather than competitive. |
| Clarifying Pedagogical Expectations to Foster Learner Autonomy | 15 | Clear articulation of academic expectations reduces uncertainty, encourages risk-taking, and scaffolds CHC students' transition toward independent learning and critical engagement. |
| Institutional Structures and the Systemic Support of Learner Agency | 19 | Systemic reforms that decentralise authority and promote flexible, student-led initiatives are essential to fostering autonomy and self-regulation among CHC learners. |

2.4.1 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Twenty-four of the 57 reviewed studies examine how culturally responsive pedagogy—particularly the validation of diverse motivational frameworks—can support learner agency among students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC). A central claim across this literature is that agency is more likely to emerge when pedagogical practices explicitly recognise the cultural logics shaping students’ learning orientations.

While many Western motivation theories foreground individualised, intrinsic goals, Confucian traditions situate academic striving within broader familial, societal, and moral frameworks (Li, 2005; Watkins & Biggs, 1996). Li (2005) shows that CHC students frequently articulate educational aspirations in terms of family responsibility and social obligation, while Watkins and Biggs (1996) argue that achievement is understood less as self-fulfilment than as a moral commitment to collective values. When these motivational structures are acknowledged, pedagogical design can align more closely with students’ value systems, supporting sustained engagement and forms of autonomy that do not depend on individualism alone.

Several studies emphasise the moral framing of academic effort. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) note that CHC students often interpret success as evidence of character and diligence rather than innate ability. Ng and Wang (2023) report that pedagogical practices recognising students’ relational obligations are associated with increased agency and proactive engagement, while Tanaka (2018) suggests that acknowledging these pressures can reduce anxiety and enable more authentic participation. Across this

work, education is consistently framed as morally purposeful rather than merely instrumental (Li, 2005; Wing On, 1996; Wang, 2019). Studies in EMI contexts similarly indicate that recognising diligence and perseverance as legitimate motivations enhances engagement and adjustment to new academic demands (Wen & Clément, 2003; Kawasaki, 2016; Rose & McKinley, 2018; Yamada, 2015; Yi, 2016).

Culturally responsive pedagogy is also linked to the development of critical engagement over time. Tweed and Lehman (2002) argue that incremental mastery can coexist with inquiry-based learning when appropriately framed, while Watkins and Biggs (1996) highlight the role of culturally grounded scaffolding in supporting the gradual internalisation of autonomy. King (2013) and Takei (2008) caution that classroom silence should not be read as disengagement, but as a culturally shaped mode of respectful participation, underscoring the need for participation frameworks sensitive to differing communicative norms

Beyond classroom practice, several authors stress the importance of institutional recognition. Marginson (2014) and Williams (2016) argue that student self-formation depends in part on whether institutional structures respect diverse motivational orientations. Empirical studies show that when EMI teachers and programmes acknowledge culturally rooted learning approaches, students are more likely to express agency and sustain participation (Zhu, 2021; Wang, 2019; Yang, 2015).

Conversely, neglecting these motivational frameworks risks alienating learners. Smith and Hu (2013) and Shi (2006) critique EMI models that marginalise CHC learning orientations, arguing that such practices suppress engagement and agency. In contrast, culturally responsive environments are associated with deeper intellectual investment and greater willingness to take academic risks (Ota & Giles, 2013; Tani, 2005; Yang & Gosling, 2014).

Despite these contributions, significant limitations remain. Much of the literature interprets student motivation from the perspective of teachers, administrators, or Western-trained researchers, positioning learners primarily as objects of analysis rather than as participants in shaping agency-enabling environments (Smith & Hu, 2013; Shi, 2006; Rose & McKinley, 2018). Moreover, while many studies affirm the value of CHC motivational systems (Li, 2005; Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Tweed & Lehman,

2002), few move beyond classroom-level accommodation to consider structural changes that would enable students to participate in curriculum design or institutional decision-making (Marginson, 2014). As a result, culturally responsive pedagogy is often framed as something delivered to students rather than co-constructed with them.

This limitation directly informs the present study's focus on student participation in curriculum redesign and its examination of how culturally grounded motivations are articulated, negotiated, and mobilised by students within Change Laboratory interventions.

2.4.2 Constructivist and Reflective Learning Processes

Twenty-three of the 57 reviewed studies examine the role of constructivist and reflective learning processes in fostering learner agency among students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC). Of these, twenty focus directly on constructivist pedagogy, reflective practice, or culturally aligned approaches to autonomy, while two offer more critical perspectives on adapting such models within EMI contexts. Together, this body of work shows how structured inquiry, scaffolded reflection, and culturally meaningful conceptions of learning—including the Confucian principle of self-cultivation—can support a shift from receptive participation to agentic engagement.

Across the literature, constructivist approaches are associated with the development of agency insofar as they position learners as active participants in knowledge construction rather than as passive recipients. Through inquiry, collaboration, and scaffolded engagement, these models align with CHC values of perseverance and incremental mastery, rather than standing in opposition to them (Savery, 2006; Smith & Hu, 2013).

Reflective practice plays a central role in this transition. Smith and Hu (2013) argue that structured reflection supports CHC students' movement from surface to deeper forms of learning in EMI settings, while Lin (2016) demonstrates that CLIL-based inquiry can foster critical engagement without generating cultural dissonance. Reid (2021) similarly shows that transmedia and inquiry-oriented approaches promote bicultural forms of learning and self-direction.

Several studies link reflective learning explicitly to the Confucian ideal of self-cultivation. Rooted in the pursuit of moral, intellectual, and personal development (Kim, 2017), self-cultivation resonates strongly with CHC learners and can support intrinsic motivation when acknowledged pedagogically. Kim (2017) and Li (2005) show that academic effort is often understood as fulfilling broader ethical responsibilities, while Cortazzi and Jin (1996) and Watkins and Biggs (1996) highlight the close association between perseverance, mastery, and moral development. Zhu (2021) further notes that integrating these principles into Western academic contexts can help students reconcile cultural tensions and develop autonomy without abandoning core values.

Empirical research supports the effectiveness of constructivist approaches when they are carefully scaffolded. Wang (2006) advocates sociocultural learning activities that position learners as co-constructors of meaning, while studies in study-abroad contexts indicate that reflective engagement can foster autonomy and identity development (Tanaka, 2018; Wang, 2019; Williams, 2016; Yi, 2016). In classroom settings, collaborative and low-risk interactional tasks are shown to support the development of academic voice and participation (King, 2013; Takei, 2008), particularly when speaking opportunities are structured and scaffolded (Yashima, 2002; Tani, 2005).

At the same time, several authors caution that constructivist and reflective pedagogies are not inherently agency-enhancing. Shi (2006) and Murray and Xu (2019) note that EMI environments often demand immediate criticality without sufficient scaffolding, undermining reflective engagement. Marginson (2014) and Zhu (2021) argue that constructivist models must be adapted to sociocultural contexts rather than transplanted wholesale from Western traditions.

CLIL offers a particularly structured form of constructivist pedagogy, combining inquiry-driven content learning with language development (Lin, 2016). Research suggests that when CLIL tasks are culturally sensitive and appropriately scaffolded, CHC students demonstrate increased motivation, participation, and autonomy (Yang, 2015; Yang & Gosling, 2014). My own research examines how CLIL reframes critical thinking and problem-solving as extensions of diligence and incremental mastery rather than as culturally alien practices (Reid, 2021).

Despite broad endorsement of constructivist and reflective approaches, much of the literature remains teacher-centred, treating reflection as something designed *for* students rather than *with* them (Smith & Hu, 2013; Murray & Xu, 2019). As a result, limited attention is paid to students' involvement in shaping reflective processes or translating reflective insights into curricular change. A more participatory orientation—one that positions learners as co-creators of knowledge and practices—may therefore be necessary to realise the transformative potential of constructivist pedagogy in EMI and EAP settings (Marginson, 2014; Zhu, 2021).

2.4.3 Culturally Sensitive Communication Strategies

This section draws on sixteen studies from the reviewed literature. Thirteen focus directly on facilitating active participation among students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC), while three extend the discussion to bicultural communicative flexibility and the development of learner agency across cultural frames.

Across this literature, facilitating participation is shown to depend on recognising how culturally patterned communication norms shape classroom behaviour. In CHC contexts, practices such as silence, minimal questioning, and risk-avoidance often reflect commitments to harmony, deference to authority, and collective face-saving rather than disengagement or lack of competence (King, 2013; Yashima, 2002). Pedagogical approaches that frame communication as collaborative rather than competitive are therefore more likely to support agency in academic interaction (Takei, 2008; Wen & Clément, 2003).

Empirical studies consistently emphasise the contextual nature of participation. King (2013) describes silence in Japanese university classrooms as a culturally meaningful practice aimed at maintaining social cohesion, while Yashima (2002) shows that willingness to communicate is highly contingent on perceived interpersonal risk. Both studies highlight the value of culturally sensitive scaffolds—such as structured turn-taking, small-group discussion, and guided preparation—in creating psychologically safer spaces for verbal engagement.

Classroom-based research supports this interpretation. Tani (2005) argues that apparent passivity among Asian students often reflects classroom formats that privilege overt verbal contribution while overlooking listening and reflective engagement. Shi (2006) similarly demonstrates that unscaffolded demands for critique or debate can increase anxiety rather than foster agency. In contrast, low-risk formats such as paired dialogue, peer feedback, and scaffolded presentations are shown to enhance participation and confidence (Takei, 2008; King, 2013).

Several studies stress the importance of making participation norms explicit. Smith and Hu (2013) note that EMI classrooms frequently operate on unspoken Western assumptions about assertiveness and debate, which can disadvantage CHC students who associate these behaviours with disrespect. Culturally sensitive instructors therefore reframe participation as a contribution to collective understanding rather than a challenge to authority, enabling students to engage without violating deeply held norms (Wen & Clément, 2003; Zhu, 2021).

Evidence from study-abroad contexts reinforces these findings. Wang (2019) and Yang (2015) show that CHC students' engagement increases when educators and peers recognise culturally shaped participation styles, while Yi (2016) observes that willingness to speak develops more readily when academic risk-taking is introduced gradually rather than expected immediately.

Attention to communication also extends beyond speech. Ota and Giles (2013) emphasise the role of non-verbal engagement, attentive listening, and relational communication in CHC students' construction of identity and agency. These practices challenge narrow definitions of participation that equate agency solely with verbal output.

Despite growing recognition of these dynamics, important limitations remain. Murray and Xu (2019) observe that many EMI classrooms continue to rely on participation models that prioritise immediate verbal contribution as the primary indicator of active learning, overlooking the sociocultural negotiation involved in CHC students' engagement. Moreover, while culturally sensitive scaffolding can lower initial barriers to participation, it risks reifying fixed cultural categories if not accompanied by opportunities for broader communicative development.

Several scholars therefore argue that the longer-term goal should be the development of bicultural communicative flexibility. Tweed and Lehman (2002) and Ryan and Louie (2007) suggest that agency is best supported when learners are able to move between Confucian and Socratic communicative norms as contexts demand. Marginson (2014) similarly frames this process as one of self-formation, in which students actively reshape their communicative repertoires rather than merely adapting to externally imposed expectations.

Overall, this body of literature highlights a tension between short-term participation support and longer-term agency development. While culturally sensitive communication strategies can reduce risk and enable initial engagement, relatively little attention is paid to how students themselves reflect on, negotiate, or transform participation norms over time. Learners are therefore often positioned as recipients of supportive pedagogy rather than as contributors to the redesign of communicative practices. Addressing this limitation, the present study examines how CHC students, when afforded participatory space, begin to articulate, contest, and reshape the communicative conditions of their own learning environments.

2.4.4 Clarifying Pedagogical Expectations

Drawing on fifteen studies, this section examines how clarity in pedagogical expectations can support learner agency among CHC students, with several additional studies extending this discussion to EMI contexts.

Across the literature, CHC learners are shown to value explicit task requirements, transparent assessment criteria, and structured feedback. In educational contexts shaped by Confucian traditions, ambiguity around expectations frequently generates anxiety, surface learning strategies, and risk-avoidance (Wicking, 2019; Rose & McKinley, 2018). Wicking (2019) reports that Japanese university students often express uncertainty about performance standards in EMI programmes, while Rose and McKinley (2018) similarly show that unclear instructional goals undermine confidence and willingness to participate.

Clear task guidelines and assessment criteria therefore function as important scaffolds for learner initiative. Smith and Hu (2013) argue that explicit communication of expectations reduces the interpretive burden associated with unfamiliar academic norms, enabling more independent engagement. Their findings suggest that modelling task processes, clarifying pedagogical rationales, and making participation norms explicit can support reflective risk-taking. Aizawa and Rose (2020) likewise show that in Japanese EMI classrooms, clearly framing the purpose of discussion tasks, expected contributions, and assessment links encourages agentic participation. Together, these studies indicate that agency is constrained less by structure itself than by uncertainty about how structure operates within unfamiliar academic systems.

The importance of clarity extends to feedback practices. Savery (2006) and Shi (2006) emphasise that regular, constructive feedback legitimises academic risk-taking by framing learning as incremental, while Lin (2016) shows that detailed formative feedback in CLIL and EMI contexts supports self-monitoring and autonomy.

Research on classroom interaction further reinforces this point. King (2013) and Takei (2008) demonstrate that CHC students' reluctance to participate verbally often reflects uncertainty about participation norms rather than limited ability. When interaction is framed as collaborative and goal-oriented, hesitation is reduced and engagement increases, challenging deficit interpretations of silence.

Evidence from study-abroad contexts supports these findings. Wang (2019) and Yi (2016) report greater learner autonomy where host institutions communicate performance criteria, participation expectations, and feedback processes explicitly. In the absence of such scaffolding, students tend to revert to compliance-oriented strategies associated with more hierarchical educational systems.

At the same time, the literature identifies clear limits to clarity as a basis for agency. Murray and Xu (2019) caution that many EMI programmes equate transparency with information provision, offering detailed instructions without supporting students to internalise or adapt academic norms. Marginson (2014) similarly warns that clarity alone may reinforce compliance rather than critical autonomy.

Some scholars further note that over-specification can inhibit agency if structure is not progressively withdrawn. Tweed and Lehman (2002) and Shi (2006) argue that sustained reliance on tightly prescribed guidance risks entrenching dependency unless learners are encouraged to tolerate ambiguity and exercise independent judgement. From this perspective, clarity is a necessary but insufficient condition for agency.

Overall, the reviewed literature suggests that while transparent expectations reduce anxiety and enable participation, they do not in themselves support students in questioning or reshaping academic practices. This limitation informs the present study's focus on how CHC students move beyond compliance with clearly articulated rules to actively interrogate and redesign pedagogical expectations within their learning environment.

2.4.5 Institutional Structures

This section draws on nineteen studies examining how institutional structures enable or constrain learner agency among students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC). Several additional studies extend this analysis by critically exploring how systemic features of educational environments shape students' capacity for autonomy in EMI and internationalised contexts.

While much research on agency focuses on classroom interaction, institutional arrangements—including assessment systems, curriculum design, and student support structures—form the broader conditions within which agency is either cultivated or constrained. For CHC students, whose educational experiences are shaped by norms of obedience to authority, exam-oriented memorisation, fear of failure, and diligence (Sections 2.3.1, 2.3.2, 2.3.4, and 2.3.5), institutional structures are often experienced as fixed and non-negotiable. As a result, agency is typically conceptualised as an individual capacity exercised within given constraints, rather than as something that might be collectively reshaped through engagement with those constraints.

Several studies illustrate how misalignment at the institutional level limits agency. Aizawa and Rose (2019) show that Japan's top-down EMI policies frequently create a disconnect between institutional goals and classroom realities. Although English-taught

programmes are promoted as fostering global competence, supporting structures such as staff development, language scaffolding, and flexible assessment are often underdeveloped, placing the burden of adaptation on students. In contrast, Gao (2010) demonstrates that decentralised structures—including self-access centres, project-based assessment, and independent modules—support learner ownership when paired with mentoring and peer collaboration.

Research within Japanese contexts similarly highlights the role of institutional design. Takei (2008) notes that while schooling structures tend to reinforce conformity, decentralised initiatives such as student-led activities signal institutional support for agency. Tanaka (2018) argues that high-stakes testing regimes undermine confidence and autonomy, whereas reforms incorporating portfolio assessment, wellbeing initiatives, and student voice can restore learner agency.

Studies of EMI programmes further show that institutional environments which decentralise authority and frame students as contributors rather than recipients are more conducive to agency development. Galloway and Rose (2015) report that programmes offering academic choice and interdisciplinary exploration foster greater learner ownership, while exam-centred systems are consistently shown to suppress risk-taking and critical engagement (Fukuzawa & LeTendre, 2001; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Wen & Clément, 2003). However, these studies rarely examine how students themselves might participate in questioning or redesigning institutional arrangements.

Evidence from study-abroad contexts reinforces the importance of institutional flexibility. Wang (2019), Yi (2016), and Williams (2016) find that CHC students in decentralised, student-centred institutions demonstrate higher levels of autonomy and self-regulation than those in more hierarchical systems. Support structures such as transparent advising, mentoring, and peer-led communities also play a mediating role. Ota and Giles (2013) argue that relational support mechanisms help CHC students navigate unfamiliar academic environments with greater confidence, underscoring that agency is institutionally and relationally mediated rather than purely individual.

At the same time, several authors caution against uncritical celebrations of flexibility. Marginson (2014) warns that autonomy may be experienced as abandonment when institutional mediation is absent, while Murray and Xu (2019) note that students

transitioning from highly structured systems require explicit developmental support to manage independent learning demands. Rose and McKinley (2018) further critique neoliberal models of agency that frame students as self-responsibilised individuals, obscuring the collective and structural conditions under which agency can meaningfully emerge.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that institutional structures powerfully shape the conditions for learner agency, yet it also reveals a persistent limitation. Agency is overwhelmingly treated as something students exercise within pre-given systems, rather than through engagement with or transformation of those systems. While decentralisation, flexibility, and support are repeatedly identified as enabling conditions, few studies examine how CHC students might participate in reshaping institutional practices themselves. This limitation directly informs the present study, which investigates how learners engage with, question, and redesign aspects of their educational environment during the Change Laboratory interventions.

2.4.6 Summary

The reviewed literature identifies five educational processes that support learner agency among students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC): culturally responsive pedagogy, constructivist and reflective learning, culturally sensitive communication strategies, clear pedagogical expectations, and institutional structures that scaffold autonomy.

Culturally responsive pedagogy that recognises learners' orientations towards obedience to authority, memorisation, group conformity, fear of failure, and diligence can support sustained engagement when these dispositions are acknowledged rather than treated as deficits. Constructivist and reflective approaches enable active knowledge-building, critical inquiry, and self-direction when culturally mediated. Communication strategies attuned to norms of silence, deference, and risk-avoidance facilitate gradual participation and confidence-building. Clear articulation of academic expectations reduces uncertainty and supports transitions towards autonomy. At the institutional level, flexible curricula, decentralised authority, transparent assessment, and relational support systems create conditions in which agency can develop

progressively, whereas rigid, exam-driven structures tend to reinforce passivity and surface learning.

At the same time, the literature reveals recurring limitations in how agency is conceptualised and studied in EMI and EAP contexts. As noted in Sections 2.4.1–2.4.3, much of this work remains teacher-centred or observational, with agency inferred from participation patterns rather than examined through students' own analyses of their learning environments. Although culturally responsive pedagogy, clarity, and institutional flexibility are widely advocated, these are most often framed as adjustments made *for* students rather than practices co-designed *with* them.

A further limitation lies in the tendency to conceptualise agency as a linear progression towards Western models of autonomy. Even where obedience to authority, group conformity, diligence, or fear of failure are acknowledged as culturally embedded orientations, few studies examine how students actively negotiate these dispositions when institutional rules, assessment regimes, or curricular tools constrain participation. Similarly, institutional reforms are often evaluated in terms of policy intent rather than through close analysis of how students experience and respond to systemic contradictions in practice.

A growing body of work on Students as Partners (SaP) explicitly addresses this limitation by positioning students as co-creators of curricula, assessment, and pedagogical practice rather than as recipients of pre-designed interventions (Cook-Sather, 2006, 2014; Bovill, 2013; Healey, Flint, & Harrington, 2014; Matthews, 2017; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). SaP scholarship foregrounds relational pedagogy, shared responsibility, and dialogic negotiation of power between staff and students, and shows that structured opportunities for co-design can strengthen engagement and disrupt hierarchical assumptions about who is entitled to shape the curriculum. However, this work is rarely situated in research specifically focused on CHC students in English-medium instruction (EMI) settings, and it is only tangentially represented in the literature reviewed earlier in Section 2.4. For this reason, SaP appears here as a complementary but relatively minor strand in the review, introduced in this concluding section rather than developed as a major subsection. The present study therefore draws on SaP as a complementary frame for understanding students as curriculum co-designers, while extending it through a Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

perspective that foregrounds systemic contradictions, activity systems, and transformative agency in a Japanese CHC setting.

These limitations inform the design and focus of the present study. Rather than asking whether particular pedagogical strategies increase agency, the research questions examine how contradictions within the academic reading curriculum are surfaced, how CHC students articulate and enact transformative agency, and how student-led innovations reshape tools and practices over time. By positioning students as co-analysts and co-designers within a Change Laboratory framework, the study reframes agency not as an individual attribute to be cultivated, but as a collective, culturally situated, and developmentally mediated process.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how learner agency among students from Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) is shaped, constrained, and potentially expanded within English-Medium Instruction (EMI) and internationalised higher education contexts. Drawing on 57 reviewed studies, Section 2.3 analysed a set of recurrent cultural, institutional, and pedagogical factors that are shown to inhibit agency, including obedience to authority, reliance on memorisation, group conformity, fear of failure, and structured passivity. Although these orientations are frequently framed as learner deficits, the literature increasingly understands them as culturally and historically situated responses to specific educational conditions.

Section 2.4 shifted the focus from constraints to enabling conditions, identifying five educational processes associated with agency development: culturally responsive pedagogy, constructivist and reflective learning, culturally sensitive communication strategies, clarification of pedagogical expectations, and institutional structures that scaffold autonomy. Taken together, these processes foreground the importance of calibrated scaffolding, cultural mediation, and gradual transitions towards independent academic engagement. At the same time, the review reveals persistent limitations in the literature. Much existing work remains teacher-centred or observational, relies on linear and implicitly Western models of autonomy, and seldom examines CHC students as active participants in shaping the pedagogical and institutional conditions of their learning.

This thesis responds to these limitations by reconceptualising learner agency not as a fixed individual trait or an outcome of instructional inputs, but as an emergent, participatory process situated within evolving sociocultural activity systems. CHC students are positioned not merely as learners adapting to EMI environments, but as active researcher-interventionists who collaboratively identify contradictions within their academic reading course and propose transformative curricular changes. In line with Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, these contradictions are understood as systemic tensions within and between elements of the academic reading activity system, rather than as individual learner deficits, and thus become the primary analytic focus of the study. In doing so, the study demonstrates how pedagogical processes that support agency can themselves become objects of collective analysis and redesign. The research questions outlined in Section 1.6 follow directly from this critical synthesis and from this reconceptualisation of agency and curricular tensions as activity-theoretical contradictions. By centring students as agents of change within a structured yet expansive-learning environment, the study advances an account of learner agency as collective, developmental, and historically situated, contributing a re-framing of agency that moves beyond deficit explanations and individualised models of participation. Chapter 3 then elaborates the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory concepts that underpin this framing, while Chapters 4 and 5 show how these concepts are operationalised in the design and analysis of the two Change Laboratory interventions that invite students to surface and work on the contradictions identified here

Chapter 3: **Theoretical Framework**

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical framework that informs both the analysis and the intervention design in this thesis. It explains how Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provides the conceptual lens for examining the development of student agency, collaboration, and curriculum innovation within an English-Medium Instruction (EMI) context in Japan. The chapter establishes the theoretical foundations linking the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and the methodological approach developed in Chapter 4.

Section 3.2 outlines the study's ontological and epistemological assumptions and explains how these informed the choice of CHAT as the overarching framework. Section 3.3 briefly considers alternative theoretical perspectives that were examined but not adopted. Section 3.4 develops the central concepts of Activity Theory, including activity systems, contradictions, expansive learning, and double stimulation. Section 3.5 then connects these concepts to the design of the Change Laboratory (Engeström, 1987), showing how CHAT informs both the analytical framework and the intervention process.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

3.2.1 Ontological Position

This study adopts a dialectical materialist ontology, grounded in a monist view of reality understood as a single, material, and historically developing totality, constituted through human activity and characterised by tension, contradiction, and change. Rather than being fixed or stable, the world is continually in the process of becoming, with development emerging through dialectical processes over time (Tolman, 1981, in Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013, p. 30). Ontologically, this entails attending not only to existing activity structures but also to the transformative potential they contain.

This position provides the ontological foundation for Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which explains how human subjectivity is constituted within an objective, material world, develops through historically situated activity, and contributes to the transformation of that world (Engeström, 1987). Subjectivity is therefore treated not as internal or individual, but as an emergent property of collective, object-oriented activity. Following Vygotsky (1987), dialectical processes—particularly the internalisation and re-externalisation of cultural tools—are central to the development of rational and agentic individuals, whose growth is inseparable from the historical and cultural development of society (Wegerif, 2008).

Dialectical thinking thus requires attention to both historical conditions and possible futures, and to the sociocultural systems in which activity is embedded (Savina, 2000). This relational ontology frames EMI classrooms as historically and culturally situated sites of becoming, where contradictions between Western (Socratic) and Confucian-heritage scholarly habitus may generate new forms of agency and participation. Within this view of reality, knowledge is not neutral or merely representational, but emerges through social practice, dialogue, and contradiction. I therefore align with Marx's view that knowledge should not only interpret the world but also contribute to its transformation (Engels, 1946), a position reinforced by the classroom experiences outlined in Section 1.2.

3.2.2 Epistemological position

My epistemological position aligns with social constructionism, which understands knowledge as co-constructed through social interaction rather than individually accumulated. In this study, however, knowledge is conceived not only as negotiated meaning or shared interpretation, but as something produced through material change in collective activity. This position is informed by the teaching experiences described in Section 1.2, where the most consequential learning occurred when students did not merely reinterpret existing practices, but actively intervened in and redesigned them.

Knowledge is therefore treated as a developmental, practice-based process that emerges through dialogue, reflection, and collective action oriented towards change. As Schwandt (2014) argues, social constructionism views knowing as an active process in

which participants “invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience” and “continually test and modify them in the light of new experience” (p. 197). Building on this view, the present study assumes that such testing and modification are most epistemically productive when participants engage in transforming the material and organisational conditions of their own activity, rather than merely reflecting upon them. Change is thus treated not as an outcome of knowledge, but as a condition for its production.

The knowledge generated in this study is formative and transformative, focusing on how participants move from recognising contradictions within their activity to designing, implementing, and stabilising new forms of practice. Rather than producing static descriptions or abstract generalisations, the analysis in Chapter 5 traces developmental processes over time, examining both the emergence of agency during Change Laboratory sessions and the subsequent evolution of pedagogical practices.

Central to this analysis is the examination of contradictions within activity systems, understood as historically situated tensions between structures, tools, rules, and objects that drive development. Knowledge is generated through analysing processes of transformation—cycles of critique, experimentation, and consolidation—rather than through isolating variables detached from context. Across Interventions A and B, knowledge was produced *with* participants rather than *about* them, through their articulation of contradictions, redesign of pedagogical tools, and evaluation of newly established routines.

This resonates with Vygotsky’s (1978) conception of researcher-intervention, in which understanding emerges through participation in collective activity rather than detached observation. The interventionist orientation of the study is therefore not merely methodological but epistemological: it assumes that educational transformation can only be understood through engagement in processes of change.

This epistemological position aligns closely with Activity Theory, which situates learning within historically developing activity systems and treats contradictions as drivers of development. Through the co-design of seminars and workshops, students and teacher collaboratively generated knowledge about participation, assessment, and curriculum design by transforming the conditions under which these practices operated.

The resulting insights—into expansive learning, collective agency, and pedagogical redesign—are situated yet transferable, demonstrating not only what changed in these classrooms, but how change itself functioned as the basis for producing new knowledge. This stance underpins the formative-intervention methodology of the Change Laboratory developed in Chapter 4, where research and pedagogy converge in a continuous process of inquiry and becoming.

3.2.3 Reasons for Choosing Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

My dialectical materialist ontology and constructionist epistemology converge in their emphasis on transformation through mediated activity. As discussed in Section 1.2, my teaching has been situated at the intersection of Western and Confucian educational traditions, where tensions between teacher-led instruction and participatory learning are particularly pronounced. Examining these dynamics requires a theoretical framework capable of accounting for contradiction, development, and change within collective practice.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provides such a framework. As Bligh and Flood (2017) argue, CHAT explains how human activity develops through the mediation of tools, rules, and community relations, making it well suited to the analysis of curricular transformation. CHAT also underpins the Change Laboratory (Engeström, 1999; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013), the formative intervention methodology employed in this thesis and detailed in Chapter 4. In contrast to frameworks that prioritise stability or consensus, CHAT treats contradiction as a generative force, enabling the study to trace how participants identify tensions, collaboratively redesign tools, and enact change within a shared activity system.

In this thesis, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) operates as the overarching theoretical stance for analysing learner agency, curriculum co-design, and change within EMI EAP settings. Grounded in a dialectical materialist ontology and a constructionist, practice-based epistemology, CHAT enables me to conceptualise classrooms as historically developing activity systems in which contradictions mediate expansive learning and transformation. This stance positions student agency as emergent, collective, and structurally mediated rather than individually possessed, and

it informs both the design of the Change Laboratory intervention and the analytical approach taken in Chapters 5–7.

3.3 Other Frameworks Considered

I considered, but decided not to use for this work other theories of learning and co-construction of meaning before deciding on CHAT and the researcher interventionist methodology of the Change Laboratory.

3.3.1 Communities of Practice Theory (COP)

Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice (CoP) theory was among the first frameworks I considered when developing this study, largely because of its emphasis on participation and identity. CoP has been widely applied in EMI and EAP research to explain how learners acculturate into Western academic practices, adopting new ways of speaking, reasoning, and collaborating. Its concept of legitimate peripheral participation appeared particularly relevant for analysing how students might move from observation to fuller involvement in English-medium classrooms.

Despite these strengths, CoP proved insufficient for the aims of this project. As Engeström (2007) notes, the theory pays limited attention to the historical and systemic dimensions of practice. While it offers a compelling account of how newcomers integrate into existing communities, it provides little analytical leverage for examining how those communities themselves change. Because this research focuses on tensions between Confucian-heritage and Socratic scholarly traditions, and on students' capacity to act as agents of transformation rather than passive acculturators, a framework attentive to contradiction and development was required.

CoP is well suited to explaining processes of participation and belonging, but less equipped to account for collective redesign or systemic change. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) therefore offered a more appropriate theoretical lens, enabling analysis of how contradictions within shared activity drive collective development and give rise to new practices, including the Student-Led Seminar and Student-Led Workshop.

3.3.2 Action Research

Action Research was also considered as a potential framework, particularly given its close association with practitioner inquiry and its orientation towards practical improvement. Having previously engaged in reflective curriculum development, I was drawn to its emphasis on integrating theory and practice through iterative cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Manfra, 2019). At first glance, this appeared compatible with my interest in examining collaborative change within EMI contexts.

On closer examination, however, Action Research proved insufficient for analysing the developmental mechanisms central to this study. Although its participatory ethos aligned with my professional orientation, its tendency to prioritise consensus and incremental improvement limited its capacity to account for deeper forms of transformation. Action Research often privileges agreement over tension, whereas this project is concerned with how contradictions function as drivers of conceptual and practical change. Virkkunen (2006, p. 44) similarly argues that Action Research frequently produces localised adjustments rather than expansive, systemic learning.

For a study focused on how contradictions in EMI pedagogy become resources for collective transformation, this framework was therefore too limited. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), by contrast, provides the conceptual tools to examine transformation as a longitudinal, collective process, capturing how students and teachers co-construct knowledge, develop agency, and redesign curriculum through cycles of expansive learning.

3.4 Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) forms part of a cultural-historical approach to learning that understands human activity as socially mediated and historically developed. Emerging from Soviet psychology and the work of Vygotsky, Leontiev, Davydov, and Engeström (Engeström, 1987), CHAT builds on Marx's view that theory should function as a tool for social transformation rather than as a purely descriptive framework (Sannino, 2011a, p. 50). It therefore operates both as a theoretical lens for

analysing learning as a collective, developmental process and as a methodological framework for intervening in practice to generate change.

This makes CHAT particularly well suited to the present study, which examines how students and teachers collaboratively transform an English-Medium Instruction (EMI) curriculum through the identification and resolution of contradictions. The theory's emphasis on mediation, historicity, and collective activity aligns with the study's focus on expansive learning: the creation of new tools, routines, and identities through cycles of questioning, modelling, and implementation. CHAT thus underpins both the analysis of student discourse and artefacts in Chapters 5 and 6 and the formative-intervention design outlined in Chapter 4.

The sections that follow introduce the key concepts drawn on in this framework—Activity Theory, activity systems, contradictions, expansive learning, double stimulation, and the Change Laboratory methodology. Each subsection outlines the concept within the CHAT tradition and explains its relevance to the present study and its use in the analysis.

These CHAT concepts provide the theoretical frame for the analysis in Chapters 5–7, where I examine how contradictions, expansive learning, and manifestations of transformative agency unfold within the academic reading activity system.

3.4.1 Activity Theory

Activity Theory, developed by Leontiev (1978) and grounded in the sociocultural psychology of Lev Vygotsky (theoretical work of the 1920s–1930s; English translation 1978), conceptualises human development as a culturally and historically mediated process. It holds that human behaviour cannot be understood in isolation from the collective, object-oriented activities in which it is embedded. Building on Vygotsky's insight that tools and symbols mediate human action, Leontiev argued that the appropriate unit of analysis is neither the individual nor the mind, but **activity**: a socially and materially mediated system oriented towards an object that gives meaning and motive to participants' actions.

Within this framework, Leontiev distinguished three analytically related levels: **activity**, **action**, and **operation**. Activity refers to the broader, object-oriented system

through which participants pursue shared purposes within specific cultural and historical conditions. Actions are conscious, goal-directed processes oriented towards realising the object of activity, while operations are routinised or automatic behaviours shaped by the conditions under which actions are carried out. This hierarchical organisation situates observable behaviour within historically developed motives and collective purposes.

This relationship is represented schematically in Figure 3-1, which illustrates Leontiev’s model of the hierarchical structure of human activity.

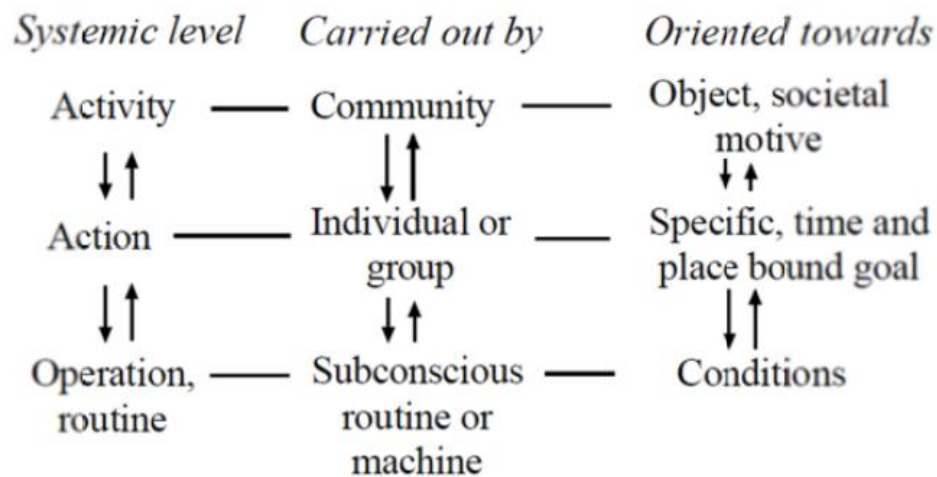


Figure 3.5. The hierarchical organization of human activity

Figure 3-1 The hierarchical organisation of human activity (adapted from Leontiev, 1978)

This hierarchy emphasises that what appears as an individual classroom action—such as asking a question or making a comment—is always embedded in, and given meaning by, the broader collective activity in which it occurs.

This distinction is central to the present study. The analysis does not focus on isolated classroom actions—such as answering questions, responding to peers, or completing

worksheets—but on the activities that organise and give meaning to those actions. These include participants’ efforts to develop and transform practices such as academic reading, discussion, and collaborative design.

It is at the level of activity that contradictions emerge and transformation becomes possible. Accordingly, the Change Laboratory interventions were oriented not towards improving discrete student actions, but towards re-mediating the activity of academic reading and discussion as a whole, enabling students to participate as co-designers of pedagogical tools and practices.

3.4.2 The Activity System

Building on the concept of activity introduced in Section 3.4.1, Engeström’s activity system model (1987) represents the internal structure of a single, collective activity. While Activity Theory conceptualises human behaviour as object-oriented and socially mediated, the activity system provides an analytic framework for examining how the components of an activity interact to produce both stability and change over time.

The activity system model (Figure 3-2) identifies six interrelated elements that constitute a collective, object-oriented activity:

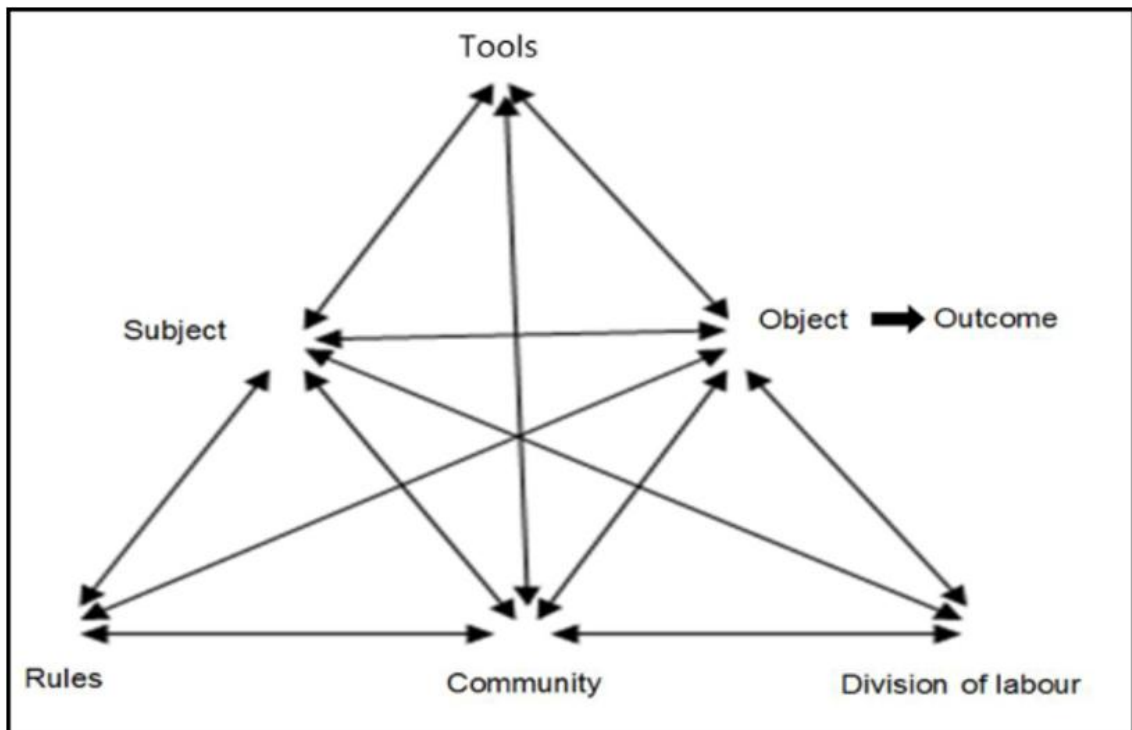


Figure 3-2 The structure of an activity system (adapted from Engeström, 1987)

Subject

The subject refers to the individual or group whose perspective is foregrounded in the analysis. In this study, this typically includes students and the teacher-researcher as participants in shared educational activity.

Object

The object denotes the problem-space or purpose that motivates the activity and gives it coherence. In educational settings, the object is not fixed but develops through participants' ongoing negotiation of what their shared activity is oriented towards. In this study, the object is treated as dynamic and historically evolving.

Tools (mediating artefacts)

Tools include the material and symbolic means through which the subject acts upon the object, such as texts, digital platforms, discussion protocols, or conceptual frameworks. Tools both enable and constrain action and carry historical and cultural meanings that shape how activity unfolds.

Rules

Rules refer to the explicit and implicit norms that regulate participation within the

activity. In educational contexts, these include assessment criteria, participation expectations, and institutional conventions that shape what forms of action are considered legitimate.

Community

Community encompasses all those who share the same object of activity. This includes students and teachers directly involved in classroom interaction, as well as broader institutional actors who influence how the activity is organised and evaluated.

Division of labour

Division of labour describes how roles, responsibilities, and authority are distributed within the community. This includes distinctions between roles such as teacher, facilitator, or discussant, and reflects underlying relations of power and expertise within the activity system.

In this study, the activity system functions as the primary unit of analysis. It provides a conceptual map for examining how actions, tools, roles, and rules interact within the activity of academic reading and discussion, and how attempts to transform that activity emerge over time. The specific configuration of each activity system is established empirically in later chapters rather than assumed in advance.

The analytic strength of the activity system model lies in its capacity to reveal contradictions between elements—such as between rules and object, or tools and division of labour—and to trace how these historically situated tensions become drivers of learning and change. Chapters 5 and 6 apply this framework to analyse how contradictions emerged across classroom and online contexts, how they were taken up by participants, and how they led to new configurations of tools, roles, and participation during the Change Laboratory interventions.

Together with Figure 3-1, Figure 3-2 provides the conceptual foundation for analysing the development of agency and pedagogical transformation in this study.

3.4.3 Contradictions

Within Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, contradictions are understood as the primary source of change and development in human activity (Engeström, 1987;

Engeström & Sannino, 2010). A contradiction is not simply a conflict or problem, but a historically produced structural tension within or between elements of an activity system. Such tensions arise because activity systems are layered over time and shaped by multiple social, cultural, and institutional demands.

Contradictions are central to CHAT because they destabilise existing ways of working and create conditions for development. When participants encounter persistent misalignments between motives, tools, rules, and practices, these tensions prompt questioning of taken-for-granted routines and open up possibilities for reorganisation. In this sense, contradictions function not as breakdowns but as developmental pressures through which new forms of activity can emerge.

In activity-theoretical terms, contradictions differ from surface-level dilemmas or situational tensions. While dilemmas often appear as expressions of uncertainty or conflict at the level of individual experience, contradictions are deeper, historically produced structural tensions within and between elements of an activity system that repeatedly generate such dilemmas over time (Engeström & Sannino, 2011). They are evidenced not only in what participants say, but in persistent misalignments between objects, tools, rules, division of labour, and outcomes that continue to reproduce problems even when individuals attempt workarounds.

Engeström (1987) distinguishes four analytically useful types of contradiction:

- **Primary contradictions** occur within a single element of the activity system, such as competing demands embedded in tools, rules, or the division of labour.
- **Secondary contradictions** arise between elements of the system, for example between the object of activity and the rules that regulate participation, or between tools and established practices.
- **Tertiary contradictions** emerge when a more advanced or alternative form of activity comes into tension with an existing one, creating friction between old and emerging practices.
- **Quaternary contradictions** occur between interacting activity systems, such as between classroom practices and wider institutional or assessment structures.

These categories are not developmental stages but analytical lenses for tracing how tensions are distributed across and between activity systems. They allow researchers to examine not only where contradictions appear, but how they are taken up, resisted, or transformed over time.

In this study, contradictions are treated as empirically observable moments in which participants articulate dissatisfaction, question existing arrangements, or propose alternative ways of organising activity. Chapters 5 and 6 apply this framework to analyse how contradictions in the academic reading curriculum were surfaced during the Change Laboratory interventions and how they became resources for collective reflection, tool redesign, and pedagogical change. Chapter 4 outlines how contradictions were identified and traced methodologically. The recurrent misalignments identified in the literature review (Chapter 2) are thus conceptualised here as systemic contradictions in the academic reading activity system and used to guide the design and analysis of the two interventions

I therefore treated as contradictions only those patterns that recurred across data sources and sessions and that could be mapped onto enduring misalignments in the academic reading activity system, rather than one-off disagreements or momentary tensions.

3.4.4 Expansive learning

Expansive learning is a central concept in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) that explains how qualitative transformations in collective activity occur when existing practices can no longer resolve persistent contradictions (Engeström, 1987; Engeström & Sannino, 2010). It is not a theory of routine problem-solving, but of developmental change, accounting for shifts in the object, motive, and structure of an activity system.

In CHAT, contradictions do not automatically lead to expansive learning. Many are managed through minor adjustments that preserve existing arrangements. Expansive learning arises only when participants collectively reconceptualise the object of their activity—what they are doing and why—and, in doing so, reorganise the tools, rules, and division of labour that structure participation. At this point, the activity system itself becomes the object of change.

The concept builds on Vygotsky’s work on mediated action, first developed in the 1920s–30s and made widely available through later English translations (notably Vygotsky, 1978). Engeström extends Vygotsky’s principle of double stimulation beyond experimental settings to real-world activity systems. In expansive learning, contradictions function as first stimuli, while newly created conceptual or material tools act as second stimuli that enable participants to reorient their collective action (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

Engeström’s (1987) expansive learning cycle conceptualises this process as a series of interconnected learning actions rather than a linear sequence (see Figure 3-3).

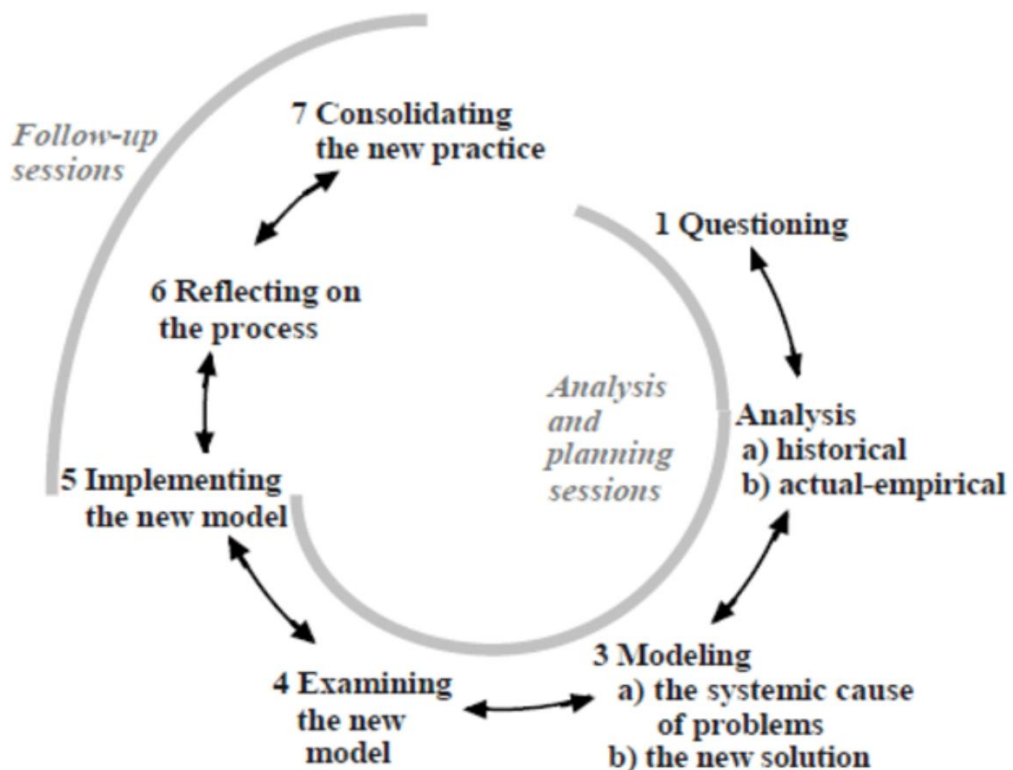


Figure 3-3 Expansive learning cycle adapted for this study (after Engeström, 1987; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013)

In this study, the analysis phase is analytically divided into historical and actual–empirical analysis to reflect how contradictions were examined both developmentally and in situ. In the historical analysis, students and I reconstructed how the Academic Reading course and its participation norms had developed over time, drawing on

syllabus documents, assessment artefacts, and students' prior schooling experiences to map the inherited activity system. In the actual–empirical analysis, we examined concrete episodes from recent classes, survey responses, and Change Laboratory discussions to identify how these historically produced patterns manifested in current tools, rules, roles, and interactions.

The concrete mirror materials through which this historical and actual–empirical analysis was operationalised—including Learning Disposition Survey summaries, anonymised student feedback, classroom artefacts, and composite activity-system diagrams—are described and illustrated in Chapter 5 across the **report** subsections for Interventions A and B, beginning with Intervention A, Session 1 (Section 5.3.3) and recurring in subsequent session accounts. Within this study, these forms of analysis were organised through Engeström's expansive-learning cycle, which is conceptualised as a series of interconnected learning actions

1. **Questioning** existing practices and articulating dissatisfaction
2. **Analysing** contradictions historically and empirically
3. **Modelling** a new form of activity
4. **Examining** and refining the model
5. **Implementing** the new model in practice
6. **Reflecting and evaluating** the process and outcomes
7. **Consolidating** the new practice as a stabilised routine

This cycle moves dialectically from abstract critique to concrete reorganisation, with each phase generating new tensions and further learning. It therefore captures learning as a collective, developmental process rather than individual skill acquisition (Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

In the Change Laboratory sessions, these expansive-learning actions took the form of concrete classroom activities: early sessions focused on historically mapping the course and students' prior experiences, while later sessions centred on analysing current seminars and assessment practices, modelling and testing new tools, and consolidating revised routines in regular class time.

For the present study, expansive learning provides the conceptual framework for analysing how curriculum change emerged from within the activity system of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom. It explains how participants moved from identifying contradictions in academic reading practices to co-developing new tools and routines that redefined their collective work. Chapter 4 outlines how this cycle informed the intervention design, while Chapter 5 traces how expansive learning actions unfolded across the two Change Laboratory interventions.

3.4.5 Double stimulation

Double stimulation is a central concept in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and plays a key role in the Change Laboratory methodology used in this study. First formulated in Vygotsky's work on mediated action, and later elaborated within CHAT (Vygotsky, 1978; Engeström, 2007), the concept explains how individuals or groups come to act purposefully in situations characterised by uncertainty or tension through the use of mediating tools.

In Vygotsky's formulation, a **first stimulus** confronts participants with a problematic or contradictory situation that demands action but offers no clear solution. A **second stimulus** is a neutral artefact—material or conceptual—that participants appropriate in order to organise their response. Importantly, the second stimulus does not resolve the problem directly. Rather, it functions as a mediational resource through which participants restructure how they understand and act upon the situation. Development, in this sense, arises through the deliberate use of cultural tools that reshape participants' relationship to the problem, rather than through instruction imposed from outside (Vygotsky, 1978; Sannino, 2015).

Within the Change Laboratory, double stimulation is used deliberately to support expansive learning. Contradictions in existing practice function as first stimuli and are made available for collective scrutiny through *mirror data*, such as video excerpts, student artefacts, or survey responses. Participants then develop or adopt second stimuli—conceptual models, diagrams, shared planning tools—that allow them to reframe the situation and explore alternative ways of organising their activity

(Engeström, 2007). Through this process, groups move beyond problem identification towards the modelling, testing, and consolidation of new practices.

For the present study, double stimulation is crucial because it explains how participants move from critique to design. In the workshops described later, mirror data were used to surface tensions in established academic reading and discussion routines, while collaboratively developed second stimuli supported their reorganisation. Double stimulation thus structured the transition from analysis to pedagogical redesign that underpins the expansive learning process examined in Chapter 5.

The procedural sequencing of first stimulus, mirror data, and second stimulus is described in Section 4.2.2, and its empirical manifestations are analysed in the chapters that follow.

3.4.6 Transformative Agency

Within Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), *transformative agency* refers to participants' capacity to step beyond the given frame of activity, articulate alternative possibilities, and intervene deliberately in the transformation of their activity system. Although transformative agency often co-emerges with expansive learning in Change Laboratory interventions, it is treated here as an analytical concept in its own right.

Where expansive learning describes how an activity system develops through cycles of questioning, modelling, and implementation, transformative agency focuses on how participants *enact* those changes through discourse and action. It draws attention to the moment-by-moment ways in which individuals and groups begin to resist established routines, reframe problems, and take responsibility for shaping new practices.

Haapasaari, Engeström, and Kerosuo (2016) conceptualise transformative agency as a collective, situated process rather than an individual disposition. Agency is understood to emerge relationally, as participants move from compliance with existing arrangements toward co-authorship of change. From this perspective, agency becomes

visible not as an internal capacity, but through observable shifts in talk, positioning, and practical engagement.

Empirically, transformative agency can be identified through a set of recurring discursive manifestations, including:

- resisting existing routines or constraints;
 - criticising current practices;
 - explicating underlying causes or contradictions;
 - envisioning alternative forms of activity;
 - committing to new courses of action;
 - taking action to implement and stabilise change
- (Haapasaari et al., 2016).

In this study, transformative agency provides the primary analytical lens for examining how expansive learning is expressed in practice. The Change Laboratory offers the structural conditions for collective transformation, while transformative agency captures how that transformation is realised through participants' talk, decisions, and artefacts. In Chapters 5 and 6, these six manifestations are used to trace how students gradually moved from questioning established classroom norms to proposing, enacting, and consolidating new collaborative practices.

3.5 The Change Laboratory

The Change Laboratory (CL) is both a methodological and theoretical framework for analysing and developing collective work practices (Engeström, 2007; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Grounded in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), it is designed as a formative intervention that supports the analysis and transformation of activity systems through the identification of contradictions and the emergence of participants' transformative agency (Engeström, 2016).

In this thesis, change in the Change Laboratory is understood in line with expansive learning as the collective reorganisation of the activity system rather than as incremental improvement of individual performance. It involves participants moving from questioning existing practices, through modelling and testing new tools and routines, towards the stabilisation of a qualitatively different way of organising the academic reading course. Change is therefore traced empirically not only in students' talk, but in the emergence, adoption, and consolidation of new curricular tools, rules, and participation patterns across and beyond the two interventions.

Within the Change Laboratory, the mechanism of double stimulation plays a central role. It enables participants to externalise problems in their current practice, introduce mediating artefacts, and develop new conceptual tools for understanding and reorganising their activity (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). These tools support not only collective analysis but also participants' capacity to take initiative in shaping change.

Unlike many participatory research approaches, the Change Laboratory is explicitly developmental and dialectical (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013; Morselli, 2014). Learning and change are understood to arise from tensions internal to the activity system, rather than from solutions imposed from outside (Engeström, 2016). Participants are positioned as co-analysts and co-designers of their own practice. Through repeated cycles of analysis, modelling, and experimentation, they move from recognising contradictions to developing new forms of activity, while simultaneously enacting transformative agency in discourse and action (Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

Transformation within the Change Laboratory unfolds through the interplay of three closely related processes:

- **Analysing contradictions.**

Participants identify and examine tensions within and between elements of their activity system—for example, between institutional rules, pedagogical tools, and the aims of learning. These contradictions are treated not as problems to be eliminated, but as sources of development (Engeström, 2018).

- **Mediating through tools.**

Conceptual and material artefacts—such as diagrams, prompts, or collaboratively produced documents—are used to interpret experience, articulate

critique, and envision alternatives. These tools mediate reflection and support participants in exercising agency in relation to their activity (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

- **Transforming practice.**

Through expansive learning cycles, participants model, test, and refine new forms of activity, reshaping tools, roles, and divisions of labour. Transformation occurs as the object of activity is reconceptualised and new routines begin to stabilise, with participants taking increasing ownership of the change process (Engeström, 2016).

In this way, the Change Laboratory provides a practical structure for developmental research that combines the analytical strength of CHAT with participatory processes that foster collaboration, ownership, and the emergence of transformative agency (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). It therefore serves as the methodological bridge between the theoretical concepts introduced in this chapter—contradictions, expansive learning, double stimulation, and transformative agency—and the research design outlined in Chapter 4.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has established the theoretical foundations for the study. A dialectical materialist ontology and a social-constructionist epistemology (Section 3.2) motivate an interventionist stance in which knowledge is produced with participants through their engagement with contradictions in activity. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (Section 3.4) provides the conceptual toolkit: activity as the unit of analysis; the activity system as a model of its internal structure; contradictions as the generative source of development; double stimulation as the mechanism through which groups gain control over problems; and expansive learning as a theory of qualitative transformation in activity systems.

Building on this, the Change Laboratory (Section 3.5) is presented as the methodological bridge that operationalises these concepts in practice through collaborative analysis, tool-mediated modelling, and iterative testing. Finally,

transformative agency (Section 3.4.6) is specified as the analytic lens used in Chapters 5 and 6 to trace how participants voice and enact change through resisting, criticising, explicating, envisioning, committing, and taking action.

Together, these elements form a coherent framework for the empirical work that follows. Chapter 4 translates the theoretical commitments set out here into research design by detailing the workshop architecture, double-stimulation protocol, data sources, and analytic procedures used to examine expansive learning and transformative agency in the English-medium academic reading context.

Chapter 4: **Research Design**

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design used to examine how English-Medium Instruction (EMI) academic curriculum design can be reshaped through student–teacher collaboration. The study focuses on how Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) students negotiate the transition from teacher-centred Japanese secondary education to EMI university contexts that place greater emphasis on participation, discussion, and Socratic inquiry.

Building on the motivations established in Chapter 1, the review of CHC learning in Chapter 2, and the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 3, the Change Laboratory (CL) was selected as the methodological approach. Grounded in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), the CL enables participants to identify contradictions within their activity systems and to develop new practices through cycles of expansive learning (Engeström, 1996; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Rather than describing existing practice or advocating particular pedagogies, the CL is designed to support systemic change by positioning participants as co-researchers in the analysis and redesign of their own curriculum.

Two Change Laboratory cycles were conducted: Intervention A (2019, in person) and Intervention B (2020, conducted online in response to COVID-19). Each intervention comprised five two-hour sessions, supplemented by a preliminary survey, an orientation session, and a concluding focus group.

Section 4.2 introduces the methodology and intervention design. Section 4.3 addresses language and cultural considerations. Section 4.4 details data collection procedures, Section 4.5 outlines the analytic approach, Section 4.6 discusses ethical considerations, and Section 4.7 reflects on the study’s strengths and limitations.

4.2 The Change Laboratory

Section 3.5 introduced the Change Laboratory (CL) as a formative intervention methodology grounded in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and oriented toward collective learning through the analysis and transformation of activity systems. This section explains how the Change Laboratory was adapted and implemented in the present study.

The Change Laboratory was developed within the tradition of Developmental Work Research (DWR), a programme of interventionist research concerned with supporting collective transformation through historically informed analysis of work and learning practices (Engeström, 1987, 2007; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Within this tradition, formative interventions differ from experimental or design-based approaches in that they do not seek to test predefined solutions. Instead, participants are supported in identifying contradictions in their own activity and in developing new forms of practice through expansive learning (Engeström, 2011).

While CHAT is often used descriptively in higher education research, the Change Laboratory operationalises its principles by creating structured opportunities for participants to surface contradictions, introduce mediating tools, and collaboratively redesign their activity (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). It is therefore explicitly interventionist, positioning participants not as informants but as co-analysts and co-designers of change.

The choice of the Change Laboratory was informed by limitations in conventional curriculum evaluation practices in universities. End-of-course surveys are typically retrospective and administrative, while mid-semester feedback mechanisms are often constrained by power asymmetries—particularly in Confucian Heritage Culture contexts where open critique of teachers may be socially difficult. Opportunities for sustained, collective curriculum development are further limited by institutional rhythms and standardisation pressures. As a result, existing mechanisms frequently fail to support in-situ, developmental change.

By contrast, the Change Laboratory provides a structured, dialogic space in which students and teachers can jointly analyse tensions in curriculum practices and negotiate

change over time (Engeström, 1996; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). Rather than displacing Confucian-Heritage learning orientations, the approach allows valued practices to be examined, reinterpreted, and selectively reconfigured through collective inquiry (Sannino, 2016).

Change Laboratory interventions typically involve a series of sessions organised around phases of the expansive learning cycle, including questioning existing practices, analysing contradictions, modelling new solutions, testing them in practice, and consolidating emerging forms of activity (Engeström, Rantavuori, & Kerosuo, 2013). In this study, these phases functioned as an analytic and organisational framework rather than as a fixed procedural script.

Although the Change Laboratory has been widely applied in workplace and organisational research, its use in higher education remains relatively limited (Bligh & Flood, 2015). This study therefore adapts the method to an English-medium Academic Reading course in Japan, positioning students and the teacher-researcher as co-researchers engaged in analysing and transforming their shared educational activity system.

The design of the Change Laboratory interventions follows directly from the CHAT framework outlined in Chapter 3, operationalising contradictions, double stimulation, and expansive learning as guiding principles for structuring sessions and analysing change.

4.2.1 Designing the Change Laboratory interventions

Figure 4-1 illustrates the typical functional organisation of a Change Laboratory session, showing how mirror data, conceptual tools, and emerging models are brought into dialogue across past, present, and future orientations (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). The figure is used here as a conceptual template rather than a literal spatial arrangement; its elements were instantiated differently across the two interventions.

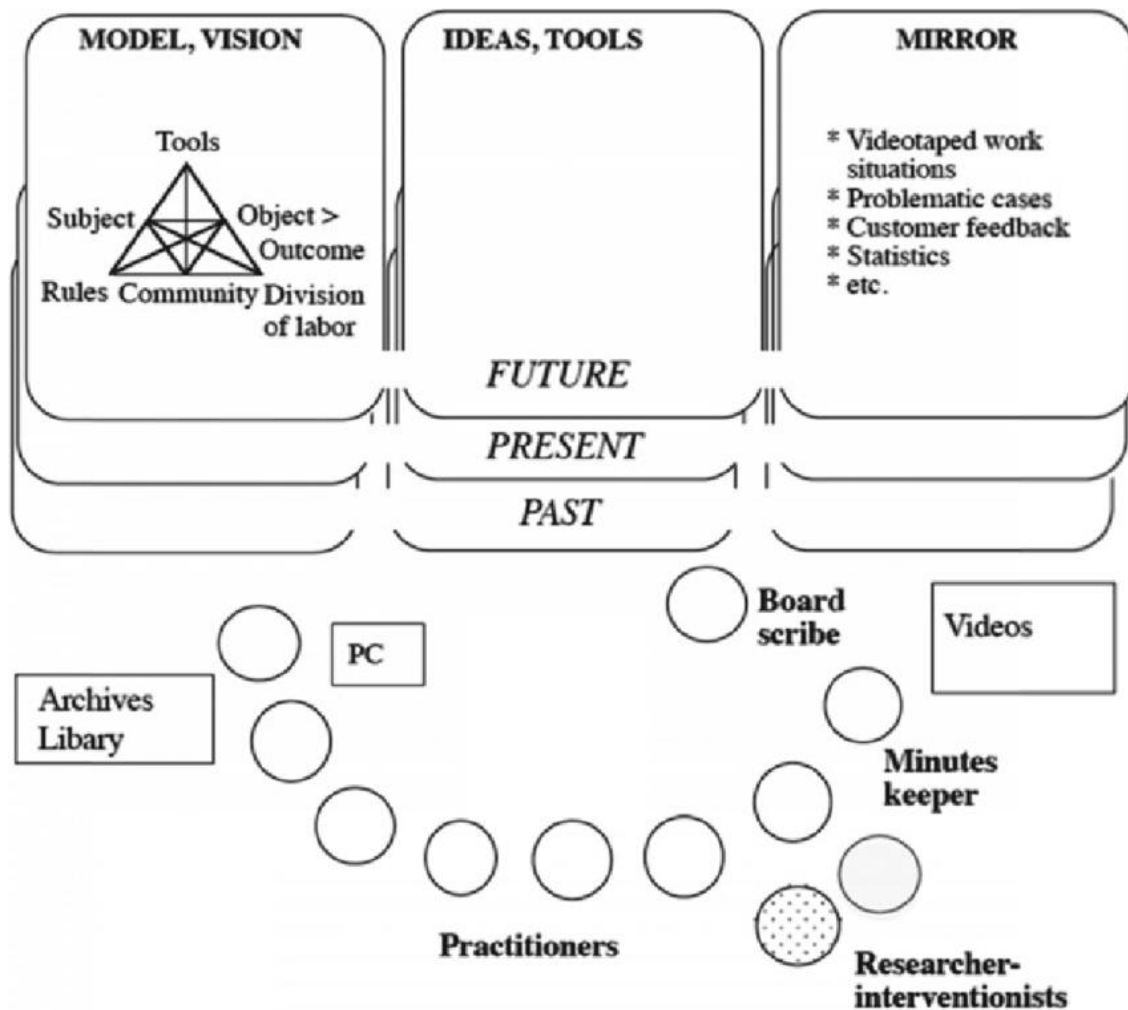


Figure 4-1 Typical Change Laboratory Session (Virkkunen & Newnham 2013, adapted from Engestrom et al. 1996, p.11)

The design aim was to create protected, sustained spaces for collective analysis and curriculum redesign, deliberately separated from the routines and time pressures of everyday teaching.

In **Intervention A (2019)**, this was achieved through fortnightly, two-hour face-to-face sessions held in a lecture room distinct from the regular teaching space. This spatial and temporal separation supported reflective distance from routine classroom interaction. Although sessions were conducted in person, shared digital tools were used to display mirror data, record emerging ideas, and develop artefacts. Session summaries, artefacts, and recordings were retained as documentation, serving both as analytical data and as cumulative resources for participants across sessions.

In **Intervention B (2020)**, the same design principles were maintained, but both teaching and Change Laboratory sessions were conducted online via Zoom. Sessions again took place fortnightly for two hours and relied more heavily on shared digital tools, including screen-sharing, collaborative documents, and breakout rooms to support collective analysis and modelling. As in Intervention A, documentation was preserved across sessions to support continuity. The primary difference between the interventions therefore lay not in the Change Laboratory structure itself, but in the extent to which interaction and teaching were digitally mediated.

Between both Change Laboratory sessions, newly designed tools and routines were trialled in ordinary weekly classes, allowing students to test and refine their ideas in vivo within the ongoing academic reading course. For example, revised Student-Led Seminar procedures, peer-feedback checklists, Student-Led Workshops, and the unseen-text examinations were implemented during regular lessons, and observations and reflections from these enactments were brought back into subsequent Change Laboratory workshops as mirror data for further analysis and redesign. This alternating rhythm—design and analysis in the Change Laboratory, implementation and refinement in regular classes—was central to how contradictions were worked on in practice.

For both interventions, the expansive learning cycle provided an organising framework rather than a rigid procedure. Table 4-1 outlines the expansive learning actions and summarises the corresponding student tasks, which are analysed in detail in Chapter 5.

Table 4-1 Expansive Learning Actions and Student Tasks

| Expansive learning action | Description of student tasks |
|---------------------------|--|
| Questioning | Students discussed what they found difficult or uncomfortable in current classroom practices, often using contrasts between Confucian-heritage and Socratic learning norms (e.g. harmony vs open disagreement, respect for authority vs student voice) to articulate concerns. |
| Historical analysis | Students reflected on their previous learning experiences and examined how the current academic reading programme had developed, including how Confucian-heritage and Socratic expectations had shaped participation, authority, and assessment practices over time. |
| Actual-empirical analysis | Students examined recent classroom experiences and concrete examples of interaction to identify tensions in how learning was currently organised. |

| Expansive learning action | Description of student tasks |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Modelling new practices | Students worked together to design alternative ways of organising seminars, discussion roles, feedback, or assessment tools. |
| Examining the model | Students discussed, tested, and revised proposed tools or formats to see whether they might work in practice. |
| Implementing | Students used the newly designed tools or formats in actual classes or workshops. |
| Reflecting and consolidating | Students reflected on what had changed, what worked or did not work, and which practices should be kept for future cohorts. |

4.2.2 Mirror Data and Second Stimulation

Each Change Laboratory workshop was organised around a double-stimulation protocol structured as a three-part sequence. Sessions began with a first stimulus that foregrounded a problem in current practice, typically through prompts or artefacts drawn from recent classroom experience. Mirror data were then introduced to make contradictions within the activity system visible to participants, for example through survey excerpts, teacher observations, or student-produced materials. Finally, second stimuli—conceptual or material tools—were used to support participants in interpreting these contradictions and modelling alternative practices.

Mirror data served to externalise and objectify tensions in the activity system, shifting them from individual concerns to shared objects of analysis. When combined with second stimuli—such as simplified activity-system diagrams, Bloom-guided question frames, checklists, or artefacts developed in earlier sessions—this configuration enabled participants to move beyond problem recognition toward collective modelling and redesign of curriculum practices (Engeström, 1996).

A central source of mirror data in this study was the Learning Dispositions Survey (see Section 4.3.1). Survey results highlighted patterns such as risk avoidance, deference to authority, and preferences for explicit guidance. When presented to participants, these data supported collective recognition of tensions between inherited learning dispositions and the dialogic expectations of the EMI Academic Reading course.

Second stimuli were then introduced in the form of conceptual tools and collaboratively produced artefacts, which participants used to reframe these tensions, propose alternative arrangements, and trial them in subsequent classes.

Across both interventions, this sequencing—first stimulus, mirror data, and second stimulus—was applied consistently, whether sessions were conducted face to face (Intervention A) or online via shared digital documents and screen-sharing (Intervention B). In this way, mirror data and second stimulation were systematically embedded within the expansive learning cycle, guiding participants from problematisation through analysis, modelling, and reflection. The unfolding of these processes across sessions is examined in detail in Chapter 5.

4.2.3 Site Selection and the Shared Object

This study was conducted at my home institution in Japan within an English-medium Academic Reading course in the EAP programme that I teach. As outlined in Chapter 1, the research addresses a persistent tension in EMI/EAP classrooms: students are expected to participate in dialogic, critical discussion, yet many Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learners—shaped by prior schooling that rewards accuracy, deference, and harmony—often participate cautiously, particularly where disagreement or public evaluation is implied. Rather than treating this tension as a learner deficit or a fixed cultural trait, the study examines what becomes possible when students and teachers jointly analyse the activity and redesign the conditions for participation.

The Academic Reading course provided a productive site for this inquiry because participation and collective meaning-making are central to its object. Students are expected not only to comprehend texts, but to interpret, critique, and develop arguments through seminar-style dialogue. At the same time, the course has a stable institutional history, including shared materials, recurring routines, and standardised assessment expectations. This continuity made it possible to examine enduring contradictions in the activity system across cohorts rather than treating participation difficulties as isolated classroom issues.

In my own teaching, a recurring pattern was that students often expressed a desire to contribute more but felt constrained by uncertainty about expectations, fear of being

wrong in public, and the perceived interpersonal cost of disagreement. Teachers, meanwhile, were concerned about limited interaction but reluctant to impose participation norms that might conflict with valued CHC learning dispositions. This convergence of concerns on both sides of the teacher–student relationship made the course a suitable context for a formative intervention.

From a Change Laboratory perspective, the site met key criteria for a viable intervention context (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). First, it constituted a historically developed activity in which present practices could be examined in relation to their longer trajectory. Second, the issues under investigation were consequential for participants, shaping classroom experience, assessment outcomes, and students’ sense of legitimacy as EMI learners. Third, the activity system allowed room for experimentation. While the course was constrained by institutional requirements, there was sufficient flexibility to trial new mediating tools—such as discussion formats, peer-feedback instruments, seminar routines, and assessment guides—and to bring evidence from those trials back into subsequent Change Laboratory sessions.

The shared object of the intervention was the collective reconfiguration of participation in EMI Academic Reading. This object was not defined as a fixed solution at the outset. Instead, it was progressively specified through early sessions in which students and teachers surfaced tensions around silence, authority, uncertainty about what counts as a valuable contribution, and limited opportunities for authentic academic dialogue. Through this process, the object came to be articulated as a practical, shared problem: how to create forms of classroom participation that support critical engagement and student voice while remaining workable and culturally legitimate for CHC learners. Across both interventions, this object remained stable even as the means of pursuing it differed (in-person workshops in 2019 and digitally mediated workshops in 2020).

Conducting the Change Laboratory within my own course was a deliberate methodological choice. It enabled sustained access to the activity system, allowed contradictions to be examined from within everyday practice, and made it possible for participant-generated proposals to be tested under authentic classroom conditions rather than remaining abstract designs. At the same time, it positioned me as an insider researcher whose institutional role could shape workshop interaction. The implications

of this dual teacher–researcher role are addressed in Section 4.5.1, with related ethical procedures outlined in Sections 4.5.2–4.5.5.

4.2.4 Participant Selection and Profiles

Participation included both students and faculty, following Virkkunen & Newnham’s (2013) guidance for heterogeneous but manageable groups. Students were recruited from my classes via an orientation session; all completed the Learning Dispositions Survey. Faculty included myself and two colleagues.

- *Intervention A (2019)*: 18 students completed the survey, 8 attended regularly. Three faculty contributed.
- *Intervention B (2020)*: 14 students completed the survey, 6 attended regularly. The same three faculty participated.

4.2.4.1 Intervention A (2019, in person)

In the first cycle, 18 students completed the survey and introductory session. Of these, 8 became regular attendees across the five sessions. Three faculty members, including myself, contributed either in person or asynchronously through updates.

Table 4-2 details the participant and attendance for Intervention A.

4.2.4.2 Intervention B (2020, online)

In the second cycle, 14 students completed the survey, 6 of whom regularly attended the CL workshops. The same three faculty members again took part, adapting to the online format. Table 4-3 details the participant and attendance for Intervention B

Table 4-2 Participant Attendance Intervention A

Key: ✓ = attended; E&M = absent (email + meeting); CR = classroom; LR = lecture room; FG = focus group; FA = author; FB/FC = faculty; S# = student pseudonym.

| # | Date | 12/4 | 26/4 | 10/5 | 24/5 | 7/6 | 21/6 | 5/7 | 19/7 |
|----|-------------|--------|-------|------|------|-----|------|-----|------|
| | Session # | Survey | Intro | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | FG |
| | Location | Online | CR | LR | LR | LR | LR | LR | LR |
| 1 | FA (me) | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 2 | FB | E&M | E&M | ✓ | E&M | E&M | E&M | ✓ | E&M |
| 3 | FC | E&M | E&M | ✓ | E&M | E&M | E&M | ✓ | E&M |
| 4 | S1 Daiki | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | S2 Haruto | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6 | S3 Yuna | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 7 | S4 Aoi | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 8 | S5 Kaito | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 9 | S6 Rina | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 10 | S7 Sora | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 11 | S8 Mai | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 12 | S9 Ren | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 13 | S10 Hinata | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 14 | S11 Koji | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 16 | S12 Emi | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| 17 | S13 Yuto | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| 18 | S14 Saki | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 19 | S15 Momoha | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 20 | S16 Satoshi | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 21 | S17 Kazumi | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 22 | S18 Jun | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |

Table 4-3 Participant Attendance Intervention B

Key: ✓ = attended or interviewed; Online = Zoom + Google Docs; E&M = absent (email + online meeting with FA); Survey = online learning background survey; Intro = introductory session; FG = post-workshop focus group; FA = author; FB/FC = faculty participants; S# = student pseudonyms.

| # | Date | 16/3 | 18/3 | 14/5 | 28/5 | 11/6 | 25/6 | 9/7 | 16/7 |
|----|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | Session # | Survey | Intro | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | FG |
| | Location | Online | Online | Online | Online | Online | Online | Online | Online |
| 1 | FA (me) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 2 | FB | ✓ | E&M | E&M | E&M | E&M | E&M | E&M | E&M |
| 3 | FC | ✓ | E&M | E&M | E&M | E&M | E&M | E&M | E&M |
| 4 | S1 Tomoki | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 5 | S2 Koji | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6 | S3 Toshiyuki | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 7 | S4 Megumi | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 8 | S5 Rie | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 9 | S6 Yuka | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 10 | S7 Emiko | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| 11 | S8 Haru | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 12 | S9 Rumiko | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 13 | S10 Taka | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 14 | S11 Shunichiro | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 16 | S12 Masaya | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 17 | S13 Kenji | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 18 | S14 Kenta | ✓ | | | | | | | |

4.3 Data Collection Methods

The study combined multiple qualitative data sources to capture student and teacher perspectives across the two Change Laboratory interventions. Data were generated during workshops, classroom trials, and follow-up discussions, allowing analysis of both interactional processes and the development of pedagogical tools over time. Table 4.4 shows how each research question was addressed through particular data sources and analytic approaches.

Table 4-4 Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analytical Approaches

| Research Question | Data Sources | Use of Data | Analytic Strand |
|---|--|--|---|
| RQ1. What contradictions in the academic reading curriculum are surfaced through student participation in Change Laboratory interventions? | Session recordings, artefacts, fieldnotes, focus groups | Identify and code contradictions; trace sequence and context; refine interpretation in focus groups | Contradictions analysis (primary–quaternary, inductive themes, expansive learning cycle) |
| RQ2. How do CHC students express transformative agency when co-developing curriculum tools and practices? | Recordings, artefacts, fieldnotes, focus groups | Trace moments of co-development; capture shifts in initiative; check interpretations with participants | Transformative agency analysis (six expressions; thematic coding of interaction) |
| RQ3. In what ways do student-led innovations influence the design, content, and delivery of the curriculum and reshape participation? | Draft and finalised tools, classroom trials, artefacts, focus groups | Document innovation pathways; link tools to contradictions and participation changes | Design trajectory analysis (from idea to prototype, testing, refinement) |

The table is intended to clarify alignment. The collection and use of each data source are explained in Sections 4.3.1 – 4.3.4 and taken up in the analysis in Chapter 5.

4.3.1 Learning Disposition Survey (methods/rationale)

To support the design of the Change Laboratory and to generate early mirror data, I designed a Learning Disposition Survey administered at the start of each intervention cycle (April 2019; April 2020). Learning dispositions are understood here not as fixed traits, but as historically and culturally shaped orientations towards learning activity—such as attitudes to authority, participation, risk-taking, and the purposes of academic reading—consistent with a CHAT perspective (see Chapter 3).

The survey was developed by me based on long-term teaching experience with Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) students and informed by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Its purpose was not to categorise students or to test hypotheses statistically, but to establish whether participants' self-reported orientations broadly aligned with patterns identified in prior research on CHC learning, and to provide a shared reference point for collective analysis. The full survey instrument is provided in Appendix B (Research Instruments).

Administered via SurveyMonkey, the survey included Likert-scale items and short open-ended questions addressing academic reading practices, comfort with speaking and questioning, note-taking habits, perceptions of authority, and prior experience of EMI or discussion-based classes. All students who later participated in the Change Laboratory completed the survey (18 in 2019; 14 in 2020). Responses were anonymised, aggregated, and introduced in the opening sessions of each intervention.

Within the Change Laboratory, the survey functioned primarily as mirror data rather than as an independent data source. It was used to prompt reflection, surface tensions between inherited learning dispositions and the dialogic expectations of EMI Academic Reading, and support the initial phases of expansive learning. Its use and interpretation within workshops are reported in Chapter 5.

4.3.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation was included as a core data source because the Change Laboratory is a dialogic, interventionist methodology in which learning and change unfold through interaction in real time. Observation was therefore essential for capturing how participants engaged with mirror data, negotiated meaning, expressed hesitation or disagreement, and took up—or resisted—emerging tools during sessions, processes that cannot be fully recovered from artefacts or recordings alone.

Across all Change Laboratory workshops, I acted as a participant observer. Observation focused on participation dynamics (e.g. who spoke, who remained silent, how turns were taken), moments where contradictions became visible in talk or activity, and how participants used conceptual tools, diagrams, or prompts during collective analysis and modelling. Notes were taken during sessions and consisted primarily of descriptive records of activities, key exchanges, and interactional patterns, rather than interpretive commentary.

These observation notes complemented the audio-visual recordings by capturing contextual features not always visible on video, such as extended silences, shifts in interactional atmosphere, or off-camera engagement with shared artefacts. For example, early observation notes recorded repeated pauses and downward gaze following invitations to critique discussion formats, which later informed the analysis of tensions around authority and risk in participation. Used alongside recordings and artefacts, observational data supported the tracing of expansive learning actions across sessions.

This use of participant observation aligns with formative intervention research, in which the researcher is embedded within the activity system and documents how learning actions unfold while facilitating the intervention itself (Engeström, Rantavuori, & Kerosuo, 2013).

4.3.3 Self-Reflective Notes

Post-session self-reflective notes were used to examine my role as teacher–researcher and to document aspects of Change Laboratory sessions not fully visible in recordings or in-session observation. Given the insider and interventionist nature of the study, reflexive documentation was necessary to examine how facilitation choices, timing of

prompts, and researcher positioning shaped interaction and emerging outcomes (Mortari, 2015; Pillow, 2003).

After each session, I wrote brief structured reflections immediately following the workshop. These combined three elements: an event log of key moments, analytic memos linked to emerging contradictions or expansive learning actions, and reflexive comments on my own interventions (e.g. when I intervened, withheld input, or reframed discussion). Writing shortly after sessions allowed interactional features such as hesitation, silence, or shifts in atmosphere to be captured while still salient.

These notes informed both the analytic process and subsequent facilitation decisions across sessions. In a small number of cases, excerpts were shared with participants for clarification, functioning as a limited form of member checking rather than validation of interpretation (Croot, Lees, & Grant, 2011). Figure 4.2 provides an illustrative example of post-session reflexive notes from Session 2 of Intervention A.

| |
|---|
| <p>Session 2 Reflexive notes</p> <p>Shift from critique to modelling strong engagement with checklist and seminar instruction sheet artefacts treated as shared tools, not teacher tasks</p> <p>students frequently looked to me for confirmation and my input after proposing ideas noticed own impulse to clarify or approve contributions deliberately withheld evaluation to avoid recentring authority</p> <p>ongoing resistance around speaking in class and teacher responsibility authority–autonomy tension still active questions about “why speak” confirm CHC norms still shaping expectations</p> <p>peer feedback checklist reduced fear of judgement tools functioning as mediators for safer critique</p> <p>modelling tasks challenging for some groups need more scaffolding for diagramming and testing tools in next session</p> <p>artefacts suitable as mirror data for Session 3 maintain non-evaluative facilitation stance to support ownership</p> |
|---|

Figure 4-2 Reflexive Notes from Session 2 Intervention A

4.3.4 Audio-Visual Recordings

Approximately 24 hours of audio-visual data were collected across ten Change Laboratory workshops and two focus groups. These recordings formed a primary data source for analysing interaction, tool use, and the emergence of contradictions and transformative agency over time.

In Intervention A (2019), sessions were recorded using a static rear-facing camera positioned behind participants. This setup captured whole-group interaction and use of shared artefacts while minimising visual intrusion and reactivity. Audio was recorded via the camera microphone (see Figure 4.3).



Figure 4-3 Static rear-facing camera in Intervention A

In Intervention B (2020), workshops were conducted online and recorded via Zoom. These recordings captured spoken interaction, screen-sharing, and collaborative work in Google Docs, allowing analysis of how tools and dialogue unfolded in a digitally mediated environment (see Figure 4.4). To protect anonymity, participant video feeds were removed from archived files; only the researcher-interventionist remained visible in the recordings.

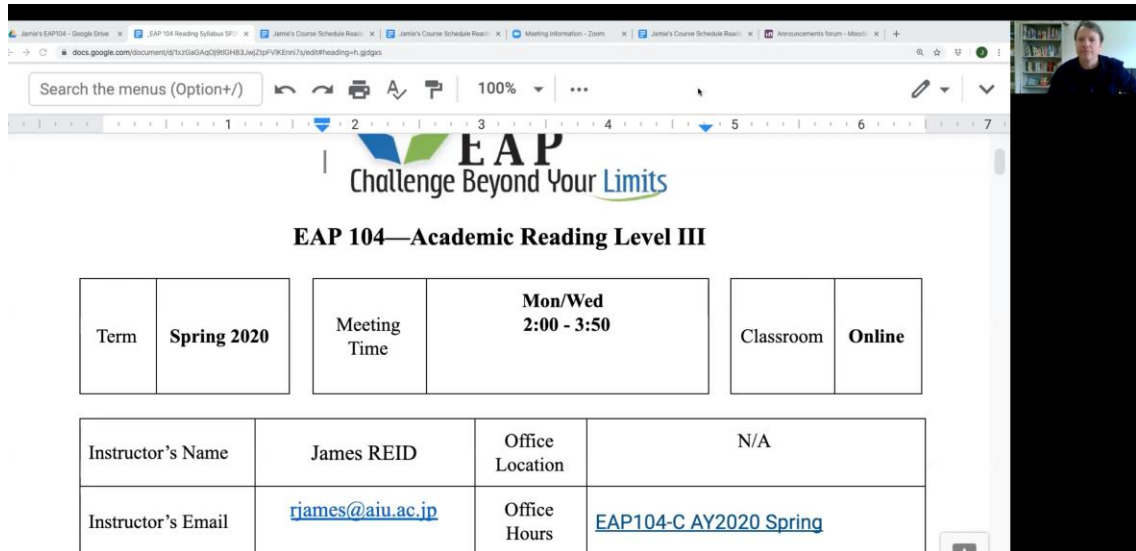


Figure 4-4 Zoom-mediated Change Laboratory session (Intervention B, 2020)

Across both interventions, recordings were used in conjunction with observation notes, artefacts, and reflexive memos to trace expansive learning actions and discursive expressions of transformative agency. Their role in the analytic process is detailed further in Section 4.5.

4.3.5 Artefacts

Artefacts were treated as a core data source because, within Change Laboratory research, participant-generated tools are not simply outcomes of discussion but central mediating means through which contradictions are analysed and new practices are developed (Engeström, 2007; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

Across the two interventions, workshops produced over 70 artefacts, including activity-system diagrams, annotated worksheets, collaboratively written minutes, draft and revised curriculum tools, and shared Google Docs. These artefacts provided a concrete record of how participants framed problems, proposed alternatives, and refined solutions over time. Many were reused in later sessions as mirror data or second stimuli, allowing earlier ideas to be revisited, challenged, and developed further.

Several artefacts moved beyond exploratory modelling and were trialled in classroom practice. For example, in Intervention A, students co-designed a Peer Feedback Checklist to address discomfort with peer evaluation associated with senpai–kōhai relations (see Figure 5.8). The checklist was revised across sessions and implemented in class, making student agency visible not only in talk but in material changes to assessment practice. Other tools, such as the Seminar Instruction Sheet, served a similar function by translating collective critique into stable curricular resources (see Chapter 5).

4.3.6 Focus Groups

Two focus groups were conducted following each Change Laboratory cycle (July 2019; July 2020), each lasting approximately two hours. They were used to clarify interpretations, surface issues not fully addressed in workshops, and reflect on the tools and practices developed during the interventions.

The focus groups followed a semi-structured format (see **Appendix B**) and drew on selected artefacts, survey summaries, and short workshop excerpts to prompt discussion. A group format was used to support reflection and critique in a Confucian-Heritage Culture context, where collective discussion can reduce the interpersonal risk associated with individual criticism (Warr, 2005). Focus group data were analysed alongside workshop recordings and artefacts and are reported in Chapter 5.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was designed to examine both the outcomes of the Change Laboratory interventions and the processes through which those outcomes emerged. As outlined in

Section 4.2, the study focused not only on documenting curriculum change, but on analysing how contradictions were identified, negotiated, and addressed within an EMI/EAP activity system.

The two interventions generated a qualitative corpus comprising approximately 24 hours of video-recorded Change Laboratory workshops, two focus groups, researcher observation and reflexive notes, and a large set of participant-generated artefacts. Analysis combined reflexive thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019) with analytical frameworks drawn from Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and transformative agency, within a social constructionist orientation. The analytic process was organised around the three research questions (see Section 1.6) and involved systematic comparison across data sources.

In line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985, 1989) naturalistic criteria, credibility and dependability were supported through triangulation across recordings, artefacts, observation notes, and focus-group data, alongside reflexive memoing and iterative checking of interpretations with participants during and after the interventions. To support analytic transparency, the coding framework and sample coded extracts are provided in Appendix C, with illustrative transcripts and transcription conventions included in Appendix D.

The findings presented in Chapter 5 result from a three-stage analytic process—intra-session, inter-session, and post-intervention analysis—adapted from Scahill and Bligh's (2022) account of Change Laboratory research-interventions in higher education. These stages are outlined below.

4.4.1 Intra-session analysis

Intra-session analysis took place during each Change Laboratory session as data were generated. This analytic work was collaborative, involving both participants and the researcher-interventionist, and often shaped the pacing and focus of subsequent discussion.

Participants used structured analytic tools—most notably simplified activity-system diagrams and prompt sheets—to articulate tensions in their academic reading practices. For instance, sessions addressing participation focused on *rules* and *division of labour* to surface contradictions between expectations for discussion and norms of harmony or deference. These exchanges captured the real-time emergence of questioning, critique, and collective sense-making.

The researcher-interventionist supported this process by clarifying tasks, introducing mirror data, and redirecting discussion to sustain expansive learning actions such as questioning, analysis, and modelling. Intra-session analysis was therefore central to identifying early discursive expressions of transformative agency as they unfolded in interaction.

4.4.2 Inter-session analysis

Inter-session analysis took place between Change Laboratory sessions and focused on reviewing data generated in the preceding workshop, including recordings, artefacts, and reflexive notes. Its purpose was to identify key moments, unresolved tensions, and emerging proposals to be carried forward into subsequent sessions.

I reviewed recordings alongside field notes, transcribed selected episodes, and produced session summaries documenting contradictions and provisional proposals. These summaries were shared with participants before the following session and were used to maintain continuity across the intervention. Earlier artefacts were frequently reintroduced as mirror data, allowing participants to revisit, refine, or contest earlier interpretations.

Through this process, inter-session analysis traced how contradictions were sustained across time and how participants progressively developed, tested, and revised curriculum tools and practices across the intervention cycle.

4.4.3 Post-intervention analysis

Post-intervention analysis was conducted after both Change Laboratory cycles and involved a comprehensive review of the full dataset. Its purpose was to produce a coherent account of how contradictions, transformative agency, and curriculum innovations unfolded across time.

Contradictions were identified and analysed inductively across the corpus and examined in relation to phases of the expansive learning cycle (Engeström, 1987, 2001). Transformative agency was analysed using the discursive manifestations proposed by Haapasaari, Engeström, and Kerosuo (2016). Agency was treated as analytically distinct from expansive learning: expansive learning captures collective phases of change, while transformative agency captures how participants voiced and enacted that change in interaction.

Curriculum tools and practices were traced longitudinally from initial proposal through prototyping, classroom testing, and refinement. Each design trajectory was analytically linked to the tensions that prompted it and to the expressions of transformative agency that sustained its development.

4.4.4 Language and cultural considerations in analysis

As the data were produced primarily in English by Japanese upper-intermediate speakers, analysis attended to cultural and pragmatic dimensions of language use. In Japanese interactional norms, indirectness and hedging often function as politeness strategies rather than expressions of epistemic uncertainty; for example, *tabun* (“maybe”) may pragmatically signal refusal or disagreement (Hill, 1990; Loveday, 1982). When such features are transferred into English, they risk being misinterpreted if treated at face value (Van Nes et al., 2010; Suurmond et al., 2016).

To address this, transcripts were analysed alongside video recordings, artefacts, and field notes, and participant checking was used where interpretations were uncertain (Croot et al., 2011). Silences and mitigated disagreement were treated as interactionally meaningful practices rather than absences of agency. My conversational competence in Japanese and long-term professional experience in this context further supported

culturally informed interpretation, which was essential for the analysis presented in Chapter 5.

4.5 Researcher Positionality and Ethical Considerations

4.5.1 Insider Researcher Positionality

This study was conducted by me as both the course instructor and the researcher-interventionist, positioning it as insider research. Insider research offers clear advantages in educational settings, including sustained access to participants, detailed contextual knowledge, and the possibility of longitudinal, practice-based inquiry (Mercer, 2007; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). At the same time, researching one's own students raises ethical and methodological concerns.

The decision to conduct the Change Laboratory within a course that I taught was theoretically grounded rather than a matter of convenience. As outlined in Chapter 1, the research problem concerned how learner agency might emerge when Confucian-heritage students are invited to analyse and redesign their own curriculum. This problem arose from long-standing tensions observed through teaching in this context. Following Virkkunen and Newnham (2013), the site was selected because contradictions were experienced as real, shared, and consequential—conditions necessary for a meaningful Change Laboratory intervention.

Working with my own students required attention to my dual role as teacher and researcher-interventionist. As course instructor, I held institutional authority that shaped participation, expectations, and interaction. Rather than attempting to neutralise this role, I treated it as part of the activity system under investigation. From a CHAT perspective, the teacher–student relationship contributes directly to rules, division of labour, and norms of participation, and therefore needed to be examined rather than set aside.

Within Change Laboratory sessions, this meant limiting evaluative feedback and refraining from resolving tensions or endorsing proposals. Disagreement, hesitation, and silence were allowed to remain visible so that participants could articulate and work

through contradictions themselves. These moments were central to the analysis, particularly in revealing tensions around authority, autonomy, and responsibility.

Across both interventions, I monitored how my teacher identity shaped interaction, for example when students deferred to me for validation or framed proposals cautiously. These instances were treated as analytically meaningful features of the activity system. Reflexive notes were written after each session to document my interventions and consider their influence on interaction and on the emergence of transformative agency.

Reflexive notes were used during analysis to examine how my interventions and positioning influenced interaction and interpretation (Pillow, 2003; Mortari, 2015). Trustworthiness was supported through triangulation of recordings, artefacts, and field notes, and through member checking in focus groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). My familiarity with Japanese educational norms and conversational Japanese further supported culturally informed interpretation of indirectness, hesitation, and silence.

4.5.2 Informed consent

During orientation, participants were fully briefed on the study's aims and procedures. They received written information sheets outlining the purpose of the research, data use, publication intentions, and participant rights. Written consent was obtained prior to participation. Students were assured that participation or non-participation would have no impact on academic standing.

Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any point during the Change Laboratory cycle or up to four weeks after its conclusion without penalty. Beyond that point, withdrawal risked compromising the integrity of the collaborative dataset.

4.5.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

All data were anonymised prior to analysis. Pseudonyms replaced participant names, and identifying institutional details were removed. In Intervention A (2019), a rear-facing camera was used to avoid direct filming of participants. In Intervention B (2020), Zoom recordings were blurred before archival storage.

Survey responses, artefacts, and transcripts were anonymised before analysis and reporting.

4.5.4 Data handling and storage

I was solely responsible for transcription, anonymisation, and secure storage. Files were kept on an encrypted, password-protected drive, with consent forms stored separately.

4.5.5 Ethical use of mirror data

Comments from prior cohorts were anonymised before reuse. In workshops, mirror data were presented collectively rather than linked to individuals.

4.6 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research Design

The research design shows close alignment between ontology, epistemology, theory, and method. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) informed not only the research questions but also the choice of the Change Laboratory (CL), the structure of the intervention, and the analytic approach. This alignment supports coherence across design, data generation, and analysis.

4.6.1 Strengths

Theoretical and methodological alignment.

A central strength lies in the fit between CHAT's dialectical assumptions and the Change Laboratory as a formative intervention. The same theoretical commitments that shaped the research questions also guided data generation and analysis (Engeström, 2007).

Trustworthiness through triangulation and sustained engagement.

The study draws on multiple data sources across two intervention cycles, each lasting approximately three months. This enabled longitudinal examination of contradictions and agency and supports trustworthiness through triangulation and prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Generative and developmental focus.

Rather than aiming for statistical generalisation, the study is generative in orientation (Engeström, 2007). It offers transferable conceptual insights into how contradictions, expansive learning, and transformative agency develop in EMI contexts.

Contextual knowledge and access.

My role as course leader provided sustained access to the activity system and supported fine-grained interpretation of interaction. When reflexively managed, such proximity is recognised as a strength in interventionist and insider research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Mercer, 2007).

Collaborative orientation.

Positioning students as co-analysts and co-designers aligns with formative intervention principles and with the study's view of agency as collective and developmental (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

4.6.2 Weaknesses

Insider positionality and power relations.

My dual role as teacher and researcher may have influenced how freely participants expressed critique. These dynamics are treated as part of the activity system under study rather than as external threats to validity.

Language and cultural mediation.

All sessions were conducted in English with Japanese L1 participants. Despite triangulation and member checking, some pragmatic meanings may have been misinterpreted.

Scope and transferability.

The study involved small, volunteer cohorts within a single institution. The findings support analytic rather than statistical transferability.

Contextual disruption in Intervention B.

Intervention B was conducted online due to COVID-19, altering interactional

conditions. This limited comparability with Intervention A but also extended the analysis to digitally mediated Change Laboratory work.

Overall, these limitations define the conditions under which the findings should be read but do not undermine the study's coherence or contribution.

4.7 Overview

Chapter 4 has set out the research design for the study. It explained the choice of the Change Laboratory, the structure of the two interventions, and the data collection and analysis procedures. It also addressed ethical considerations, insider positionality, and the limits and strengths of the design. Together, these elements provide the basis for examining contradictions, transformative agency, and student-led curriculum change in EMI Academic Reading.

Chapter 5 turns to the findings. These are presented session by session to show how contradictions were surfaced, how agency was expressed, and how new curriculum practices developed over time.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports findings from two Change Laboratory interventions—Intervention A (2019) and Intervention B (2020)—conducted in an English-medium academic reading course to examine curriculum co-construction and the emergence of transformative agency among Japanese students. Grounded in expansive learning theory (Engeström, 1987) and guided by principles of interpretative, naturalistic inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, Allison & Pomeroy, 2000), the analysis traces developmental change in the activity system across the two interventions rather than presenting static outcomes. The findings focus on how the recurrent misalignments identified in the literature review (Chapter 2) are surfaced as systemic contradictions in the activity system and how students express transformative agency, as conceptualised in the CHAT framework in Chapter 3, when they collectively redesign curricular tools and practices.

Data include participant artefacts (e.g. activity-system diagrams), survey responses, field notes, and audio-visual recordings. Each of the ten sessions (five per intervention) is analysed chronologically using a six-part framework:

1. Context – the session’s place in the developmental trajectory
2. Design – tasks, stimuli, and tools
3. Report – key interactions and ideas
4. Contradictions – tensions within the activity system
5. Transformative agency – student expressions following Haapasaari et al. (2016)
6. Outcomes – revisions to the activity system and curriculum implications

Together, the sessions show how CHC learners re-worked academic roles and identities through mediated collective action across two cycles of expansive learning.

5.1.1 Visual Overview of Activity System Shifts

Before the session-by-session analysis, Figures 5.1–5.3 outline the three activity-system configurations identified across the study.

The **Transmission-Focused Activity System** (Figure 5.1) represents the pre-intervention baseline: a teacher-centred model in which students acted mainly as recipients of knowledge, oriented toward skill acquisition and assessment performance.

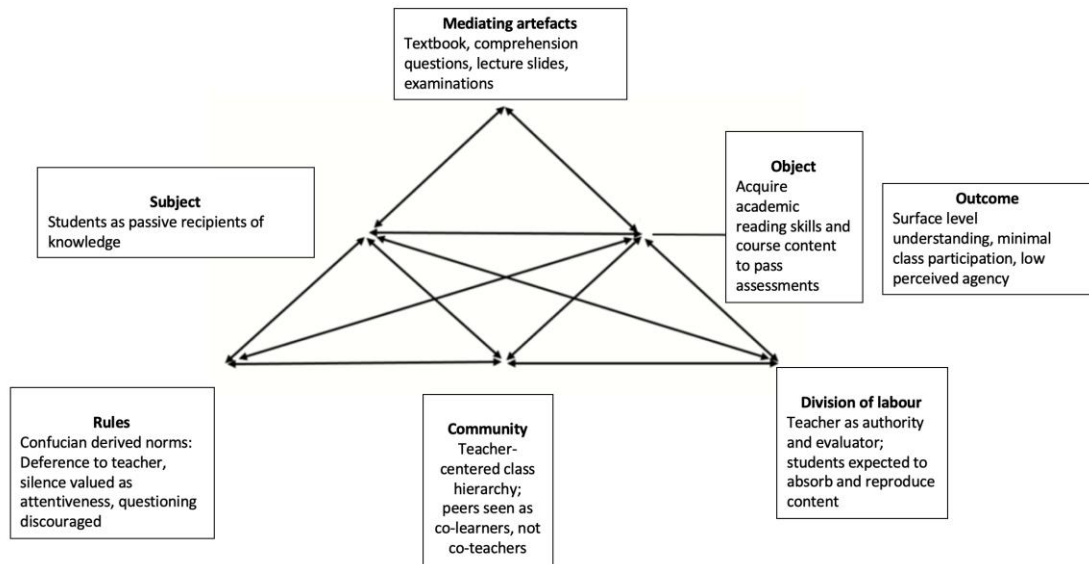


Table 5-1 Transmission-Focused Activity System

The **Dialogic Activity System** (Figure 5.2) captures changes co-designed during Intervention A, including student-led discussion, collaborative tool development, and questioning of established classroom norms.

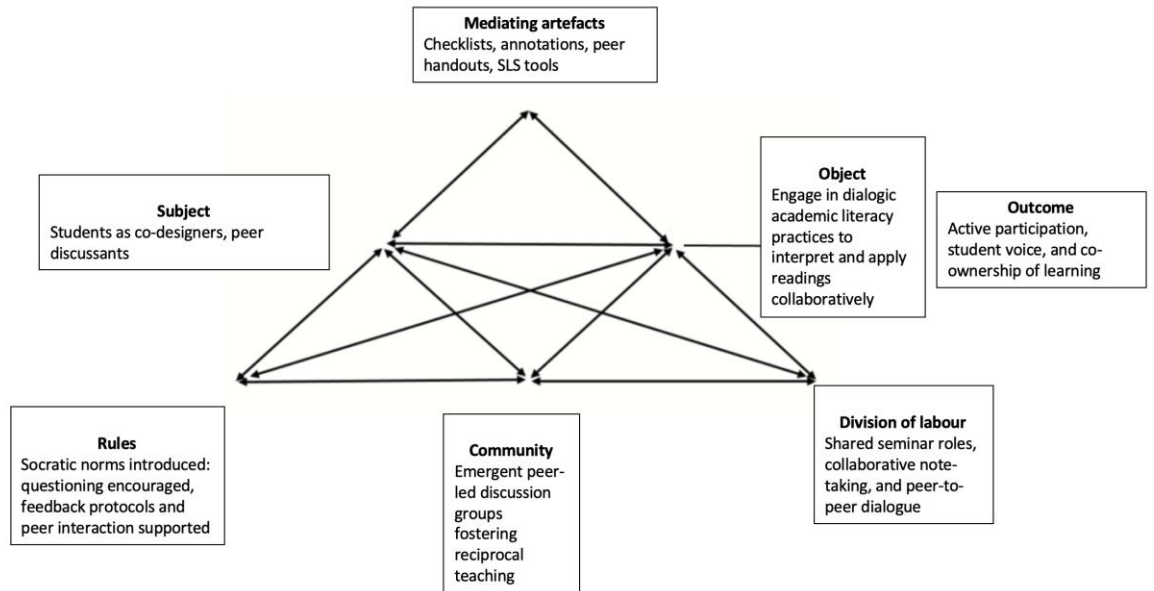


Table 5-2 Dialogic Activity System

The **Autonomous Learning Activity System** (Figure 5.3) reflects refinements developed during Intervention B, characterised by greater student independence, peer evaluation, and multimodal engagement with texts.

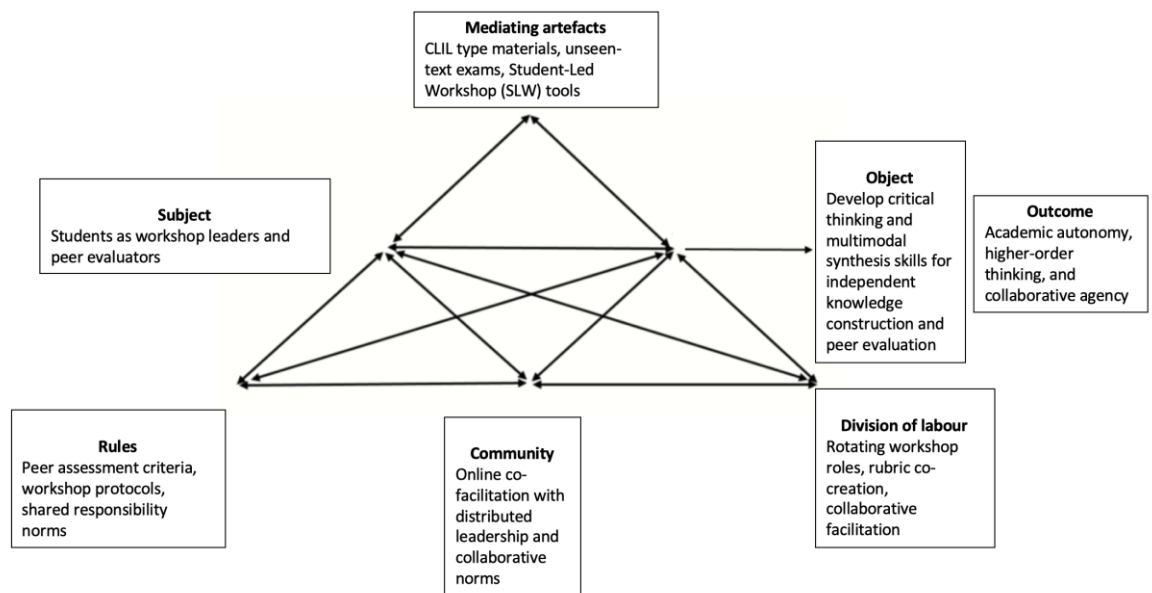


Table 5-3 Autonomous Learning Activity System

These configurations are synthesised in Table 5.4, which summarises developmental shifts across all elements of the activity system as learning moved from transmission,

through dialogic co-construction, to more autonomous forms of practice. These changes emerged through successive phases of expansive learning—questioning, analysis, modelling, implementation, and reflection—rather than through externally imposed reform

Table 5-4 Key Shifts in the Academic Reading Activity System (Pre–Post Intervention A & B)

| Element | Before Interventions Transmission-Focused | Intervention A Dialogic Co-Construction | Intervention B Autonomous Learning |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|
| Object | Acquire academic reading skills and course content to pass assessments | Engage in dialogic academic literacy practices to interpret and apply readings collaboratively | Develop critical thinking and multimodal synthesis skills for independent knowledge construction and peer evaluation |
| Subject | Students as passive receivers of knowledge | Students as co-designers and peer discussants | Students as workshop leaders and peer evaluators |
| Tools | Textbooks, comprehension questions, lecture slides, examinations | Checklists, annotations, peer handouts, Student-Led Seminar (SLS) tools | CLIL type materials, unseen-text exams, Student-Led Workshop (SLW) tools |
| Rules | Confucian-derived norms: deference to teacher, silence valued as attentiveness, questioning discouraged | Socratic norms introduced: questioning encouraged, feedback protocols and peer interaction supported | Peer assessment criteria, workshop protocols, shared responsibility norms |
| Community | Hierarchical, teacher-centred class. Peers seen as co-learners, not co-teachers | Emergent peer-led discussion groups fostering reciprocal teaching | Online co-facilitation with distributed leadership and collaborative norms |
| Division of Labour | Teacher as authority and evaluator; students expected to absorb and reproduce content | Shared seminar roles, collaborative note-taking, and peer-to-peer dialogue | Rotating workshop roles, rubric co-creation, collaborative facilitation |
| Outcome | Surface-level understanding, minimal class participation, low perceived agency | Active participation, student voice, and co-ownership of learning | Academic autonomy, higher-order thinking, and collaborative agency |

5.2 Overview of Intervention A and B

Both interventions followed the Change Laboratory design outlined in Section 4.2 and were organised around expansive learning actions. Each comprised four elements: a learning dispositions survey, an orientation session, five fortnightly Change Laboratory workshops, and a concluding focus group. Intervention A (April–July 2019) was conducted in person; Intervention B (April–July 2020) was delivered online via Zoom

and shared documents due to COVID-19. Despite different modalities, both followed the same analytic framework.

Across sessions, participants questioned existing practices, analysed contradictions, modelled alternative tools and arrangements, refined these through discussion and testing, and implemented changes in class. Intervention A generated Student-Led Seminars, peer-feedback checklists, annotation protocols, and the proposal of an unseen-text examination. Intervention B extended these innovations digitally: Transmedia Presentations evolved into Student-Led Workshops, peer-assessment rubrics were co-designed, and the unseen-text exam was implemented.

Together, the interventions document a shift from teacher-directed, text-bound instruction toward collaborative and student-authored practices, providing the foundation for the detailed findings that follow.

5.2.1 Learning Disposition Survey

As outlined in Chapter 4, the Learning Disposition Survey was introduced in Session 1 of each intervention as mirror data to prompt collective reflection rather than diagnostic judgement. Aggregated results were shared with participants (see Figure 5.1).

Responses revealed common patterns across cohorts. All students reported teacher-centred, test-oriented schooling; many described themselves as cautious or passive in discussion-based settings. Twelve students self-identified as “mostly passive,” and none reported prior experience writing extended academic essays in Japanese or English. Presentations were typically described as tightly scripted and teacher-corrected. Although some students viewed participation positively, many were reluctant to speak unless confident of correctness or explicitly invited.

These patterns broadly align with CHC themes discussed in Chapter 2, such as respect for authority, memorisation, and fear of failure. However, in early discussions, students rarely framed these tendencies in cultural or philosophical terms. Instead, they attributed them to schooling practices or pragmatic explanations, such as collective rice harvesting, rather than to Confucian heritage per se.

This gap proved analytically important. It reinforced the need to surface contradictions through dialogue and mirror data rather than assuming cultural explanations in advance. In later sessions, survey themes were revisited implicitly as students engaged in historical and empirical analysis of participation, authority, and academic reading, allowing these logics to be questioned and re-worked over time.

| Educational background | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Public Elementary Passive | Public Elementary Mix | Public Elementary Active | Private Elementary Passive | Private Elementary Mix | Private Elementary Active |
| 12 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Public JHS Passive | Public JHS Mix | Public JHS Active | Private JHS Passive | Private JHS Mix | Private JHS Active |
| 11 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Public HS Passive | Public HS Mix | Public HS Active | Private HS Passive | Private HS Mix | Private HS Active |
| 7 | 4* | 0 | 3 | 4* | 0 |
| No particular difference between public and private school education. Teacher-centred transmission style of education. *Japanese Literature and Mathematics incorporate some Socratic learning. English education remains a grammar-translation method for examination purposes. | | | | | |
| What kind of learner are you? | | | | | |
| Passive | Mostly Passive | I like both styles | Mostly Active | Active | |
| 0 | 12 | 5 | 1 | 0 | |
| Mostly passive but sometimes likes to share ideas in class. Used to this kind of learning. | | | | | |
| When is it appropriate to share ideas and ask questions in class? | | | | | |
| Usually not. The textbook and teacher have answers. | Only when something is difficult or controversial. | Often appropriate as it improves learning and is more enjoyable. | Always appropriate. Just listening is boring. | | |
| 4 | 4 | 9 | 1 | | |
| At school, what would you do if you didn't know the answer to something during class? | | | | | |
| Research the answer after class. | Ask the teacher after class <u>one-on-one</u> | Ask during the class | | | |
| 12 | 4 | 2 | | | |
| Assuming the teacher is a nice person, if you think the teacher made a mistake during class, what would you do? | | | | | |
| Nothing. I don't want to embarrass the teacher | Wait until after class and then politely tell the teacher in private. | Politely ask the teacher in class to explain the point again. | Politely say in class that they made a mistake. | | |
| 7 | 7 | 3 | 1 | | |
| Assuming the teacher is a nice person, if you disagree with the teacher about an opinion, what do you do? | | | | | |
| Nothing. I don't want to embarrass the teacher. | Wait until after class and then politely ask the teacher to explain their opinion again. | Politely ask the teacher in class to explain the point again <u>in</u> the class | Politely say in class that I disagree with the teacher. | | |
| 9 | 8 | 1 | 0 | | |
| In Japan, the concept of Senpai (senior) and Kouhai (junior) is used. Did this concept affect your behaviour at school? | | | | | |

Figure 5-1 Summary of Learning Disposition Survey Screenshot from Intervention A

5.2.2 Key Contradictions Guiding Analysis

Across both interventions, a set of recurring contradictions in the academic reading activity system became visible and were progressively analysed through cycles of expansive learning. As students questioned inherited practices, designed and tested new tools, and reflected on outcomes, five core contradictions emerged. These are summarised in Table 5-5 and structure the session-by-session analysis that follows.

Table 5-5 Key Contradictions Driving Expansive Learning

| Contradiction | Elements | Underlying Poles | Manifestation in Practice | Analytic Implication |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Harmony ↔ Expression (Secondary) | Rules ↔ Object | Cultural value of harmony vs. need for open expression | Students avoid disagreement to maintain group balance | Restricts dialogic interaction; reveals internal rules conflict |
| Authority ↔ Autonomy (Secondary) | Division of Labour ↔ Object (also Rules ↔ Subject) | Teacher as expert vs. student-led responsibility | Students defer to teacher for “correct” answers | Drives creation of peer-led tools and SLS routines |
| Safety ↔ Risk (Primary → Secondary) | Subject → Tools ↔ Object | Preference for accuracy vs. trying new formats/ideas | Students avoid unfamiliar genres or readings | Initially internal (Subject), later becomes tool–object misalignment |
| Fairness ↔ Flexibility (Secondary) | Rules ↔ Tools | Equal rules vs. varied effort and unclear criteria | Anxiety about grading fairness; desire for clear guidelines | Leads to student-designed rubrics and transparent evaluation |
| Academic ↔ Authentic (Tertiary) | Old Model (textbook) ↔ New Model (authentic sources) | Formal academic norms vs. desire for relevance | Debate over what counts as “academic” | Directly motivates SLWs and adoption of outside readings |

5.3 Session 1 (Intervention A)

5.3.1 Context

Session 1 initiated the expansive learning cycle by prompting students to question existing roles, tools, and rules in the academic reading activity system. Thirteen of 18 students attended, together with two faculty observers. Held one month after the Learning Disposition Survey, the session focused on how students had previously learned, how they prepared for reading classes, and what forms of participation were expected of them, with the aim of surfacing tensions between these norms and the dialogic expectations of EMI.

Two double-stimulation tasks structured the session. Task 1.1 used survey results as mirror data to prompt comparison of Japanese and Western classroom behaviours, supported by Tweed and Lehman’s (2002) Confucian–Socratic framework as a second stimulus. Task 1.2 focused on reading preparation and note-taking practices, drawing on past feedback and observation data, alongside alternative activity system diagrams, to identify contradictions in the transmission-oriented model.

5.3.2 Design

Session 1 was designed to prompt questioning. In Task 1.1, students compared Confucian and Socratic learning behaviours to surface assumptions about academic identity, authority, and participation. In Task 1.2, attention shifted to concrete study routines. Using mirror data and activity system diagrams, students mapped tensions in their note-taking and preparation practices and proposed alternative ways of organising their learning activity. Each group produced a revised activity system diagram.

Table 5-6 summarises the session design.

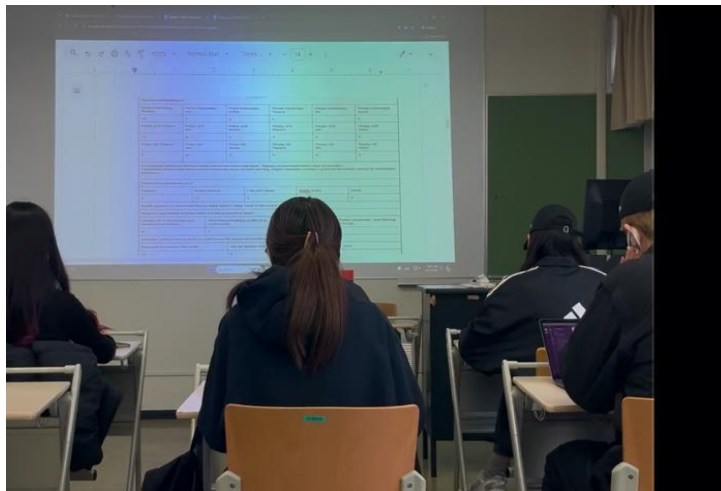
Table 5-6 Design summary Session 1

| Task | Expansive Learning Action | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|-------------|----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 1.1 | Questioning | Prompt to compare cultural learning behaviours | Learning Disposition Survey summary | Confucian vs. Socratic learning comparison (Tweed & Lehman, 2002) |
| 1.2 | Questioning | Prompt to analyse note-taking and preparation | Past student feedback and observation data | Completed and blank Activity System diagrams |

5.3.3 Report

The session began with small-group and whole-class discussion comparing Japanese and Western learning dispositions. The aim was to prompt reflection on the strengths and limits of familiar classroom behaviours, the kinds of learning they support, and the assumptions they carry about participation and authority. This discussion was grounded in the Learning Disposition Survey summary, which was presented as mirror data rather than as an evaluative judgement (see Section 4.3.1). The summary combined simple visualisations of survey responses with short anonymised student comments about classroom behaviours, allowing participants to recognise familiar patterns in their own and earlier cohorts' experiences without identifying individuals

Figure 5.3 shows students examining the survey results and identifying shared experiences in their learning histories.



| Educational background | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|------------------------|---------------------------|
| Public Elementary Passive | Public Elementary Mix | Public Elementary Active | Private Elementary Passive | Private Elementary Mix | Private Elementary Active |
| 12 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Public JHS Passive | Public JHS Mix | Public JHS Active | Private JHS Passive | Private JHS Mix | Private JHS Active |
| 11 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Public HS Passive | Public HS Mix | Public HS Active | Private HS Passive | Private HS Mix | Private HS Active |
| 7 | 4* | 0 | 3 | 4* | 0 |
| No particular difference between public and private school education. Teacher-centred transmission style of education. *Japanese Literature and Mathematics incorporate some Socratic learning. English education remains a grammar-translation method for examination purposes. | | | | | |
| What kind of learner are you? | | | | | |
| Passive | Mostly Passive | I like both styles | Mostly Active | Active | |
| 0 | 12 | 5 | 1 | 0 | |
| Mostly passive but sometimes likes to share ideas in class. Used to this kind of learning. | | | | | |
| When is it appropriate to share ideas and ask questions in class? | | | | | |
| Usually not. The textbook and teacher have answers. | Only when something is difficult or controversial. | Often appropriate as it improves learning and is more enjoyable. | Always appropriate. Just listening is boring. | | |
| 4 | 4 | 9 | 1 | | |
| At school, what would you do if you didn't know the answer to something during class? | | | | | |
| Research the answer after class. | Ask the teacher after class <u>one-on-one</u> . | Ask during the class | | | |
| 12 | 4 | 2 | | | |
| Assuming the teacher is a nice person, if you think the teacher made a mistake during class, what would you do? | | | | | |
| Nothing, I don't want to embarrass the teacher | Wait until after class and then politely tell the teacher in private. | Politely ask the teacher in class to explain the point again. | Politely say in class that they made a mistake. | | |
| 7 | 7 | 3 | 1 | | |
| Assuming the teacher is a nice person, if you disagree with the teacher about an opinion, what do you do? | | | | | |
| Nothing, I don't want to embarrass the teacher. | Wait until after class and then politely ask the teacher to explain their opinion again. | Politely ask the teacher in class to explain the point again <u>in</u> the class | Politely say in class that I disagree with the teacher. | | |
| 9 | 8 | 1 | 0 | | |
| In Japan, the concept of Senpai (senior) and Kouhai (junior) is used. Did this concept affect your behaviour at school? | | | | | |

Figure 5-2 Students Discussing the Learning Disposition Survey Summary

As they reflected on the data, several cultural tensions were surfaced. In Task 1.1, Yuna remarked, “We have this strong sense of working together, like rice farming,” while Daiki observed, “Maybe we just accept the textbook... and miss some new ideas?” These comments pointed to a tension between collective harmony and critical inquiry, as well as between deference and independent interpretation.

To deepen reflection, I then introduced the second stimulus: a short slide set contrasting Confucian and Socratic learning styles, adapted from Tweed and Lehman (2002). Alongside the cultural comparison, the slides also modelled how to condense an academic source into a usable summary (see Figure 5.4), which helped students connect the framework to their own reading and discussion routines.





| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Individualistic culture - question authority Socratic framework Socrates (470 – 399 BC)</p>  | <p>Collective culture - social harmony Confucian framework Confucianism (儒教, Jukyō) Confucius (孔子, Kōshi) (551 to 479 BC)</p>  |
| <p>Tendency to question: one’s own beliefs and those of others. The Socratic method. The dialectic. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIbV1nzQqGM</p> | <p>Effortful Learning: Learning is hard work. Effort more than ability. Scornful of those pursuing quick results. Practice and single-minded effort lead to success.</p> |
| <p>Tendency to Evaluate: Socrates evaluated others knowledge by asking successively deeper and more probing questions – The Socratic method. Reveals the ignorance of people. The elite killed him for it. - disrupt social harmony.</p> | <p>Behavioral Reform: through deep internal transformation of the student. Central goal of education. Virtuous behavior ensures individual success and societal harmony.</p> |

Figure 5-3 Students Responding to the Confucian–Socratic Learning Styles Slide

Most students were unfamiliar with the English term *Confucianism*. Yui commented, “I didn’t know... like, the English word Confucianism? But... we say *Kōshi* in Japanese, right? I think it’s about... being polite in class.” Takumi contrasted this with the Socratic model: “This Socratic one is... kind of opposite. It says students can challenge teachers. But in high school, we never do that. It feels a bit... dangerous?” These exchanges made visible how questioning was associated with risk and norm violation rather than engagement.

The comparison also prompted hybrid proposals. Aoi suggested, “If we discuss in pairs first, it would feel more natural,” while Sora added, “We could start small and build confidence.” These comments marked early movement from critique toward envisioning alternative participation formats.

Students then worked with activity-system diagrams to externalise these tensions. In the *Questioning Authority* diagram, the object of critical dialogue was constrained by rules such as “don’t interrupt,” by note-taking tools focused on transcription, and by a teacher-centred division of labour. The diagram made visible students’ peripheral role in knowledge construction.

In Task 1.2, attention shifted to reading preparation and note-taking practices. Students produced Activity diagrams on *Note-taking Practices* and *Reading Texts Critically and Discussing Them*, proposed annotations, discussion stems, and a shift in object from comprehension to interpretation. These three artefacts were later assembled into a montage (Figure 5.5) and reused as mirror data in subsequent sessions.

Aoi proposed adding a “discussion points” section to notes: “If we write what confused us, we can bring it up more easily.” Sora suggested, “Maybe we can mark one line we want to ask about?” Daiki added that peer feedback should begin with positive framing: “Say thank you or something first.” These proposals were immediately incorporated into revised diagrams.

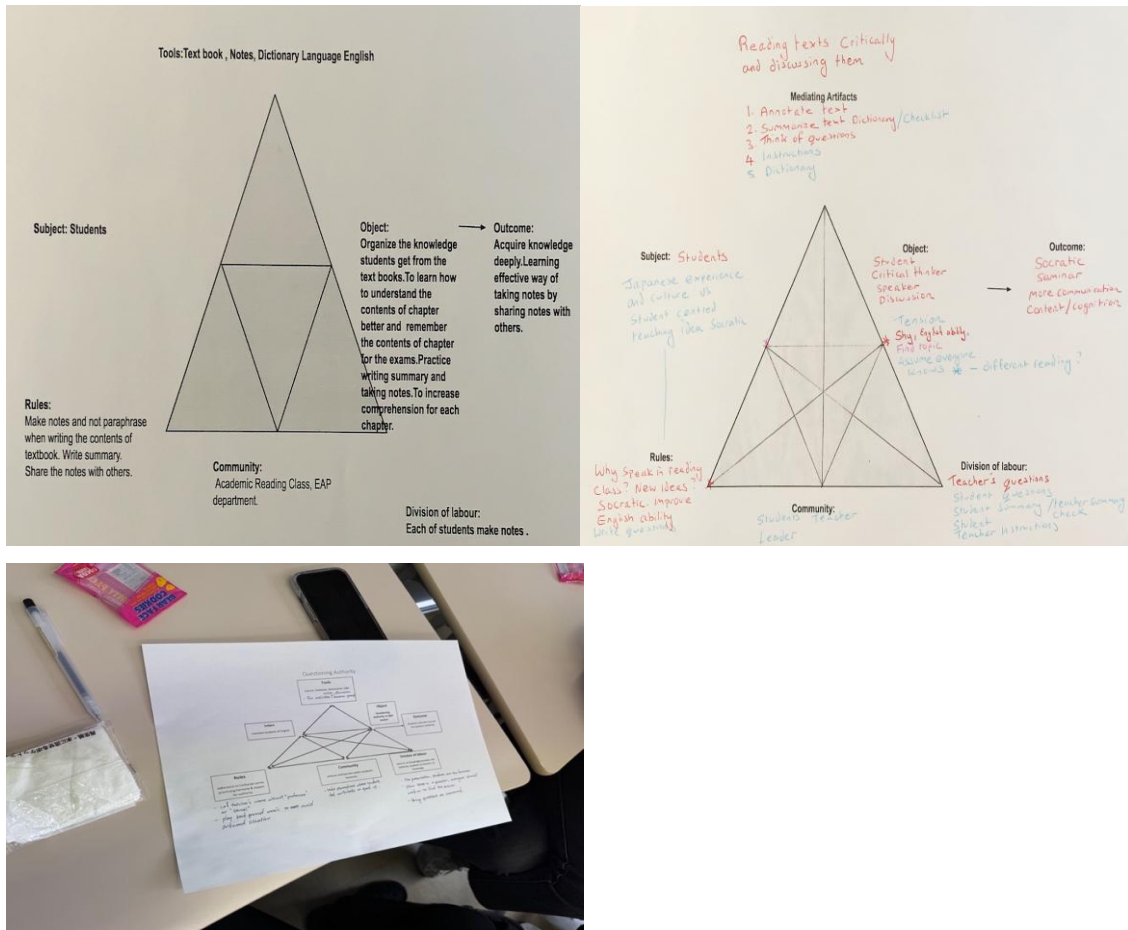


Figure 5-4 Montage of Student-Generated Activity System Diagrams

The artefacts produced in Session 1 marked a shift from identifying problems to modelling possible new forms of academic reading activity. Students began to articulate how participation, tools, and roles might be reorganised to support dialogue, even as hesitation and deference remained visible in their talk

5.3.4 Contradictions

The contradictions in Table 5-7 were surfaced through participant discussion and named during post-session analysis by the researcher.

Table 5-7 Contradictions Intervention A Session 1

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Similarity to Earlier/Later Contradictions |
|--|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Participation Discomfort (Primary) | Rules ↔ Object | Norms of harmony and silence discouraged speaking and conflicted with the dialogic aim; smaller groups felt safer. | Students avoided disagreement and preferred listening rather than initiating ideas. | Early appearance of harmony/silence tension; later develops into Harmony–Expression in Sessions 2–4. |
| Passive Role Identity (Primary) | Subject ↔ Outcome | Students saw themselves as passive due to exam-oriented, teacher-centred schooling, misaligned with aims of active engagement. | Students said they were “not used to discussing,” “not confident,” or “waiting for the teacher.” | Foundational issue shaping Sessions 2–5, especially SLS role negotiation. |
| Monologic Tools (Secondary) | Tools ↔ Object | Existing tools (textbook tasks, slides, grammar exercises) supported individual comprehension but not collaborative meaning-making. | Reliance on silent reading, worksheets, comprehension answers; suggestions to add annotated “discussion points.” | Reappears in Sessions 3–5 as students redesign tools (SLS sheets, peer-feedback forms, SLW templates). |
| Teacher-as-Fount-of-Knowledge (Secondary) | Division of Labour ↔ Object | Teacher viewed as main knowledge source, limiting peer questioning and shared construction of ideas; students began reconsidering this role. | Students reported “waiting for the teacher” and uncertainty “without the teacher’s answer.” | Precedes later moves toward shared facilitation in SLS and SLW development. |

These contradictions were raised thoughtfully, often indirectly, reflecting CHC norms of respectful critique. Their articulation marked an early move toward expansive learning.

Because this is the first point in the findings chapter where contradictions are presented, it is helpful to clarify why these issues are analysed as contradictions rather than as more general dilemmas or tensions. The issues summarised in Table 5-7 are treated as contradictions because they involve structurally embedded clashes between key elements of the activity system, not just momentary discomfort or differences of opinion. In each case, students identified a misalignment between the object of the course (interpretive, dialogic academic reading) and the tools, rules, or roles through

which their learning was organised: norms of harmony and silence conflicted with expectations for open discussion (Rules ↔ Object), inherited school experiences positioned them as passive recipients rather than active contributors (Subject ↔ Outcome), monologic tools prioritised individual comprehension over collaborative meaning-making (Tools ↔ Object), and the teacher's role as the fount of knowledge limited possibilities for shared facilitation (Division of labour ↔ Object). These are contradictions in the activity-theoretical sense because they are recurrent, historically produced misalignments that generate pressure for change, rather than preferences that could be resolved by simple adjustment; the same analytic rationale underpins the identification and naming of the contradictions presented in later tables and sections.

5.3.5 Transformative Agency

This section analyses expressions of transformative agency across the Change Laboratory sessions and focus groups in Interventions A and B. The tables below summarise analytically salient episodes of transformative agency identified in each session.

Frequency figures refer to distinct analytic episodes rather than counts of individual utterances; multiple expressions of a given agency type may occur within a single episode. The Expressions of Transformative Agency tables should therefore be read as indicating patterns of agency across sessions and interventions, not as exhaustive quantitative measures.

Table 5-8 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention A Session 1

| Agency Type | Evidence | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|---------------|---|---|-----------|
| Resisting | Not observed during this session | — | 0 |
| Criticising | One student questioned passive use of existing materials | “We just accept the textbook.” (Daiki) | 1 |
| Explicating | Emerging reflection on emotional/cultural constraints | “We don’t want to disrupt the atmosphere.” (Yuna) | 1 |
| Envisioning | Students suggested alternative interaction formats | “Pairs feel more natural.” / “Try small groups.” (Aoi, Sora) | 2 |
| Committing | Multiple suggestions made for concrete preparatory strategies | “Next time I’ll try writing questions in advance.” “Maybe we should annotate one part that we find interesting or confusing?” “Maybe we can mark one line we want to ask about.” (Aoi, Sora, Daiki) | 3 |
| Taking Action | Not observed; students did not yet produce or implement any artefacts | — | |

Total agency expressions in Session 1: 7

Manifestations of transformative agency: (Aoi, Sora, Daiki, Yuna)

Agency remained tentative and respectful, consistent with CHC norms. Still, students began to reposition themselves as contributors to future change.

5.3.6 Outcomes

By the end of Session 1, students had:

- Co-created activity diagrams mapping four contradictions and proposing solutions
- Suggested scaffolds for future practice (e.g. discussion points, sentence stems, pair work)

The session initiated the expansive learning cycle, with clear evidence of *Questioning* as students examined assumptions embedded in their roles. They also expressed transformative agency, particularly in *Explicating* constraints and *Envisioning* new participation formats (see Table 5.2).

The Confucian–Socratic slides (Task 1.2) were especially impactful. Most students had not previously encountered questioning framed as engagement, and the comparison helped reframe their understanding of classroom dialogue. The Learning Disposition Survey (Task 1.1) also functioned effectively as mirror data, prompting critical self-reflection.

Some participants found the activity system triangle difficult to use, noting that the boxes were too small to express their ideas. Several proposed converting the triangle into a table format, which was adopted, with students using either tables or printed triangles.

The session concluded with students expressing a clear intention to take more active roles in Academic Reading classes and to foster peer dialogue. This shift is captured in Figure 5.6, which contrasts with the transmission-focused model in Figure 5.1.

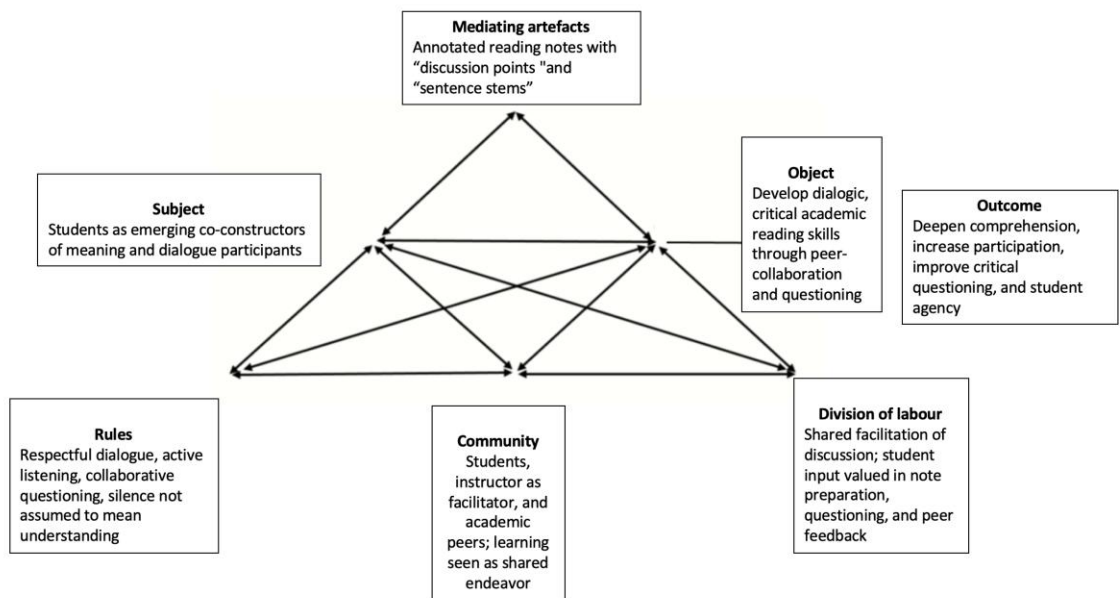


Figure 5-5 New Activity System Diagram – “Collaborative Academic Reading Activity”

5.4 Session 2 (Intervention A)

5.4.1 Context

Session 2 took built directly on the contradictions and proposals surfaced in Session 1. Eleven students attended alongside the facilitator (FA); faculty members FB and FC were absent due to scheduling conflicts. Between sessions, students worked

individually and in small groups to elaborate and prototype responses to the tensions identified earlier.

The session aimed to deepen analysis of the academic reading classroom as an activity system and to begin modelling alternative practices.

5.4.2 Design

The session followed three progressively complex tasks aligned with the expansive learning cycle. Students first revisited existing contradictions (Task 2.1), then presented and refined their student-designed artefacts (Task 2.2), and finally modelled new practices for future implementation (Task 2.3).

Table 5-9 Session 2 Design

| Expansive Learning Action | Task # | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|----------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Analysing | 2.1 Mapping contradictions using Activity System diagrams | Group analysis of course structure | Contradictions from Session 1 | Live-annotated activity system diagrams |
| Modelling | 2.2 Presenting and refining peer-designed classroom tools | Student-created artefacts (e.g., checklist) | Peer trial reflections | Group feedback, FA synthesis |
| Modelling | 2.3 Generating new solutions and refining interventions collaboratively | Small group presentations | Annotated contradictions | Expanded activity system diagrams |

5.4.3 Report

Task 2.1 began with a review of contradictions identified in Session 1. A summary table and live-annotated activity system diagrams were projected as students reflected on how these tensions shaped their learning. Comments revealed persistent assumptions such as “everyone already knows the answer” and “we need more teacher guidance,” alongside concerns about unequal participation. One student suggested that explaining a

text to an international peer might improve understanding, implicitly invoking learning through shared explanation within a ZPD.



Figure 5-6 A student commenting on an Activity System Diagram

Participants then co-created **Table 5.10, Understanding and Discussing Texts**, which documented recurring classroom problems alongside proposed solutions. Each row captured both initial suggestions (“presented solutions”) and ideas refined through discussion (“discussion solutions”). The table functioned as mirror data and mediating artefact, linking specific problems—such as limited discussion, avoidance of questions, and surface-level reading—to expansive learning actions including Questioning, Analysing, and Modelling.

Table 5-10 Understanding and Discussing Texts

| Problem | Presented Solutions | Discussion Solutions | Expansive Learning Link |
|--|---|--|---|
| Insufficient time to review notes because I have to prepare for the next chapter | Reduce reading load | Miss out on AWL; Possible, which? Paraphrasing sentences? | 1. Questioning – The intention was to challenge assumptions about workload and explore what could realistically be reduced without undermining learning. |
| When discussing text, we sometimes use Japanese instead of English | Use a dictionary in class; Penalty for speaking Japanese | Takes time, but it is learning; Stick rather than carrot – behaviorist approach, “You must use English.” | 2. Analysis – The purpose was to examine language habits critically and surface contradictions between convenience and learning goals. |
| Discussion fails because we cannot find the main point or think everybody has already understood it | Must discuss each paragraph and ask what the main idea is; Try to agree | Note-taking may help; Have a designated speaker to report back | 3. Modelling the new solution – The aim was to create new collaborative practices (e.g., shared summaries) to support collective understanding. |
| Students don’t know what to do if they don’t understand something in the passage – another contradiction? | Must discuss everything you need help with; Note what you don’t understand and report back; Explain the chapter to international students; Write questions about difficulties | Could report back to the whole class; Create a shared “difficulties” list | 4. Examining the new model – The goal was to trial peer explanation and reporting systems to see if they improved comprehension. |
| Unwillingness to ask questions or admit ignorance | Prepare in groups; Discuss first and then ask the teacher | Could use group note-takers or a Confucian solution | 5. Implementing the model – The idea was to normalize question-asking through collective scaffolding before approaching the teacher. |
| Sometimes students are confused about which highlight marker they should use since they can divide the main text from other important things such as evidence, experiment, or the author’s statement | Compare annotations with peers; Identify supporting details; Check with the teacher and the whole class | | |

Task 2.2 introduced two artefacts developed in small groups: a **Peer Feedback Checklist** (figure 5.7) and a **Seminar Instruction Sheet**. The checklist used a simple Yes/No format to reduce hierarchical pressure. Haruto explained, “*We don’t feel like we can grade someone else properly because of senpai–kohai pressure,*” and Mai added, “*It allows feedback without hurting feelings.*” Participants agreed that a “No” response should trigger revision rather than judgement, reframing peer feedback as *formative rather than evaluative*.

| | Criteria | Yes / No |
|----|--|-----------------|
| 1 | The topic sentence mentions the name of the text (in italics), the author, the year of publication, and the broad topic. | |
| 2 | All main ideas and key supporting details have been presented. | |
| 3 | The points mentioned in the summary are all relevant to the topic described in the topic sentence. | |
| 4 | The information is paraphrased, not plagiarized. | |
| 5 | The information in the summary has been accurately presented. | |
| 6 | The summary does not include your opinion or unnecessary quotations. | |
| 7 | The summary does not include new information from outside the text. | |
| 8 | Transitions/connectors have been used to tie the text together. | |
| 9 | The summary is coherent (clear). | |
| 10 | The text has been carefully proofread. Errors do not confuse the reader. | |

Figure 5-7 Student-created Peer Feedback Checklist.

The Seminar Instruction Sheet assigned presenters clear roles: summarising the text, integrating one outside source, and designing comprehension and discussion questions. Ren noted, *“If we add outside sources, it becomes more like real research,”* while Aoi observed, *“Writing questions helps us understand the article better too.”* These artefacts marked a shift from critique to curriculum design.

How to Prepare for Student Led Seminar

1. **Read the Chapter**
Make sure you've read the text carefully, checked new vocabulary, and done the exercises.
2. **Make Questions**
Create at least **6 comprehension questions** and **4 critical thinking questions**.
 - **Comprehension Questions:** Help your group understand what the author is saying. These should focus on meaning, structure, or main points.
 - **Critical Thinking Questions:** These help the group have deeper conversations and think more deeply about the ideas in the text.
3. **Find Extra Information**
Do some research online about the author or topic. Bring useful background info to help your group understand more. Also choose a chart, photo, or video) to make it easier to explain.
4. **Don't Copy/Paste**
You **must not** copy from websites. You can use information, but you have to rewrite it in your own words and include where you found it (URL + date). No Wikipedia or AI websites allowed. This is to avoid plagiarism.
5. **Write a Summary**
Make a short summary of the article you read. It should include:
 - The **title** (in italics)
 - The **author(s)**
 - The **year** of publication
 - The **main topic** of the articleYour summary should be clear and only include the main ideas. Aim for around **250 words**. Follow the class checklist when writing it.
6. **Group Work**
Work in a group of 3–4 people. Hand in one discussion sheet as a group. Your sheet should include:
 - Your summary
 - The extra information you found
 - Your 6 comprehension questions
 - Your 4 critical thinking questions

Figure 5-8 Student-designed Seminar Instruction Sheet.

In Task 2.3, groups refined their designs and proposed three new classroom practices:

1. Comparing annotations in class;
2. Preparing summaries for peer review using the checklist; and
3. Integrating outside readings to deepen discussion.

Students also recommended *rotating seminar roles* to distribute responsibility more evenly. Some resistance remained. Koji asked, “*Shouldn't the teacher be responsible for designing the course?*” and Hinata questioned, “*Why do we need to speak in an Academic Reading class?*” These exchanges showed persistent CHC-derived views of authority and knowledge transmission, even as peers displayed growing agency.

Groups then mapped their learning process using revised activity system diagrams. Yuki’s group reflected, “*We always read but don’t know what to say after,*” while Riku noted, “*The object is supposed to be discussion, but the rules are ‘don’t challenge.’*” Collectively, students visualised misalignments between tools, roles, and objectives, producing a shared synthesis that guided subsequent redesigns.

5.4.4 Contradictions

Of the four contradictions identified in Session 1, three persisted in refined form, while one new contradiction emerged as students moved from critique toward modelling new tools and roles.

Table 5-11 Contradictions Intervention A Session 2

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Similarity to Earlier/Later Contradictions |
|--|-----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Reproduction vs Dialogue (Secondary) | Tools ↔ Object | Textbook tasks and note-taking templates still pushed students toward reproducing information rather than discussing it. Tools supported recall more than dialogue. | “We just accept the textbook”; reliance on comprehension tasks. | Refines Session 1’s “Monologic Tools.” Persists until SLS tools appear in Sessions 3–4. |
| Teacher-Centred Roles (Secondary) | Division of Labour ↔ Object | Interaction remained teacher-led, positioning students mainly as listeners and limiting peer facilitation or shared ownership. | Students said they “wanted more teacher guidance,” signalling reliance on authority. | Refines Session 1’s “Teacher-as-Fount-of-Knowledge.” Leads to rotating seminar roles in Sessions 3–5. |
| Deference vs Criticality (Secondary) | Rules ↔ Object | Norms of avoiding disagreement and senpai–kohai hierarchy continued to inhibit critique and open questioning, conflicting with the goal of critical inquiry. | Students feared “disrupting the atmosphere” and hesitated to challenge peers. | Builds on Session 1’s “Participation Discomfort.” Later addressed via feedback-language scaffolds in Sessions 3–4. |
| Fragmented Peer Community (Secondary) | Community ↔ Subject | Group work occurred, but genuine collaboration was limited; students worked alongside rather than with each other, weakening the shared ZPD. | Students noted “working together but not really together”; little building on peers’ ideas. | |

These contradictions informed the next phase of modelling and the creation of student-led tools designed to realign *rules, roles, and tools* with the object of dialogic academic reading.

5.4.5 Transformative Agency

Session 2 provided stronger and more sustained evidence of transformative agency than Session 1. Students not only identified contradictions but co-created artefacts and negotiated their classroom function (see Table 5-12)

Table 5-12 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention A Session 2

| Agency Type | Evidence from Session 2 | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|----------------------|--|---|--------------------|
| Resisting | Rare, but present; students expressed doubt about the legitimacy of learner-led design | “Shouldn’t the teacher be responsible for designing the course?” (Koji) “Why do we need to speak in an Academic Reading class?” (Hinata) | 2 |
| Criticising | Cultural and pedagogical critiques voiced with growing confidence | “We don’t feel like we can grade someone else properly because of senpai–kohai pressure.” (Haruto) “Maybe I’m the only one who doesn’t understand.” (Kazumi) | 2 |
| Explicating | Students interpreted and clarified the causes behind participation issues | “It [the checklist] allows feedback without hurting feelings.” (Mai) “We always read but don’t know what to say after.” (Yuki’s group) | 2 |
| Envisioning | Students generated new ideas for curriculum tools and participation strategies | Anonymous questions (Satoshi) Outside sources (Ren) Collaborative annotation and rotating roles (general discussion) | 4 |
| Committing | Students agreed on tool implementation protocols and principles | “Every ‘No’ in the checklist should mean we review.” (Mai) Group agreement to trial checklist and instruction sheet | 3 |
| Taking Action | Students co-created and tested two curriculum tools during the session | No direct quotes, but actions included production, trialling, and revision of artefacts | 2 artefacts |

Total agency expressions: 15

Expressions of transformative agency: (Mai, Yuki, Satoshi, Ren, whole group)

5.4.6 Outcomes

By the end of Session 2, students had co-produced two curriculum artefacts—the Peer Feedback Checklist and the Seminar Instruction Sheet—which became prototypes for later practice. Haruto and Mai reframed peer feedback as dialogue rather than evaluation, while Ren and Aoi linked question design and outside readings to academic inquiry. Rotating seminar roles laid the groundwork for later Student-Led Workshops.

Some resistance persisted around speaking and teacher authority, highlighting ongoing negotiation between CHC norms and emerging autonomy. Requests for additional scaffolding informed later sessions.

Overall, Session 2 marked a clear shift from analysis to modelling, as students redesigned tools, roles, and participation norms. The revised system, shown in Figure 5-10: Collaborative Academic Reading Activity System, captures this transition from passive reception to collective knowledge construction

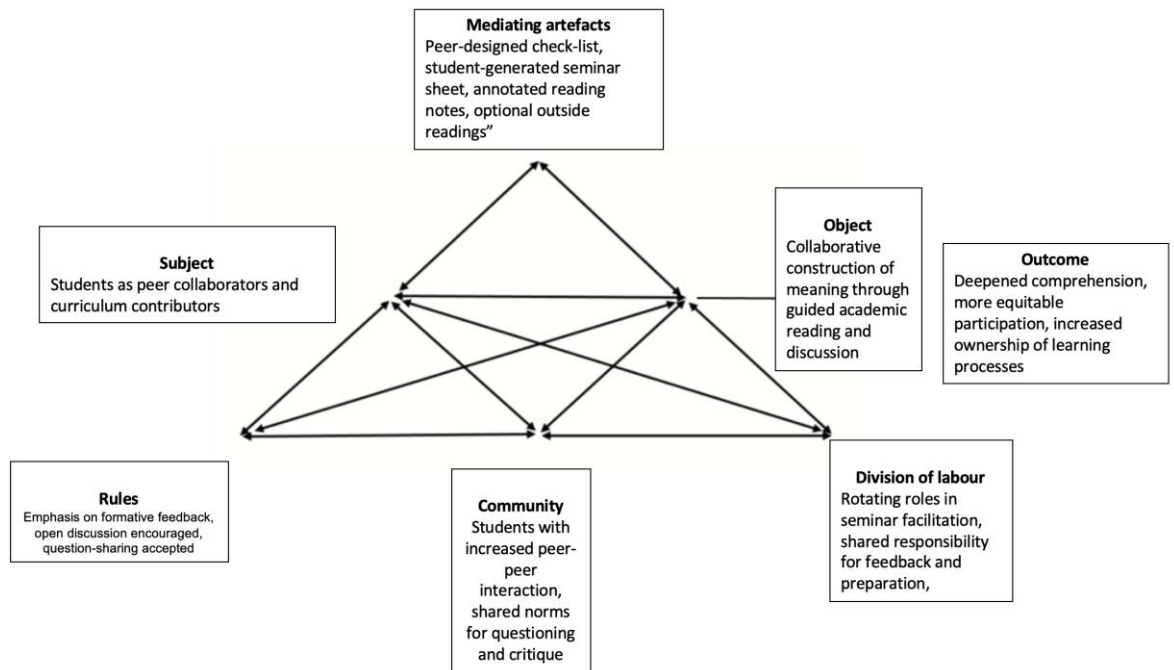


Figure 5-9 Revised Activity System Diagram – “Collaborative Academic Reading”

5.5 Session 3 (Intervention A)

5.5.1 Context

Session 3 marked the early *modelling* stage of the expansive learning cycle. Ten students attended, together with two observing faculty and myself (FA Prior to the session, students were asked to trial the Peer Review Checklist and Seminar Instruction Sheet developed in Session 2 and to bring feedback based on their use. The aim was to test and refine these tools, explore the emotional and cultural dynamics of peer review, and co-develop a more balanced structure for the Student-Led Seminar (SLS).

5.5.2 Design

Table 5-13 summarizes three collaborative tasks through which students trialled, discussed, and redesigned the new tools.

Table 5-13 Design Intervention A Session 3

| Expansive Learning Action | Task # | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Modelling | 3.1 Trialling the peer review checklist | Checklist created in Session 2 | Student reflections on its ambiguity and cultural tension | Real-time application to peer summaries |
| Modelling | 3.2 Refining peer feedback strategies | Comments on emotional discomfort in giving feedback | Survey data on critique anxiety; peer quotes | Constructive sentence stems and feedback templates |
| Modelling | 3.3 Finalising roles in the Student-Led Seminar (SLS) | Draft seminar structure and role cards | Notes on role overload and group dynamics | Examples of restructured roles and revised templates |

Each group of 3–4 students worked collaboratively at tables, using their trial experiences to refine the checklist and seminar framework. After each task, the class reconvened to share improvements and update designs collectively.

5.5.3 Report

Task 3.1 began with paired peer reviews using the checklist designed in Session 2. Students reflected not only on its function but also on their emotional responses. Yuna admitted, “*I feel bad if I say ‘No’ to my friend,*” sparking a discussion on feedback norms and politeness. Sora proposed a “*sandwich-style*” approach—positive comment, advice, positive comment—while Rina suggested a feedback workshop for practice.

To support this, on the spur of the moment, I introduced a short list of sentence stems such as “*One thing I liked was...*” and “*You could improve this by...*”. Although teacher-generated, students chose their preferred expressions from the list discussing which felt most natural and respectful and added them to the top of the Student Led Checklist (see Figure 5-1).

Student-Led Seminar Checklist

Feedback Language

Positive

- “One thing I liked was...”
- “I liked how you explained...”
- “This part was clear.”
- “You used strong vocabulary here

Suggestions

- “You could improve this by...”
- “Maybe explain this part more clearly?”
- “I wasn’t sure what you meant by...”
- “Maybe add an example here?”

Summary Checklist

| | Checklist Item | Yes / No |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | The topic sentence includes the title, authors, year, and topic . | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 2 | All main ideas and key details are included. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 3 | All points are relevant to the topic sentence. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 4 | The information is paraphrased , not copied. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 5 | The information is accurate. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 6 | No opinions or unnecessary quotations are used. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 7 | No new outside information is added. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 8 | Transitions/connectors are used. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 9 | The summary is clear and coherent. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| 10 | The text is proofread and easy to read. | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No |

Figure 5-10 SLS Peer Feedback Sentence Stems.

In Task 3.2, students reflected on how the revised checklist altered the tone of critique. Haruto noted, “*The checklist feels safer—it’s not scoring, it’s helping,*” while Mai added, “*It gives me ideas for revision without feeling attacked.*” Satoshi suggested adding a column for suggestions rather than binary answers, and Kaito and Yuna commented that the sentence stems helped them express uncertainty politely.

Task 3.3 focused on imbalance in seminar roles. Aoi and Daiki proposed rotating duties—summariser, question-maker, and outside-source researcher—so that

responsibility was shared. “*We all take turns and no one does everything,*” Daiki explained, and Aoi added, “*This makes preparation fairer and encourages everyone to contribute.*” Figure 5.12 shows the updated Seminar Instruction Sheet with rotating roles.

Each seminar group assigns the following rotating roles:

| Role | Responsibility |
|-----------------------|--|
| Summariser | Gives a brief summary of the reading’s key points. |
| Question-Maker | Prepares 2-3 discussion questions based on the text. |
| Vocabulary Finder | Highlights and explains 3-5 key academic terms from the reading. |
| Outside Source Linker | Connects the reading to another article, class content, or real-world example. |
| Facilitator | Keeps the group on task and ensures everyone has a chance to speak. |
| Timekeeper/Note-Taker | Monitors time and takes notes on key discussion points for group reflection. |

Figure 5-11 Revised Seminar Instruction Sheet with rotating roles.

Koji and Hinata, who had resisted peer-led changes in earlier sessions, were absent. Whether due to their absence or stronger peer cohesion, the atmosphere felt noticeably more collaborative. Students seemed more confident and engaged in shaping the course together.

5.5.4 Contradictions

Table 5-14 shows that of the four contradictions from Session 2, two persisted in refined form, and two new contradictions emerged as students trialled the new tools and structures.

Table 5-14 Contradictions Intervention A Session 3

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Similarity to Earlier/Later Contradictions |
|---|------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Participation Unevenness (Secondary) | Division of Labour ↔ Outcome | Some students continued to do more preparation than others, revealing a persistent imbalance in task distribution. Students recognised that uneven contribution undermined the shared goal of collaborative discussion. | Aoi and Daiki proposed a rotating-roles system to distribute responsibilities fairly. | Refinement of Session 2's "Fragmented Peer Community" contradiction , now recognised explicitly as a structural imbalance requiring a design solution. |
| Feedback Anxiety (Primary) | Rules ↔ Community | Cultural expectations of harmony made direct critique uncomfortable. Students felt guilty or disloyal when offering negative feedback, creating tension with the goal of constructive peer development. | Yuna: "I feel bad if I say 'No' to my friend." Adoption of the "sandwich" method reframed critique as supportive. | Refinement of Session 2's "Deference vs Criticality." This becomes a major focus of tool development (sentence stems, checklists) in Sessions 3–4. |
| Authority–Responsibility Shift (Secondary) | Division of Labour ↔ Subject | Students initially assumed the teacher should direct all discussions, but through revising seminar roles they began to reconceptualise responsibility as shared, peer-led, and co-constructed. | Role-negotiation discussion; students' recognition that "we must lead the discussion." | Refinement of Session 2's "Teacher-Centred Roles" contradiction , continuing the transition toward autonomy established in Session 1. |
| Clarity–Judgement (Secondary) | Tools ↔ Outcome | Traditional rubrics were viewed as stressful and evaluative. Students preferred clearer, low-stakes tools (checklists, sentence stems) that reduced fear of judgement and promoted learning. | Students responded positively to checklists and sentence stems as "easier to understand" and "less scary." | New contradiction , emerging from practical application of peer-assessment tools. Anticipates later concerns in Sessions 4–5 about fairness and transparency. |

These evolving contradictions highlighted how emotional safety and fairness shaped students' willingness to participate. Their resolution through tool redesign demonstrated growing capacity for collective problem-solving and cultural adaptation.

5.5.5 Transformative Agency

Session 3 displayed strong and varied forms of transformative agency. Their willingness to question norms, propose improvements, and take concrete steps forward marked a clear shift into expansive learning and curriculum co-design (see Table 5-15)

Table 5-15 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention A Session 3

| Agency Type | Evidence from Session 3 | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|----------------------|--|---|-----------|
| Resisting | | | 0 |
| Criticising | Students identified emotional and cultural limits of feedback practices | “I feel bad if I say ‘No’ to my friend.” (Yuna) “The checklist could still feel like judgement.” (Haruto) | 2 |
| Explicating | Clarified how revised tools (like the checklist) changed the experience of feedback | “It gives me ideas for revision without feeling attacked.” (Mai) | 1 |
| Envisioning | Proposed new solutions to known problems—both interpersonal and structural Rina’s idea for a feedback workshop Sora’s sandwich strategy | “If we practise in a small group first, I think we can give better feedback in class.” (Rina) “We could do sandwich-style—something good, then advice, then something good again.” (Sora) “Rotating roles can help everyone try new skills.” (Aoi) “Maybe we can make a checklist for seminar roles, like we did for writing.” (Daiki) | 3 |
| Committing | Took responsibility for refining tools and agreed to try them in class Kaito trialled sentence stems Daiki drafted role descriptions for his group | “I’ll try using these stems in my next feedback—I think they sound polite but clear.” (Kaito) “I’ve started writing our group’s role sheet. Can I share it in the folder later?” (Daiki) “Let’s all try the new checklist next time. It’s easier to follow.” (Mai) | 3 |
| Taking Action | Integrated sentence stems Finalised the SLS format | “We tried giving each other feedback with the new checklist—it helped keep us on track.” (Satoshi) “These stems made it easier to say something honest without being rude.” (Yuna) “Now we’ve all got a job, it feels more balanced. I didn’t feel so much pressure.” (Daiki) | 3 |

Total agency expressions: 12:

Expressions of transformative agency: (Yuna, Haruto, Mai, Rina, Sora, Aoi, Daiki, Satoshi,)

5.5.6 Outcomes

Session 3 represented a clear transition from reflection to design and implementation. Students refined and internalised the tools they had created, adapting them to their cultural and emotional contexts.

By the end of the session, students had:

- Finalised the **Student-Led Seminar format** with rotating, balanced roles

- Enhanced the **Peer Review Checklist** with sentence stems and a suggestions column
- Proposed a **peer-led feedback workshop** for practice and confidence-building
- Integrated **emotionally sensitive critique norms** into their classroom practice

These outcomes demonstrated growing ownership and agency. Tools had become mediators of cultural change, supporting a shift from polite conformity toward constructive, collaborative participation.

The next session (Session 4) would move from workshop design to *implementation*, testing these new structures in a live seminar context. The evolving system is visualised in Figure 5-13 capturing the redistribution of classroom roles and the embedding of supportive feedback tools.

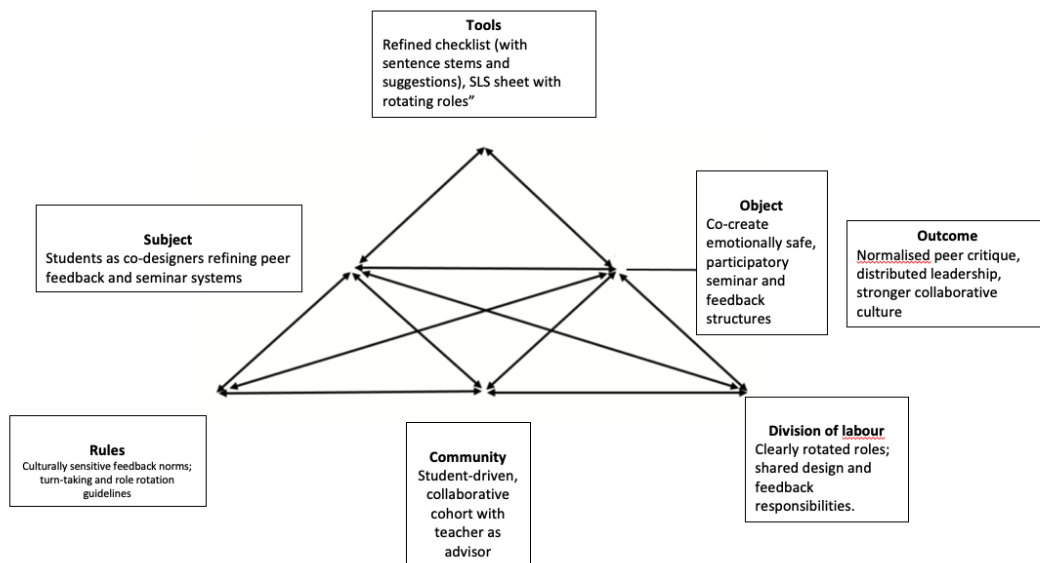


Figure 5-12 Revised Activity System Session 3 - Collaborative feedback and role rotation

5.6 Session 4 (Intervention A)

5.6.1 Context

Session 4 took place mid-semester with myself and eight students attending; no faculty observers were present. Building on Session 3, where students had trialled the SLS format and revised the Peer Feedback Checklist, the session focused on refining these tools, addressing dissatisfaction with textbook materials, and co-designing fairer assessment criteria for the upcoming Transmedia Presentation. Students took greater initiative than in earlier sessions, with discussion increasingly driven by peer proposals rather than facilitator prompts

5.6.2 Design

Table 5-16 summarizes the research design.

Table 5-16 Design Intervention A Session 4

| Expansive Learning Action | Task # | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|---------------------------|--------|---|---|--|
| Analysing | 4.1 | SLS format and student reflections | Annotated checklists and previous seminar notes | Suggestions to add discussion prompts and link outside readings |
| Modelling | 4.2 | Sample outside texts | Reflections on using authentic sources | New seminar outlines using self-selected external articles |
| Modelling | 4.3 | Comments on textbook content | Student remarks on tone and topic relevance | Brainstormed list of better-suited authentic sources |
| Modelling | 4.4 | Recap of Transmedia tasks and feedback gaps | Peer critique of grading inconsistency | Student-designed checklist for evaluating multimodal presentations |

5.6.3 Report

This session focused on improving the SLS format and strengthening the use of outside texts and feedback tools. Students worked in small groups through each task, then shared ideas in a whole-class debrief.

In **Task 4.1**, Haruto proposed adding a new column to the seminar worksheet: *“We can use it to show how the outside article connects to the main one.”* Daiki agreed: *“Some people bring good questions but forget to ask. This helps us prepare better.”* These changes helped clarify roles and address uncertainty about expectations. Notably, this built on Ren’s earlier idea in Session 2 to link textbook readings to real-world sources—an idea that now became a concrete part of the worksheet and seminar structure. The group added this to the existing worksheet. See figure 5-14

Student-Led Seminar Worksheet

1. Seminar Leader Information

- **Textbook Chapter Title:** _____
- **Author(s) & Year:** _____
- **Outside Reading Title:** _____
- **Type of Source (news, video, academic article, etc.):** _____
- **Outside Reading Link / Key Connection:**
How does the outside source connect to the main reading?

2. Seminar Questions

A. Comprehension Questions (Textbook chapter)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. Connection Question (Outside Source)

Show how the outside reading connects to the main reading.

4. _____

C. Critical Thinking / Discussion Questions

5. _____
6. _____

3. Key Vocabulary for the Seminar

| Word/Phrase | Meaning (in your words) | Example Sentence |
|-------------|-------------------------|------------------|
|-------------|-------------------------|------------------|

Figure 5-13 SLS Worksheet with Session 4 Additions

In **Task 4.2**, students trialled outside readings. Haruto introduced an article from *The Guardian* about global social media use. Daiki responded, “This article is good, but a little easy. What if we add something about global data?” Their exchange reflected modelling and envisioning—raising the intellectual level of student-chosen materials and integrating them into academic tasks.

Task 4.3 focused on the textbook. Daiki noted, “Some textbook articles feel too fake. Like, not real-world topics.” Haruto added, “If we can read something professors or researchers actually write, it feels more connected to university study.” These comments revealed deeper tensions between course content and students’ expectations for meaningful learning. After we brainstormed possible outside sources, I produced a quick slide that students could refer to when choosing sources for seminars and essays Figure 5-14

Popular Sources: Substantive Magazines and Newspapers. Edited not peer-reviewed. Journalists not necessarily experts in the field. For educated readers
<https://www.bbc.com/news> <https://www.theatlantic.com/world/> <https://edition.cnn.com/> <https://abcnews.go.com/>

Intermediate: Magazine style written by academics for educated readers and researchers. The Conversation <https://theconversation.com/global> Nautilus <https://nautil.us/> Aeon Magazine <https://aeon.co/>

Scholarly Sources: https://library.aiu.ac.jp/?page_id=101&lang=english
Peer-reviewed academic journal articles. For researchers. Titles and Abstracts summarize main idea of the article. So, skim these first.

Figure 5-14 authentic reading sources generated during Task 4.3

In Task 4.4, students revisited the Transmedia Presentation and raised concerns about how the task should be interpreted. “I liked doing the video,” Daiki said, “but I didn’t know how we would be graded.” Haruto added that “some people made funny ones but didn’t connect to the topic much,” highlighting uncertainty about what counted as a strong presentation. Rather than changing the task itself, students aimed to make the existing instructions clearer. Using the original guidelines (Figure 5-16), they designed a simple evaluation checklist that translated the requirements into concrete, observable criteria. Their checklist grouped expectations into six areas—main ideas and supporting details, connection to the chapter, creativity and use of genre or media, language and AWL words, audience interaction, and teamwork and delivery—and was refined further in the following week of class. The final version (Figure 5-17) made the assessment more transparent.

Transmedia Presentation – Instructions

Purpose

In groups of 3 or 4, represent the assigned textbook chapter in a different way, using a new genre or media form, while showing accurate understanding of the main ideas.

Task Requirements

- Re-represent the chapter using a different genre or medium.

Examples:

- Genres: travelogue, anime scene, short skit, interview, news report, diary, talk show
 - Media: cartoon/comic, video, artwork, narrated slides, animation
- Clearly present the chapter's main ideas and key points.
 - Use at least 10 AWL words from the chapter correctly (spoken or written).
 - Include audience interaction (e.g., quiz, matching activity, short discussion question).
 - Maximum time: 30 minutes. All group members participate.

Assessment

- Coverage of main points
- Creativity and effective multimodal design
- Accurate and clear language use, including AWL integration
- Meaningful audience engagement

Figure 5-15 Existing Transmedia Presentation Instructions

Transmedia Presentation – Evaluation Checklist

1. Main Ideas & Key Supporting Details

- The presenters explained the main ideas of the chapter clearly.
- The presenters included the main points and key supporting details.
- The information was accurate and easy to understand.

2. Connection to the Chapter

- Every part of the presentation clearly linked to the chapter.
- No section felt random or unrelated.

3. Creativity & Use of Genre/Media

- The presenters used a clear genre or media format (skit, video, comic, news report, etc.).
- The creative choice helped the audience understand the chapter.
- Visuals/audio supported meaning and did not distract.

4. Language & AWL Words

- The presenters used clear and mostly accurate language.
- The presenters used 10 AWL words from the chapter correctly in speech or slides.

5. Audience Interaction

- The presentation included a short interaction (quiz, question, matching, prediction).
- The interaction helped classmates think about the chapter.

6. Teamwork & Delivery

- All presenters participated.
- The presentation was rehearsed and within the time limit.
- Slides/visuals were clear and easy to follow.

Figure 5-16 Transmedia Presentation Evaluation Checklist

5.6.4 Contradictions

Table 5-17 shows that of the four contradictions identified in Session 3, two persisted in refined form and two new ones emerged as students examined the wider curriculum.

Table 5-17 Contradictions Intervention A Session 4

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Similarity to Earlier / Later Contradictions |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| Textbook Limitations vs Authenticity (Secondary) | Tools ↔ Object | Students felt the textbook’s simplified tone and curated content no longer matched the goal of engaging with “real” academic reading; they preferred authentic sources. | Daiki: “Some articles feel too fake.” Students proposed outside sources. | Refines Session 3’s “Clarity–Judgement,” shifting focus from assessment to source authenticity; later underpins SLWs in Intervention B. |
| Uneven Participation in SLS Tasks (Secondary) | Rules ↔ Division of Labour | Despite rotating roles, preparation and contribution remained uneven; clearer prompts and a more structured worksheet were needed. | Daiki: “Some people prepare a lot, some don’t know what to do.” | Continues Session 3’s “Participation Unevenness”; addressed through role reminders and the new worksheet column. |
| Creative Freedom vs Assessment Clarity (Tertiary) | Object ↔ Outcome (Old Model ↔ New Model) | Students liked the Transmedia task’s creativity but were unclear how it was graded; lack of criteria made “good work” ambiguous. | Haruto: “We didn’t know what’s okay or not.” | New contradiction highlighting tension between the open-ended task and a need for transparent criteria; leads to co-creating the evaluation checklist. |
| Integrating Outside Sources Effectively (Secondary) | Subject ↔ Tools | Students struggled to link outside articles coherently to the main reading; the “Outside Reading Link” column aimed to make connections explicit. | Haruto proposed adding the “Outside Reading Link” column. | Refines Session 2’s “Reproduction vs Dialogue,” turning outside-source use into a structured meaning-making tool. |

These contradictions reveal a shift from interpersonal to *systemic curriculum design*, where students questioned not just classroom interaction but the materials and assessment structures themselves.

5.6.5 Transformative Agency

Students displayed sustained and distributed agency. They moved fluidly from Criticising and Explicating to Envisioning, Committing, and Taking Action as can be seen in Table 5-18

Table 5-18 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention A Session 4

| Agency Type | Evidence from Session 4 | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|--------------------|---|---|-----------|
| Resisting | | | 0 |
| Criticising | Students pointed out the textbook was artificial and unhelpful for deeper understanding | “Some textbook articles feel too fake... not useful for real topics.” (Daiki) | 5 |

| Agency Type | Evidence from Session 4 | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|----------------------|--|--|-----------|
| | | "I want to read something that is more academic." (Haruto) | |
| Explicating | Clarified how outside readings made SLS discussion more meaningful | "If I use other article, I can bring new idea to seminar." (Haruto) "We can explain better if we connect to real example." (Sora) | 4 |
| Envisioning | Suggested replacing textbook texts with authentic articles; imagined how the course could include real-world texts | "Maybe each group choose one real article?" (Ren) "If we can read what professors write, we understand university more." (Haruto) | 3 |
| Committing | Took initiative to update the SLS worksheet and agreed to bring outside readings | "I try to find better article for next week." (Daiki) "We write new version of worksheet together." (Rina) | 4 |
| Taking Action | Created checklist for Transmedia project; added new column to seminar worksheet | "We already made checklist for the video project." (Sora) "I added a place to write about outside reading here." (Ren, during group task) | 6 |

Total agency expressions: 17

Expressions of transformative agency: (Mai, Yuki, Satoshi, Ren, whole group)

5.6.6 Outcomes

By the end of Session 4, students had co-developed three interrelated tools:

1. a revised Student-Led Seminar (SLS) worksheet with an **Outside Reading Link** column, building on Ren's proposal from Session 2;
2. a peer-generated checklist for evaluating Transmedia Presentations; and
3. a shared list of authentic academic sources to replace or supplement textbook readings.

Together, these artefacts reflected both practical innovations and shifts in how students understood their roles as learners and co-designers. Rather than responding to pre-set materials, students actively shaped pedagogical tools, assessment criteria, and course content.

Critiques of the textbook signalled rising expectations for meaningful and authentic learning. The move toward self-selected sources broadened the intellectual scope of the SLS and aligned discussion more closely with academic inquiry. The peer-designed Transmedia checklist similarly addressed earlier tensions between creative freedom and assessment clarity by foregrounding fairness, transparency, and academic depth.

Session 4 also marked a turning point in transformative agency. Compared with earlier sessions, students initiated revisions without facilitator prompts, negotiated changes collectively, and reflected on their shared practice. This shift suggested that expansive learning processes were beginning to sustain themselves.

Figure 5-19 shows the revised activity system for the Student-Led Seminar, highlighting changes to mediating artefacts, roles, and rules that supported more dialogic participation. Some uneven participation remained, indicating that shared norms were still being consolidated.

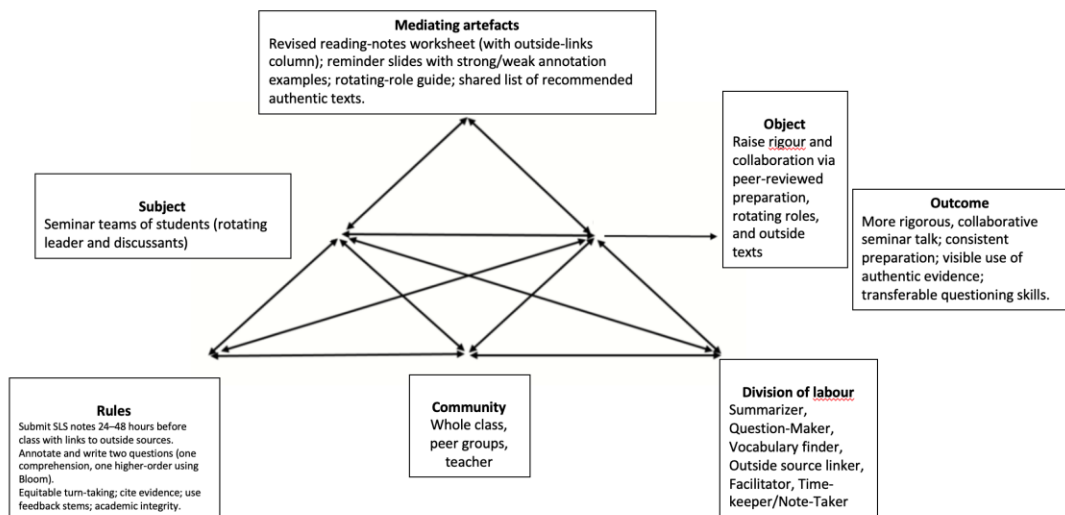


Figure 5-17 Student-Led Seminar Activity System

For the Transmedia Presentation, a parallel transformation was underway. Students' creation of the checklist addressed the *Object–Outcome* contradiction identified earlier, clarifying expectations and linking creativity to critical engagement. The resulting system, visualised in Figure 5-20, shows how redesigned tools, rules, and division of labour led to improved fairness, intellectual rigour, and performative quality in subsequent presentations.

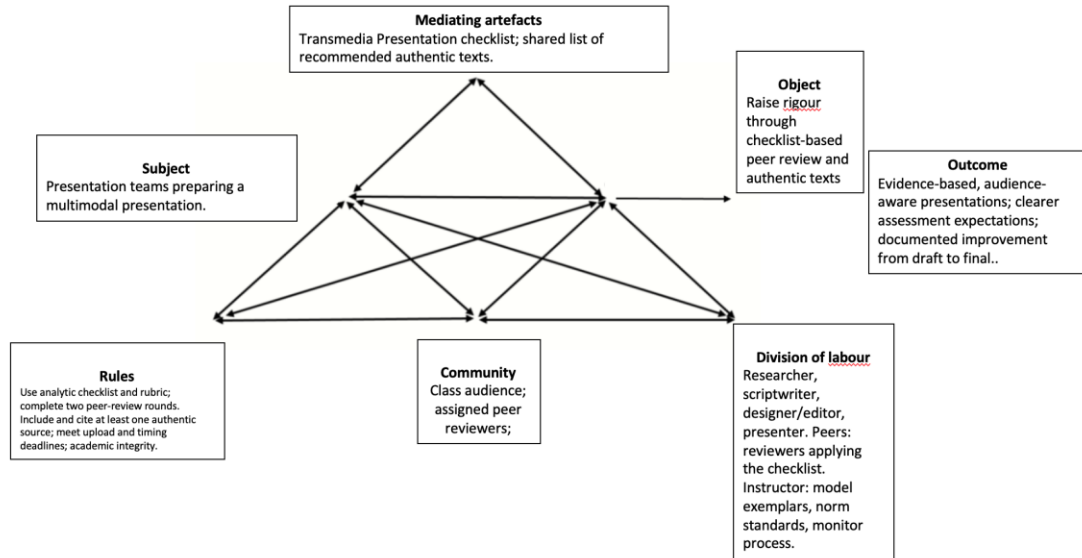


Figure 5-18 Transmedia Presentation Activity System

5.7 Session 5 (Intervention A)

5.7.1 Context

Session 5 took place near the end of the semester with myself and 12 of 13 students present; the two faculty observers were absent. By this stage, students had repeatedly trialled the **Student-Led Seminar (SLS)** format, **Peer-Review Checklist**, and **Outside Reading Link** column. While these tools were now familiar, new concerns emerged around fairness, preparation, and assessment.

The aim of the session was to consolidate previous innovations, surface lingering contradictions, and co-construct shared classroom norms. Confidence had grown, and several students began to question not only course practices but also broader institutional routines such as exam design.

5.7.2 Design

This session focused on consolidating earlier innovations and addressing persistent contradictions. Rather than introducing new tools, tasks prompted critique and collaborative redesign of classroom norms.

Table 5-19 Design Intervention A Session 5

| Expansive Learning Action | Task # | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|---|--------|--|---|--|
| Questioning/Analysing | 5.1 | Summary of SLS experiences and prep concerns | Student comments on uneven seminar preparation | Prompt to co-create shared preparation norms |
| Modelling | 5.2 | Samples of annotated texts with student-made questions | Reflections on question types and Bloom's taxonomy | Proposal to adopt a protocol (annotation + 2 questions) |
| Questioning & Analysing of assessment rules | 5.3 | Copies of previous multiple-choice exams | Criticism from Sora and Satoshi about memorisation and fairness | Suggested trial of unseen text format with AWL and comprehension focus |
| Implementing (early action) | 5.4 | Samples of Transmedia Presentation rubrics | Student feedback on unclear expectations (Yuna, Haruto) | Group creation of a clearer presentation checklist |

5.7.3 Report

Session 5 marked a shift toward an institutional perspective, with students examining not only classroom tools but also preparation routines, assessment expectations, and learning norms. In small groups, they discussed ongoing issues around uneven seminar preparation, unclear exam demands, and fairness in vocabulary learning and assessment.

In Tasks 5.1 and 5.2, students focused on uneven preparation in the Student-Led Seminars (SLS) and proposed ways to establish shared responsibility. Yuna noted, *“Some students still don’t prepare unless they are presenting,”* while Daiki added, *“They wait for the summary and just listen. It’s unfair.”* These comments reflected growing frustration with existing norms. Haruto suggested, *“What if we all had to bring annotations every time? Not just presenters,”* and Kaito proposed, *“And one question each. Like one basic and one deep one. It would help us think.”* Together, these ideas formed the basis for a common preparation protocol.

To support the design of more varied and cognitively demanding questions, I drew Bloom’s revised taxonomy on the whiteboard and explained its relevance to question design, then asked students to explore it independently. One group found a clear visual representation online, which students used to distinguish between lower- and higher-order thinking questions (see Figure 5-21).



Figure 5-19 Blooming Orange – Bloom’s Taxonomy verbs. Adapted from *Blooming Orange – Bloom’s Taxonomy Helpful Verbs Poster [Image]*, by W. Sparrow, 2013, W Sparrow ICT Education.

Building on this, students in Task 5.2 proposed a more structured approach—annotating texts and preparing one comprehension and one critical thinking question. Yuna suggested teacher checks: “*Maybe the teacher can check our annotations at the start?*” Daiki linked the idea to past practice: “*It sounds strict, but it worked in high school for vocabulary checks. It made us more serious.*” Haruto proposed a peer-sharing model instead: “*We can show our vocab sentences to a partner. Then it feels less top-down.*” These exchanges are summarised in Table 5-20, which combines student concerns, proposed solutions, and the final visual checklist.

Table 5-20 Student-Identified Issues and Agreed Preparation Protocol (Session 5)

| Focus Area | Speaker(s) | Issue / Suggestion | Agreed or Proposed Response | Purpose |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Seminar Preparation | Yuna | Some students do not prepare unless presenting | Introduce a shared preparation rule | Encourage responsibility |
| | Daiki | Listeners rely on summaries rather than reading | Require annotations from all students | Promote active reading |
| | Haruto | Unequal balance of work in seminars | Everyone brings annotations | Fairness and shared workload |
| Vocabulary Learning | Daiki | Vocabulary should build on what is already familiar from high school | Use familiar vocabulary checks | Familiar and effective routine |
| | Haruto | Vocabulary work feels uneven and stressful | Peer-sharing of vocabulary sentences | Reduce pressure; balance effort |
| Question Formation | Kaito | Discussions lack depth and momentum | Each student prepares 1 basic + 1 deep question (Bloom-guided) | Increase cognitive depth |
| Shared Preparation Checklist | Group | Lack of clarity about expectations before seminars | All students must: annotate text, prepare 1 comprehension question, prepare 1 critical-thinking question, and share in a pair/group | Establish shared responsibility |

Task 5.3 turned to examinations. Students criticised the multiple-choice format. Sora remarked, “*We remember the answers just for that day... then forget*” highlighting the gap between rote memorisation and lasting learning. Satoshi added, “*It’s like guessing what the teacher thinks is important.*” Rina and Aoi proposed using unseen texts and vocabulary-in-context questions. “*It feels more like real reading,*” Aoi said, later adding, “*That feels like EIKEN,*” referring to the widely recognised English proficiency test in Japan. Students then modelled possible question types in small groups. Although it was too late to revise examinations that semester, I recorded these concerns for Intervention B. This later informed the current course design, in which three reading exams are based on unseen texts.

Task 5.4 focused on Transmedia Presentations. Haruto observed, “*Some groups made flashy ones, but didn’t really connect it to the topic,*” criticising outcomes. Yuna agreed: “*I liked the freedom, but I wasn’t sure what the teacher was really looking for.*” In response, students drafted a checklist clarifying expectations for topic relevance, depth,

and creativity, moving from critique to modelling and action. I supported the wording of several items included in Figure 5-23.

| Criteria | What to check before presenting | Yes / No | Suggestions |
|---------------------|---|----------|-------------|
| Relevance to topic | Is your presentation clearly linked to the chosen article? | | |
| Depth of analysis | Have you gone beyond summary to offer critical thinking or interpretation? | | |
| Creativity | Have you included engaging or original elements to present your message? | | |
| Equal participation | Did all group members contribute visibly and equally to the content and delivery? | | |
| Clarity of message | Is the audience likely to understand the main point easily? | | |
| Time management | Does the presentation fit within the allocated time per speaker | | |
| Use of English | Have you checked grammar, pronunciation, and academic tone? | | |
| Visuals or Media | Are any slides, props, or media clear, relevant, and well-integrated? | | |

Figure 5-20 Student-Designed Draft Checklist to Improve Clarity and Relevance of Transmedia Presentations.

5.7.4 Contradictions

Session 5 surfaced five key contradictions, indicating that students were now analysing not only classroom tools and participation norms but also broader issues of assessment and institutional design. Each contradiction can be viewed as either a refinement of earlier tensions or the emergence of a new systemic layer of critique within the expanding activity system.

Table 5-21 Contradictions Intervention A Session 5

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Similarity to Earlier / Later Contradictions |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Memorisation Exams vs Lasting Understanding (Tertiary) | Rules ↔ Object (Institutional vs Course) | Students determined multiple-choice exams promoted memorisation rather than conceptual understanding; their proposal for unseen-text exams aimed to align assessment with dialogic, interpretive learning. | Students contrasted MCQs with deeper learning; suggested unseen-text reading exams. | Extends Session 2’s “Reproduction vs Dialogue” from classroom tools to institutional assessment; becomes a pivot toward rethinking formal evaluation. |
| Unclear Presentation Rubric (Secondary) | Tools ↔ Outcome | Ambiguity in the original rubric—especially around “creative but off-topic” work—prompted students to design a clearer, student-generated checklist. | Concerns over “flashy but not on topic”; creation of checklist. | Refines Session 4’s “Creative Freedom vs Assessment Clarity,” becoming a concrete co-assessment tool. |
| Teacher Authority vs Peer Accountability (Secondary) | Rules ↔ Community | Students debated whether preparation should be checked by the teacher or peers, revealing tension between hierarchical expectations and emerging shared responsibility. | Discussion over who should confirm preparation; concerns about fairness. | Continues Session 3’s “Feedback Anxiety,” shifting from emotional discomfort to structural negotiation of power and accountability. |
| Vocabulary Retention and Application (Primary → Secondary) | Subject ↔ Tools | Students sought systematic ways to retain and reuse vocabulary, drawing on familiar high-school routines; indicated need for tools supporting sustained vocabulary development, not just short-term use. | Students proposed vocabulary integration into annotation and peer-sharing routines. | New contradiction building on Session 3’s tool-related tensions (clarity vs judgement), extending tool-object misalignment to long-term learning. |

Collectively, these contradictions show how the focus of expansive learning had widened: from interpersonal communication and participation norms (Sessions 1–3) to the re-engineering of tools, rules, and assessments themselves. The progression marks a shift from local pedagogical improvement to systemic, institution-facing critique—an essential precursor to the unseen-text assessment and refined peer-evaluation systems implemented in Intervention B.

5.7.5 Transformative Agency

By Session 5, students demonstrated the most comprehensive and self-sustaining forms of transformative agency observed in Intervention A. Their actions spanned later phases

of Haapasaari et al.’s (2016) typology, from critiquing existing classroom norms to envisioning and acting on structural reforms. Unlike earlier sessions, agency was no longer limited to classroom tools, as students also questioned assessment systems and institutional routines, indicating a stronger sense of ownership over the learning environment.

Table 5-22 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention A Session 5

| Type of Agency | Evidence from Session | Example Quote | Frequency |
|-----------------------------|---|---|-----------|
| Resisting | | | 0 |
| Criticising | Yuna criticised the uneven workload in SLS preparation. Daiki and Satoshi pointed out issues in peer preparation and exam guessing. | “Some people still don’t prepare unless they are presenting.” (Yuna) / “They wait for the summary and just listen. It’s unfair.” (Daiki) / “It’s like guessing what the teacher thinks is important.” (Satoshi) | 3 |
| Explicating | Students described how current routines failed to support shared effort. | “What if we all had to bring annotations every time? Not just presenters.” | 2 |
| Envisioning | Students imagined improved learning structures using annotations and unseen texts. | “One basic and one deep question. It would help us think.” “It feels more like real reading.” | 3 |
| Committing to Action | Groups agreed to adopt annotation routines and co-create clearer criteria. | “We can show our vocab sentences to a partner. Then it feels less top-down.” | 2 |
| Taking Action | Students co-created the Transmedia checklist and shared Bloom’s image via Classroom. | (Checklist and Bloom’s image were added to Google Classroom resources.) | 2 |

Total agency expressions: 12

Expressions of transformative agency: (Yuna, Daiki, Satoshi, whole group)

5.7.6 Outcomes

Session 5 resulted in both immediate classroom improvements and broader conceptual shifts. Students co-created a **seminar preparation checklist**—requiring annotation and two questions per reading—to ensure fair and consistent participation, and a **revised Transmedia Presentation checklist** to clarify expectations for relevance, creativity, and academic depth. Both tools were shared via Google Classroom and widely adopted.

The class also integrated **Bloom’s Taxonomy** into seminar preparation, helping students design higher-order questions and link classroom tasks to assessment goals.

Finally, their critique of multiple-choice exams produced the proposal for **unseen-text reading assessments**, which would later be implemented in Intervention B.

These developments signalled a shift from local tool refinement to systemic redesign. Students were no longer adjusting existing activities but actively shaping the rules, tools, and assessment structures of their learning environment. The revised activity system (Figure 5-21) captures this transition, showing how peer accountability, authentic materials, and shared preparation norms replaced hierarchical dependency and passive participation, completing the first expansive-learning cycle of the study.

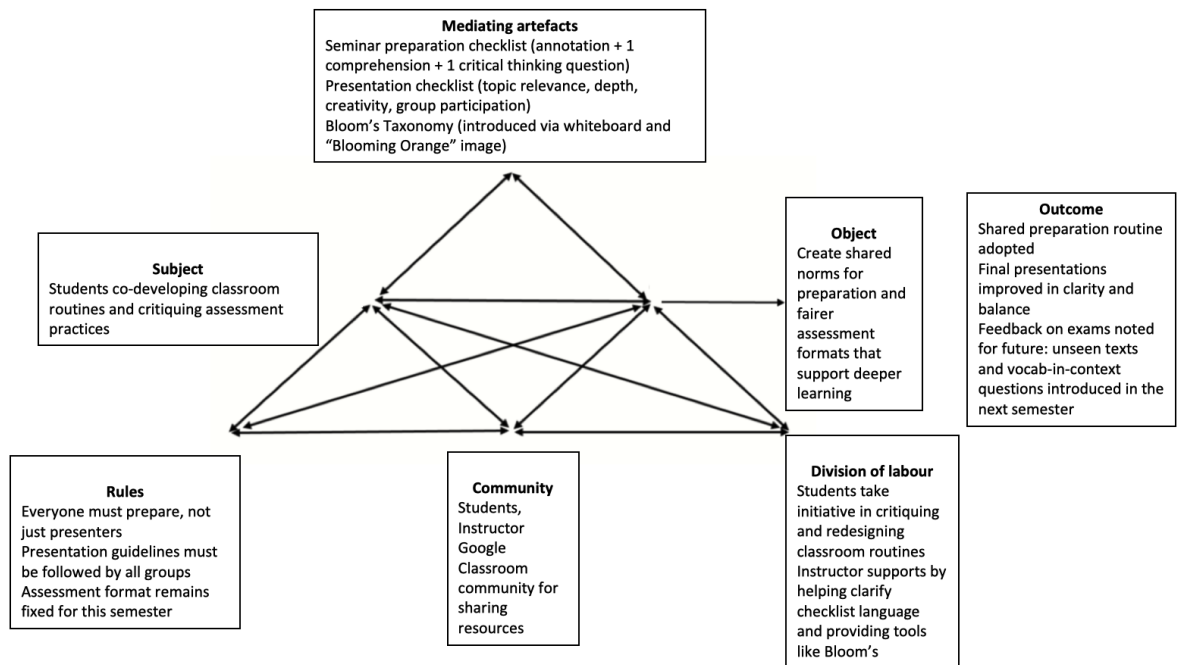


Figure 5-21 Revised Activity System Diagram - Intervention A Session 5

5.8 Focus Group (Intervention A)

5.8.1 Context

The final session of Intervention A was a two-hour focus group with eight participants (Daiki, Haruto, Yuna, Aoi, Kaito, Rina, Sora, and Mai). Held in a familiar seminar room and facilitated only by the researcher, the session constituted the *process reflection* phase of Engeström's expansive learning cycle. Here, students collectively

re-examined the five workshops to evaluate what had changed, what persisted, and what should be embedded for future cohorts. As in the previous workshops, the analysis below follows the standard structure—Expansive Learning, Contradictions, and Transformative Agency—although this discussion involved guided reflection rather than new modelling or tool creation.

5.8.2 Design

Prompts were grouped to revisit each major area of change, pairing recollection of what had been tried with reflection on what had endured and what needed further improvement.

Table 5-23 Design Summary: Focus Group

| Prompt Cluster (FG Task) | Expansive Learning Action | First Stimulus (Prompt/Artifact) | Mirror Data (Students' accounts/artefacts) | Second Stimulus (Comparative/Consolidation Aid) |
|---|----------------------------|---|--|---|
| FG.1 Preparation protocols (annotation + student questions) | Reflecting → Consolidating | Prompt to recall Session 5 protocol | Examples of questions/annotations used since workshops | Side-by-side comparison of “before/after” prep routines |
| FG.2 Seminar design & outside readings | Reflecting → Consolidating | Prompt to recall Session 4 redesign & authentic sources | Experiences selecting/using outside articles | Source list + outline templates to anchor consolidation |
| FG.3 Assessment shift (unseen text + AWL focus) | Reflecting → Consolidating | Prompt to evaluate exam changes | Reports of perceived fairness/relevance | Criteria reminders to stabilise expectations |
| FG.4 Multimodal presentation rubric/checklist | Reflecting → Consolidating | Prompt to evaluate rubric clarity & peer feedback | Examples of how rubric aided preparation/feedback | Agreed refinements for earlier release next semester |

5.8.3 Report

Discussion followed the four prompt clusters and focused on reflection and consolidation rather than new modelling. Across the focus groups, students consistently described a shift toward more active preparation, collaborative questioning, and shared responsibility for learning.

Students reported that preparation protocols and questioning tools supported deeper engagement over time. Several noted that early reluctance to speak gave way to greater confidence as their contributions were taken up in course design. As Yuna reflected,

“We built the course together. Even small suggestions, like the feedback sheet, became real.” Others described how Bloom’s taxonomy and vocabulary checks helped them move beyond surface understanding toward more analytical engagement, particularly when examples and questions were student-generated.

Seminar design and the use of outside readings were also discussed positively. Students valued selecting authentic articles and saw this as increasing academic seriousness and relevance. As Mai explained, choosing readings “felt more like university,” while others emphasised the importance of engaging with new texts rather than repeating a single shared source.

Assessment practices, particularly the introduction of unseen-text exams, prompted mixed but reflective responses. While students acknowledged increased stress, they also described the format as fairer and more authentic. Several requested clearer criteria and earlier explanation, indicating a shift from passive acceptance of assessment to evaluative engagement with how learning was recognised.

Reflections on presentation rubrics and feedback checklists highlighted the role of structure in enabling participation. Students noted that clear criteria supported gradual involvement, especially for quieter members, because ideas were visibly incorporated into shared tools. As Kaito observed, participation increased “step by step” once students saw their suggestions being used.

Across all focus groups, students contrasted these experiences with prior schooling characterised by memorisation and compliance. Several described this course as the first context in which they felt able to influence learning practices rather than simply follow instructions. These reflections align with the expanded awareness observed in Session 5, confirming that students were evaluating learning not only as participants but increasingly as designers of future practice (see Table 5-24).

Table 5-24 Expansive Learning Actions Evident in Intervention A Focus Group

| Expansive Learning Action | Observed Focus in Discussion | Representative Evidence | Representative Quote(s) |
|--|--|--|--|
| Reflecting on the process (process reflection) | Evaluating what changed across the five workshops; recognising shifts in roles and practices | Students reviewed how tools and routines altered participation and preparation | “At first, I was shy to speak out, but now I feel like... we built the course together. Even small suggestions, like the feedback sheet, became real.” (Yuna) • “Writing critical questions was hard at first, but with Bloom’s taxonomy, I started to think deeper.” (Aoi) |
| Consolidating the new practice | Identifying which practices had been taken up and what conditions are needed to embed them for the next cohort | Continued use of annotation + student questions; value of rubric clarity; endorsement of student-chosen articles; requests for earlier criteria and structured prep time | “When we made our own examples, it became more useful.” (Daiki) • “I liked choosing the articles with my group... We weren’t just reading what someone told us to read.” (Mai) • “Some of us were quiet... but step-by-step we joined more because we saw our ideas got used.” (Kaito) |
| Questioning (re-problematizing) | Re-surfacing unresolved tensions that hinder full stabilisation | Ongoing concerns about preparation consistency, confidence to speak, and assessment clarity | “Exams are stressful, but the idea of unseen texts... felt more real.” (Sora) • “We didn’t fix everything, but I think we learned to say what we think.” (Rina) |

5.8.4 Contradictions

Three recurring contradictions were identified after transcription.

Table 5-25 Contradictions Intervention A Focus Group

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Similarity to Earlier Sessions |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Preparation Consistency (Secondary) | Rules ↔ Object | Despite new tools (annotation protocols, question templates), students noted uneven uptake. Some continued minimal preparation, limiting the object of fully dialogic seminar discussion. | Reports of variable annotation depth; some students “still not sure what to prepare.” | Refinement of Sessions 3–5 “Participation Unevenness” and “Uneven SLS Roles” contradictions. Shows the challenge persisted even after tool development. |
| Confidence Gap (Primary) | Subject ↔ Outcome | Students valued speaking and recognised growth, but cultural reticence, fear of error, and self-doubt still limited full participation. | Students reported lingering hesitation to speak or challenge peers; fear of “being wrong.” | Continuation of Sessions 1–3 “Participation Discomfort” and “Deference vs Criticality.” Improved awareness, but tension not fully eliminated. |
| Assessment Clarity (Secondary) | Tools ↔ Rules | Although student-generated rubrics increased transparency, uncertainty remained—especially for multimodal tasks. Students requested earlier, clearer criteria. | Students asked for clearer examples, earlier rubrics, and better alignment with expectations. | Refinement of Sessions 4–5 “Creative Freedom vs Assessment Clarity” and “Unclear Presentation Rubric.” Now recognised as an ongoing system-wide tension. |

5.8.5 Transformative Agency

The focus group data were coded for expressions of transformative agency. Most instances reflected *criticism*, *explication*, and *commitment*—typical of reflection and consolidation phases. Students articulated a collective responsibility for shaping learning tools and transferring them to future cohorts.

Table 5-26 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention A Focus Group

| Agency Type | Evidence | Example quote(s) | Frequency |
|---------------|---|--|-----------|
| Resisting | | | 0 |
| Criticising | Highlighting weaknesses in assessment & routines | “Unseen texts felt more real.” (Sora); “Rubrics should be explained earlier.” (Mai) | 2 |
| Explicating | Naming constraints / shifts in roles | “At first I was shy... we built the course together.” (Yuna); “I still feel nervous speaking, but I try.” (Rina); “With Bloom’s taxonomy, I started to think deeper.” (Aoi) | 3 |
| Committing | Endorsing continuation/embedding of tried practices for the next cohort | “Let’s keep the annotation and questions—those really helped.” (Daiki); “Some articles should be chosen by students.” (Aoi); “We joined more because we saw our ideas used.” (Kaito) | 3 |
| Envisioning | | | |
| Taking Action | | | |

Total agency expressions (coded instances): 8

Participants exhibiting transformative agency: Yuna, Rina, Aoi, Daiki, Kaito, Sora, Mai

5.8.6 Outcome

The focus group fulfilled its role as the *collective reflection* phase of the expansive learning cycle. Students reviewed the full trajectory of the intervention, identified which tools and practices had worked, and specified the conditions for embedding them in the next cohort.

They endorsed the continued use of annotation with student-written questions guided by Bloom’s taxonomy, peer vocabulary checks using student examples, student-designed checklists, clearer preparation norms, and student-selected articles. They also called for

earlier and clearer rubrics, more structured preparation time, and unseen-text assessments that test vocabulary-in-context and interpretive comprehension.

Unexpectedly, students spoke with striking seriousness about improving the course for future cohorts, even though they would not personally benefit. This forward-looking stance showed a strong collective investment in course quality and sustained ownership of change.

However, some contradictions persisted: uneven preparation, partial assessment clarity, and limited confidence in peer-led dialogue. These unresolved tensions informed the design of Intervention B (2020, online), which began not from teacher-created models but from student-generated tools, norms, and shared expectations developed in Intervention A.

By articulating these refinements, students effectively transferred ownership of the redesigned practices to the next cohort—signalling the close of one expansive learning cycle and the conditions for the next.

5.9 Summary of Intervention A

5.9.1 Overview

This summary should be read in direct relation to the contrast between the transmission-focused activity system (Figure 5.1) and the dialogic activity system introduced in Section 5.1.1 (Figure 5.2). While the former positioned academic reading as the reproduction of teacher-selected content, Intervention A progressively re-oriented the activity toward dialogic meaning-making, shared interpretation, and distributed responsibility. The expansive-learning cycle traced below therefore represents not only a sequence of pedagogical changes, but a systemic re-mediation of the academic-reading activity.

Intervention A moved the cohort through a full cycle of expansive learning. Sessions 1–2 surfaced and analysed inherited practices; Sessions 2–4 modelled and examined alternatives; Sessions 4–5 implemented and refined new routines; and the Focus Group served as and early consolidation. Students gradually shifted from peripheral participation to active co-design, most visibly in the **Student-Led Seminar (SLS)**

routine—annotation with student-written questions, peer vocabulary checks using student examples, and shared checklists for preparation and feedback.

Table 5-27 presents the distribution of expansive-learning actions across sessions. Table 5-28 complements this overview by mapping these actions onto Engeström’s expansive-learning cycle, showing how specific Change Laboratory sessions and artefacts contributed to the re-mediation of the academic-reading activity system.

Table 5-27 Distribution of Expansive Learning Actions Evidenced Across Intervention A

| Expansive Learning Action | Sessions Where Predominant |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Questioning | Session 1 |
| 2. Analysing | Sessions 1–2 |
| 3. Modelling | Sessions 2–3 |
| 4. Examining the Model | Sessions 3–4 |
| 5. Implementing | Sessions 4–5 Focus Group (reports of trying practices in class) |
| 6. Reflecting | Sessions 4–5 Focus Group (discussion of benefits/limits, cultural discomforts) |
| 7. Consolidating | Session 5 (partially) Focus Group (suggestions for embedding changes in curriculum) |

Table 5-28 Trajectory of the Expansive-Learning Cycle During Intervention A (2019)

| Expansive-Learning Phase | Session(s) | Core Activity | Illustrative Tools / Outcomes |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| Questioning | A1 | Surfacing contradictions in the academic-reading activity system | Mirror-data discussion; mapping of cultural expectations |
| Analysing | A2 | Exploring causes of contradictions | Group analysis of participation norms; identification of teacher-centred routines |
| Modelling the New | A3–A4 | Designing new mediating tools and practices | Student-Led Seminar (SLS) checklists; Bloom-guided question sheets; peer-feedback templates |
| Examining the Model | A5 | Testing and refining the new designs | Trial SLS sessions; feedback on authentic-reading use |
| Reflecting & Consolidating | Focus Group A | Evaluating new routines and planning transfer | Revised annotation protocol; proposal for unseen-text exam |

5.9.2 Contradictions

Three thematic clusters of contradictions persisted across the cycle:

• **Participation, roles, and community**

Tensions first surfaced in Session 1—such as participation discomfort, passive role identity, and teacher-centred authority—resurfaced as uneven contribution and reluctance to question peers. Although rotating roles and co-designed tools redistributed responsibility, hierarchical norms continued to moderate participation, and the learning community had not yet fully stabilised into a collaborative dialogic system.

• **Tools and preparation**

The shift from monologic textbook routines to SLS protocols, authentic sources, and question-writing practices represented significant tool development across Sessions 2–5. However, the Focus Group revealed lingering inconsistency in annotation and question preparation, indicating that collective accountability had improved but not yet fully consolidated.

• **Assessment and authenticity**

Students critiqued memorisation-based testing and proposed unseen-text reading exams to foreground vocabulary-in-context and interpretive reading. They also requested clearer, earlier criteria for multimodal tasks. While authenticity and fairness were increasingly embedded in student-generated tools, full alignment with institutional assessment norms remained incomplete.

Together these contradictions show that expansive learning had produced structural and cultural shifts, but the system had not yet reached full stabilisation.

5.9.3 Transformative Agency

Students' discourse and artefacts across Intervention A revealed a patterned distribution of transformative agency over the course of the intervention. In the early sessions, criticising and explicating predominated as students problematised memorisation-oriented practices and reflected on their own passive participation within teacher-centred routines.

From Sessions 3–5, committing and taking action became increasingly evident, as students agreed to trial and then routinely implemented redesigned practices, including

the Student-Led Seminar (SLS) preparation checklist, peer vocabulary checks, and student-designed rubrics. These actions marked a shift from critique toward collective experimentation and practical enactment of new tools.

In the focus group, expressions of agency assumed a more collective and forward-looking orientation, with participants advocating the retention and institutionalisation of redesigned practices for future cohorts. This indicates an emerging transfer of responsibility from teacher-led instruction toward shared ownership of the academic-reading activity.

Instances of envisioning were concentrated in the mid-phase of the intervention and declined in later sessions, while expressions of resisting were limited overall. This pattern is consistent with an expansive-learning cycle in which critique and explanation give way to implementation and early consolidation, rather than to extended open-ended modelling. Table 5-29 summarises the distribution of transformative agency across the Change Laboratory sessions and focus group.

Table 5-29 Distribution of Transformative Agency Across Intervention A

| Agency type | Session 1 | Session 2 | Session 3 | Session 4 | Session 5 | Focus Group |
|----------------------|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| Resisting | Questioning the legitimacy of student-led change and preference for teacher authority | Continued hesitation about responsibility for course design | — | — | — | — |
| Criticising | Critique of memorisation, textbook dominance, and participation norms | Cultural and pedagogical critique linked to senpai–kohai and fear of error | Ongoing critique of discussion formats and assessment | Reduced as practices stabilised | — | Retrospective critique of former course design |
| Explicating | Initial explanations of passivity and silence | Clearer articulation of causes (authority, lack of tools) | Linking problems to rules, roles, and tools | Refinement of explanations through tool use | Explicit reflection on what had changed | Collective explanation of learning gains |
| Envisioning | — | Proposals for peer tools and structured discussion | Expansion of ideas into seminar formats | Envisioning refinement rather than new ideas | — | — |
| Committing | — | — | Agreement to trial student-designed tools | Commitment to regular use of SLS tools | Endorsement of redesigned practices | Advocacy for continuation in future cohorts |
| Taking action | — | — | Creation and trial of checklists and seminar sheets | Routine use and adjustment of tools | Consolidation of practices | — |

5.9.4 Curriculum Changes

Intervention A produced a coherent set of curriculum innovations through students’ collective redesign of the academic reading activity. These changes focused primarily on new mediating artefacts (tools) and revised rules governing participation, preparation, and evaluation, rather than on formal institutional roles or wider community structures.

At the level of tools, students co-designed the Student-Led Seminar (SLS) routine, combining shared annotation, student-written comprehension and critical questions guided by Bloom's taxonomy, and peer vocabulary checks using student-generated examples. They also produced checklists for seminars and Transmedia Presentations that clarified expectations for preparation and feedback, and integrated authentic, student-selected articles to strengthen links between classroom discussion and disciplinary academic practice.

At the level of rules, students argued for greater transparency and fairness in assessment, including clearer criteria and proposals for unseen-text reading examinations that prioritised interpretive reading over memorisation. While these proposals addressed assessment practices, responsibility for formal grading and course governance remained with teaching staff.

Together, these student-generated tools and revised rules re-mediated the activity system shown in Figure 5.2 by redistributing responsibility for meaning-making, preparation, and evaluative judgement toward the student collective, while leaving institutional roles largely intact. The focus group confirmed which practices should be retained, identified conditions for sustainable embedding, and highlighted unresolved tensions, particularly uneven preparation and assessment transparency.

These unresolved contradictions directly informed Intervention B (2020), which began not from a teacher-devised framework but from the dialogic tools, norms, and shared accountability structures generated by students during Intervention A.

5.10 Intervention B Overview

Intervention B began from the dialogic academic reading activity system that had emerged through students' work in Intervention A (Figure 5.2). As students progressed through the Change Laboratory sessions, their continued redesign of tools, rules, and evaluative practices produced the features associated with the Autonomous Learning Activity System shown in Figure 5.3, including increased responsibility for learning design, multimodal task creation, and peer regulation.

Intervention B ran from April to July 2020 with a new cohort of 14 students and three faculty members, although only six students attended each session. It followed the same overall structure as Intervention A: an initial diagnostic survey, five bi-weekly Change Laboratory sessions, and a final online focus group. Data sources included student-created artefacts (activity-system diagrams, SLS and SLW plans, annotated readings, presentation slides, and peer-feedback rubrics), field notes, and full Zoom recordings. All data were coded thematically using the procedures outlined in Chapter 4, enabling direct comparison between the two interventions

5.11 Session 1 (Intervention B)

5.11.1 Context

Session 1 opened the expansive learning cycle for Intervention B and revisited the learning dispositions and contradictions identified in Intervention A. Six students attended. The session was conducted online via Zoom. Its purpose was to prompt reflection on participants' current academic reading practices, roles, and rules, while linking their experiences to the developmental findings from the earlier cohort.

Participants examined a summary of the Learning Disposition Survey alongside four contradictions identified in Intervention A — Participation Discomfort, Passive Role Identity, Monologic Tools, and Teacher-as-Fount-of-Knowledge — which were used as mirror data. They discussed whether these tensions still described their own experiences and identified any new or modified contradictions. The session aimed to move quickly from reflection toward action by positioning students as co-analysts of the academic reading system and encouraging early expressions of transformative agency.

Although the two faculty members (FB and FC) did not attend, they were kept informed through email summaries and follow-up meetings with me as facilitator.

5.11.2 Design

A single integrated task combined reflection on learning dispositions with examination of study routines and mediating tools.

Table 5-30 Intervention B Session 1 Design

| Task | Expansive Learning Action | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|------|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 1.1 | Questioning → Envisioning | Prompts on learning dispositions and reading habits | Learning Disposition Survey summary & contradictions from Intervention A | Confucian–Socratic learning framework (Tweed & Lehman, 2002) + revised activity-system table template |

Students worked in small breakout groups using shared Google Docs templates to record contradictions and propose practical changes. Each template contained columns for *Rules*, *Tools*, *Community*, *Object*, and *Proposed Change*, allowing ideas to be captured more efficiently than with the earlier triangular model. Figure 5-25 shows the Google Doc Activity System Table completed in the session

| Rules | Tools | Community | Object | Proposed Change |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Everyone should join the discussion, but usually only 2–3 people talk. | We only use PowerPoint slides and textbook now. | 6 people in one group + teacher watching. | We want everyone to talk more and feel relaxed. | Add one question section in reading notes. Everyone must write 1 question before class. |
| Leaders need to make the discussion smooth, but they talk too much. | No clear plan for what to say or ask. | Members wait for leader to finish. | Make the talk more equal between leader and members. | Make “interaction plan” in the slide — leader ask short question after each part. |
| Teacher gives feedback but we don’t know how grade is decided. | No checklist or form to see evaluation. | Only teacher decide the score. | We want fair and clear evaluation. | Make peer feedback sheet with 3 points: preparation / speaking / teamwork. |

Figure 5-22 Google Doc Activity System Table

Groups were asked to identify one specific classroom action to trial before Session 2.

5.11.3 Report

The session began with a review of the Learning Disposition Survey (see Section 5.2.1), followed by discussion of the four contradictions identified in Intervention A. Students agreed that Participation Discomfort and Passive Role Identity remained particularly salient. Yuka observed, “We still hesitate to speak if we are not sure,” while Tomoki added, “We study alone too much — maybe we don’t share ideas enough.”

Using the Confucian–Socratic framework as a lens, students re-examined their learning habits. Koji reflected, “We rely on the teacher too much; we wait for the answer instead of exploring together,” highlighting the persistence of the Teacher-as-Fount-of-Knowledge contradiction. Megumi suggested, “If we write what we don’t understand and share it, that’s already more active,” and Rie proposed adding a ‘question’ section to reading notes to make participation more concrete.

A new contradiction emerged — Over-Preparation vs. Interaction — capturing students’ growing awareness that solitary comprehension often displaced exploratory dialogue.

Students also reflected on the inherited Student-Led Seminar (SLS) format. Several felt that requiring only seminar leaders to write full summaries created imbalance and reduced peer engagement. Toshiyuki commented that some classmates “only annotated” without understanding the article in depth. The group proposed that all students write short summaries, while seminar leaders prepare PowerPoint slides presenting key points. These slides could then be compared with peers’ written summaries before discussion, balancing workload and ensuring closer reading of the source text.

By the end of the session, each participant had proposed at least one actionable change, including annotated question sections, rotating peer facilitation, and the revised SLS procedure.

5.11.4 Contradictions

Students identified four main contradictions—three continuing from Intervention A and one newly emerging. Together, these showed how familiar habits were being re-examined in a more self-aware way.

Table 5-31 Contradictions Intervention B Session 1

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Connection to Earlier Contradictions |
|---|-------------------|---|---|---|
| Participation Discomfort (Primary) | Rules ↔ Object | Social norms of silence and harmony continued to inhibit spontaneous speaking, even though the object required active dialogic participation. | Yuka: “We still hesitate to speak if we are not sure.” | Continuation of Intervention A Sessions 1–3 , where discomfort with speaking and fear of disrupting harmony repeatedly surfaced. |
| Passive Role Identity (Primary) | Subject ↔ Outcome | Students still positioned themselves as listeners who absorb information rather than contributors who co-construct meaning. This conflicted with the intended outcome of collaborative engagement. | Students described learning as “listening and understanding rather than giving ideas.” | Carries over directly from Sessions 1–3 , where students struggled to shift away from exam-oriented, teacher-led identities. |
| Monologic Tools (Secondary) | Tools ↔ Object | Students continued relying on textbooks and comprehension exercises that supported individual processing rather than collaborative meaning-making, misaligning tools with the dialogic object. | Use of comprehension questions and textbook summaries dominated early discussion. | Direct continuation of Session 1’s “Monologic Tools” and Session 2’s “Reproduction vs Dialogue” contradictions , still unresolved at the start of Intervention B. |
| Over-Preparation vs Interaction (Secondary – Newly Emergent) | Tools ↔ Object | A new contradiction emerged as students realised that solitary, intensive preparation often replaced genuine interaction. Excessive pre-discussion notes restricted openness and reduced peer engagement. | Students reported spending “too much time preparing alone” and not enough time talking. | Newly explicit in Intervention B , but rooted in Intervention A’s <i>Transcription vs Interpretation</i> and <i>Participation Unevenness</i> contradictions. Students now recognised it and used this insight to redesign the SLS for shared responsibility. |

5.11.5 Transformative Agency

Expressions of transformative agency appeared earlier and more confidently than in Intervention A, progressing from Criticising and Explicating to Envisioning and Taking Action.

Yuka’s comment, “We still hesitate to speak if we are not sure,” identified emotional norms limiting participation (Criticising). Koji’s observation, “We rely on the teacher too much; we wait for the answer instead of exploring together,” Explicated ongoing structural dependence.

Envisioning was evident when Megumi suggested, “If we write what we don’t understand and share it, that’s already more active.” Building on this, Toshiyuki

proposed a revised SLS procedure: “Some people only annotate; they don’t really understand the article deeply.” The group agreed to trial this format, marking the first instance of Taking Action in Intervention B.

Table 5-32 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention B Session 1

| Agency Type | Evidence | Example Quote(s) | Freq. |
|---------------|--|---|-------|
| Resisting | — | — | 0 |
| Criticising | Emotional and behavioural barriers | “We still hesitate to speak if we are not sure.” (Yuka) | 1 |
| Explicating | Structural dependency on teacher | “We rely on the teacher too much; we wait for the answer instead of exploring together.” (Koji) | 1 |
| Envisioning | Collaborative preparation | “If we write what we don’t understand and share it, that’s already more active.” (Megumi) | 1 |
| Committing | Trial new SLS format | All students agreed | 1 |
| Taking Action | New SLS format: all summarise, leaders make slides | “Some people only annotate... leaders can make slides instead.” (Toshiyuki) | 1 |

Total agency expressions: 5 **Participants:** 4 students

This session marked a clear shift from problem recognition to collective experimentation.

5.11.6 Outcome

By the end of Session 1, students had revisited key contradictions from Intervention A—hesitation to speak, reliance on the teacher, and uneven preparation—and identified a new one, Over-Preparation versus Interaction, describing how private study often replaced dialogue.

Several concrete changes were proposed, including adding a “question” section to reading notes and encouraging open sharing of difficulties. The most significant outcome was the revised Student-Led Seminar format: all students would write short summaries, while seminar leaders prepared brief PowerPoint slides presenting key points. Because everyone had already written a summary, peers could evaluate the clarity and accuracy of the leaders’ slides before discussion. Figure 5.26 shows the revised SLS Instruction Sheet created by participants.

These steps marked a move toward shared responsibility for learning. The rapid transition from analysis to design may reflect both the task-focused structure of the Zoom workshops and the self-selecting nature of this small group. Allowing Japanese in breakout rooms also appeared to support quicker decision-making and collaboration. The revised activity system is captured in Figure 5.27.

Student-Led Seminar Instructions

| For All Students | For Seminar Leaders Only |
|--|---|
| <p>Read the text before the seminar. Check new vocabulary and understand the main idea and key points.</p> | <p>Make Questions: 6 comprehension + 4 discussion. Comprehension = check understanding. Discussion = opinions / real life.</p> |
| <p>Write one question you want to ask in the seminar.</p> | <p>Find One Outside Source: short video, news article, or a summary you write. Must connect to the topic and help with discussion questions. Add link or 1–2 sentence explanation.</p> |
| <p>Write Your Summary (about 200 words): use your own words; include title, author, main idea, key points; bring it to class.</p> | <p>Prepare Your Slides (for comparison): max 3 slides with (1) key points from the text, (2) your outside source, (3) how it connects. Add a simple plan for when you will pause and ask questions.</p> |
| <p>During the seminar: listen carefully; compare the slides with your own summary (same? different? missing?); use your own question and the outside source to join discussion.</p> | <p>During the seminar: explain the text briefly with your slides; explain why your source connects; ask if anyone has questions; ask comprehension questions (others answer first); ask discussion questions using the source; keep time and make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.</p> |

Figure 5-23 Revised Student-Led Seminar Instructions

These steps marked a shift toward shared responsibility for learning. The group moved quickly from problem analysis to design, likely supported by the task-focused structure of the Zoom workshops and the small, self-selecting cohort. Allowing Japanese in breakout rooms also appeared to facilitate decision-making and collaborative negotiation. The resulting configuration of tools, rules, and roles is represented in Figure 5.27.

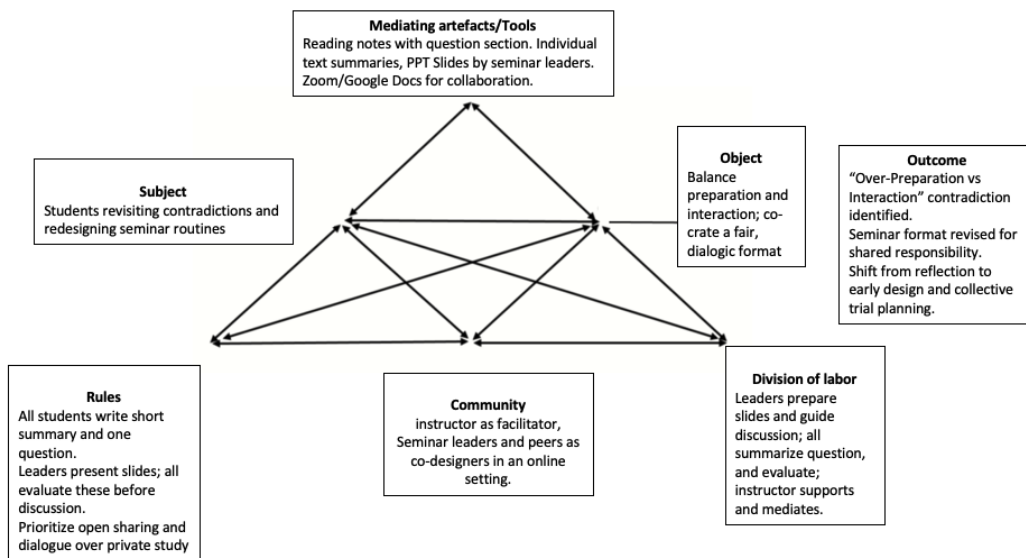


Figure 5-24 Revised Activity System Diagram - Intervention B Session 1

5.12 Session 2 (Intervention B)

5.12.1 Context

Session 2 took place two weeks after the first Change Laboratory workshop. The same six students attended, having trialed the revised Student-Led Seminar (SLS) format in their regular classes. Under this model, all students prepared short written summaries of the textbook chapter, while seminar leaders created concise PowerPoint slides highlighting key points and introducing one outside source linked to the chapter theme.

The session had two aims: to evaluate how effectively the new seminar design balanced preparation and interaction, and to examine how other course components—particularly the Transmedia Presentation and unseen-text reading examinations—related to these changes. To prompt discussion, students viewed a short Transmedia Presentation video from a previous cohort and were asked to consider its engagement, skill development, and alignment with course aims.

5.12.2 Design

The session design can be seen in Table 5-33.

Table 5-33 Design Intervention B Session 2

| Expansive Learning Action | Task # | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|---------------------------|--------|--|---|--|
| Examining the new model | 2.1 | Students' slides and summaries | Reflections on SLS trial | Peer feedback and timing notes |
| Modelling refinements | 2.2 | Comments on preparation and workload | Group discussion | Revised SLS worksheet |
| Evaluating source quality | 2.3 | Outside sources used in SLS | Comparisons of source relevance | Draft checklist for "academic" and conceptually linked materials |
| Examining inherited tool | 2.4 | Video of Transmedia Presentation (previous cohort) | Student reflections on academic value and relevance | Discussion of possible redesign ideas for future presentations |

5.12.3 Report

Students began by reflecting on their first SLS seminars. Yuka noted, "Everyone read more carefully because we had to write our own summary," while Tomoki added, "I felt more confident to ask questions when I already had my notes." Toshiyuki observed, "I spent too long making slides — it became like a mini-lecture." In response, Koji proposed limiting slides to three to keep discussion central, and Megumi suggested, "Maybe leaders should stop after each point and ask one short question." Both suggestions were adopted in a revised worksheet.

Discussion then turned to outside sources. Rie commented, "Sometimes it fits, sometimes it's just interesting," and Megumi reflected, "Mine was from a blog — easy to read but not very academic." This led to a broader discussion of academic credibility. I explained that while journal articles are the most formal sources, accessible academic outlets such as *The Conversation* could bridge readability and credibility. Koji proposed a simple evaluative checklist: "Is it by an expert? Does it connect to the same idea or question?" This was refined into a short Source Guide for future use.

In Task 2.4, students viewed a Transmedia Presentation from an earlier cohort. Yuka said, "It's funny and easy to understand," and Tomoki added, "It would be fun to make something like that." Koji questioned, "It looks creative, but maybe it's not so academic?" Megumi suggested that allowing students to choose their own source text could make the task "more meaningful, not just entertainment," and Rie proposed using the same source checklist to evaluate materials. The group agreed that future

Transmedia tasks should prioritise critical engagement over performance and planned to brainstorm redesign ideas in pairs before Session 3.

5.12.4 Contradictions

Table 5-34 shows that several existing contradictions evolved and Creativity Vs Academic Rigor was identified.

Table 5-34 Contradictions Intervention B Session 2

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Connection to Earlier Sessions |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Over-Preparation vs Interaction (Secondary – Partially Resolved) | Tools ↔ Object | Slides and written summaries reduced isolation and supported shared preparation, yet some leaders continued to over-prepare individually. A three-slide limit was introduced to restore balance between preparation and real-time peer interaction. | Leaders produced long, detailed summaries; decision made to restrict slide numbers. | Refined continuation of Intervention B Session 1’s newly emergent contradiction. Shows early resolution through tool redesign. |
| Monologic Tools and Source Integration (Secondary – Reframed) | Tools ↔ Object | Although slides and outside readings encouraged more dialogic preparation, students became aware of a new issue: the academic credibility, depth, and conceptual relevance of student-selected materials. | Students questioned whether chosen sources were “academic enough” or connected clearly. | Reframing of Intervention A’s “Textbook Limitations vs Authenticity” and Session 1’s “Monologic Tools.” Problem has shifted from quantity of talk to quality of sources. |
| Participation Discomfort (Primary – Persistent) | Rules ↔ Object | Despite stronger preparation routines, students continued to hesitate when disagreeing or challenging peers. Cultural norms of harmony still constrained open critical engagement. | Students reported “still feeling unsure about disagreeing.” | Persists from Intervention A (Sessions 1–3) and Intervention B Session 1. A deep-rooted cultural rule contradiction. |
| Creativity vs Academic Rigor (Tertiary – Newly Articulated) | Object ↔ Outcome (Old Model ↔ New Model) | The Transmedia video resurfaced questions about balancing creative multimodal work with academic depth. Students began imagining alternatives that were both conceptually strong and engaging, signalling a shift toward a more advanced learning model. | Students reflected on how creative formats could stay “academic” and meaningful. | New contradiction, emerging as students compare inherited creative tasks with their evolving expectations for academically grounded multimodality. |

5.12.5 Transformative Agency

Table 5-35 summarizes expression of transformative agency

Table 5-35 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention B Session 2

| Agency Type | Evidence | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|---------------|--|--|-----------|
| Resisting | | | 0 |
| Criticising | Questioned lack of academic depth in Transmedia tasks | “It looks creative, but maybe it’s not so academic?” (Koji) | 1 |
| Explicating | Clarified how preparation changed participation | “Everyone read more carefully because we had to write our own summary.” (Yuka) | 1 |
| Envisioning | Proposed clearer discussion structure and new Transmedia direction | “Maybe leaders should stop after each point and ask one short question.” (Megumi); “If we can choose our own source, it’s more meaningful.” (Megumi) | 2 |
| Committing | Agreed to limit slides, create Source Guide, and plan redesign ideas | “Let’s set three slides only.” (Koji); “We can use the same source checklist for the presentation.” (Rie) | 2 |
| Taking Action | Produced revised worksheet, draft Source Guide, and paired brainstorming plans | (Group task) | 1 |

Total agency expressions: 6 Participants: All six

5.12.6 Outcome

By the end of Session 2, students had refined the SLS format to better balance preparation and interaction. They introduced a three-slide limit and an interaction-planning column to support discussion, and co-created a Source Guide checklist to evaluate credibility and conceptual fit, including reference to accessible academic outlets such as *The Conversation*. They also critically reviewed the Transmedia Presentation task, identifying a need for stronger academic grounding, and began conceptualising a redesigned multimodal project combining presentation, discussion, and source evaluation, to be developed further before Session 3.

Figure 5.28 presents the revised activity system emerging from these changes.

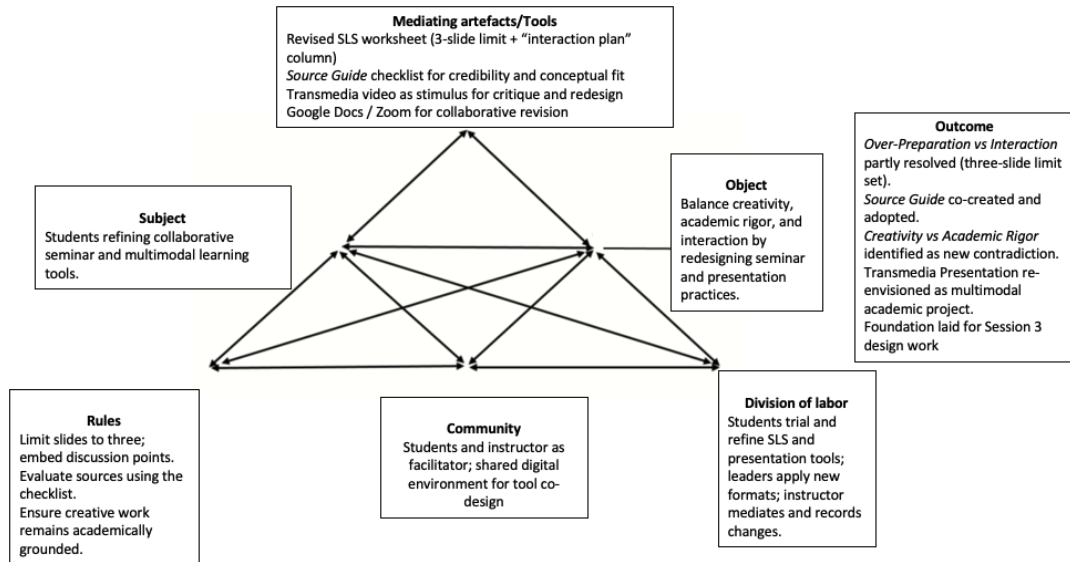


Figure 5-25 Revised Activity System Diagram - Intervention B Session 2

5.13 Session 3 (Intervention B)

5.13.1 Context

Session 3 took place two weeks after the previous workshop with the same six participants. Between sessions, students had prepared two artefacts:

1. Draft outlines for a redesigned multimodal project building on critiques of the Transmedia Presentation;
2. Updated SLS slides and notes reflecting how the revised seminar format was functioning in class.

By this stage, the group had moved beyond adapting existing tools to proposing new ones. The session focused on shaping what became the Student-Led Workshop (SLW) and linking it to questions of academic rigour and assessment authenticity.

5.13.2 Design

Table 5-36 summarizes the design for this session.

Table 5-36 Design Intervention B Session 3

| Expansive Learning Action | Task # | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|--------------------------------|--------|--|---|--|
| Modelling new tool | 3.1 | Pairs' multimodal project outlines | Peer and tutor feedback | Draft SLW structure (roles, duration, interaction plan) |
| Examining assessment alignment | 3.2 | Sample reading exam texts from previous year | Critiques of memorisation and fairness | Brainstorm of new formats using authentic articles such as <i>The Conversation</i> |
| Consolidating SLS revisions | 3.3 | Students' SLS slides and summaries | Reflections on question quality and interaction | Checklist for effective seminar slides |

5.13.3 Report

The workshop began with students presenting their multimodal project ideas. Yuka and Megumi proposed a “news-show” format combining reports, interviews, and a quiz. Koji’s group designed an academic “panel discussion” using two contrasting sources, while Rie and Toshiyuki proposed a “mini-documentary” followed by audience debate.

As ideas developed, students compared their proposals to the original Transmedia Presentations. Tomoki observed, “It feels like Transmedia, but more academic,” and Yuka added, “Before, it was just performance. Now we explain and discuss.” The group agreed that the new activity should retain creative elements while centring understanding, synthesis, and dialogue.

After discussion, they finalised the new format and named it the Student-Led Workshop (SLW). Each SLW would last 45 minutes and run in class or via Zoom with breakout-room discussions. Groups of three or four presenters would each facilitate a breakout room, ensuring active participation rather than passive viewing.

Koji summarised, “It’s not just showing something—it’s teaching and discussing.” The group agreed that each SLW should include:

- a short presentation introducing key ideas from one or more sources;
- at least one interactive component (e.g. quiz, role-play, or critical questions);
- a 15–20-minute breakout-room discussion facilitated by presenters;
- a short plenary reflection.

Task 3.2 linked SLW design to assessment. Building on earlier discussion of *The Conversation*, Megumi suggested, “Maybe we could use articles like that for exams too—written by professors, but easier to understand.” Yuka agreed: “If we study that kind of text in workshops, it’s fair if exams use the same type.” Students viewed these sources as a bridge between authentic academic writing and manageable reading.

In Task 3.3, the group refined the SLS slide checklist to emphasise integration across tasks. Tomoki noted, “Now the seminar and workshop are connected—both need real sources and clear questions.”

5.13.4 Contradictions

Table 5-37 Contradictions Intervention B Session 3

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Connection to Earlier Sessions |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| Creativity vs Academic Rigor (Tertiary – Resolved) | Object ↔ Outcome (Old Model ↔ New Model) | The SLW design addressed earlier doubts about the academic value of Transmedia-style work by requiring scholarly sources and discussion-led activities. Creative elements were retained but grounded in academic purpose. | SLW plans included scholarly readings, activity-led discussion prompts, and thematic coherence. | Resolution of Session B2’s newly articulated “Creativity vs Academic Rigor” contradiction , and a reworking of Intervention A’s Transmedia tensions. |
| Over-Preparation vs Interaction (Secondary – Resolved) | Tools ↔ Object | The SLW’s breakout-room format and collaborative activity design balanced individual preparation with live participation, transforming solitary work into shared engagement. | Students distributed preparation tasks and used meetings to coordinate activity-led discussion. | Full resolution of Session B1–B2’s “Over-Preparation vs Interaction” contradiction , which originated in Intervention A (Transcription vs Interpretation). |
| Tool Alignment Across the Course (Secondary – New Systemic Resolution) | Tools ↔ Object | Seminars, workshops, and proposed exams were now aligned around a shared genre (“The Conversation”-style explanatory readings), creating unprecedented conceptual and procedural coherence across tasks. | Students explicitly connected SLS, SLW, and unseen-text exam design around the same reading genre. | New systemic development emerging only in Intervention B — not a contradiction but a <i>resolution pathway</i> , showing vertical coherence across tools. |
| Assessment Authenticity (Tertiary – Emerging Contradiction) | Rules ↔ Object (Institutional Rules vs Pedagogical Object) | Using authentic academic texts (e.g., “The Conversation”-style articles) in exams emerged as an innovative proposal linking classroom learning to institutional practices, highlighting a tension between existing assessment rules and students’ vision for authenticity. | Students proposed unseen-text exams based on the same authentic genres used in workshops. | New contradiction , expanding Intervention A’s “Memorisation Exams vs Lasting Understanding” into a more institutionally focused authenticity debate. |

5.13.5 Transformative Agency

Table 5-38 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention B Session 3

| Agency Type | Evidence | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|---------------|--|--|-----------|
| Resisting | | | 0 |
| Criticising | Questioned lack of depth in previous Transmedia projects and exams | “Before, it was just performance.” (Yuka); “It tested memory, not understanding.” (Koji) | 2 |
| Explicating | Clarified how SLW differed from earlier formats | “Now we explain and discuss.” (Yuka) | 1 |
| Envisioning | Proposed new SLW format with breakout discussions and source-based design | “Each presenter could go into a breakout room and lead discussion.” (Megumi) | 2 |
| Committing | Agreed to develop 45-minute SLWs and align readings with <i>The Conversation</i> | “Let’s make it the same kind of text for study and test.” (Megumi) | 2 |
| Taking Action | Produced detailed SLW outline and SLS–SLW integration checklist | (Group task) | 1 |

Total agency expressions: 8 Participants: All six

5.13.6 Outcome

By the end of Session 3, students had co-created and named the Student-Led Workshop (SLW): a 45-minute multimodal, discussion-based task combining presentation, interaction, and breakout-room dialogue. They agreed on core components, linked the SLW to the SLS through shared principles of source evaluation and critical questioning, and proposed aligning reading exams with accessible academic texts such as *The Conversation* to improve fairness and authenticity. The SLS slide checklist was further revised to strengthen conceptual links between textbook and external readings.

This session marked a shift from tool refinement to genuine innovation. Students’ proposals were creative yet strongly structured, reflecting a preference for clearly defined formats and criteria—an orientation consistent with the high stakes attached to assessment within the course.

Figure 5.29 presents the revised activity system emerging from Session 3.

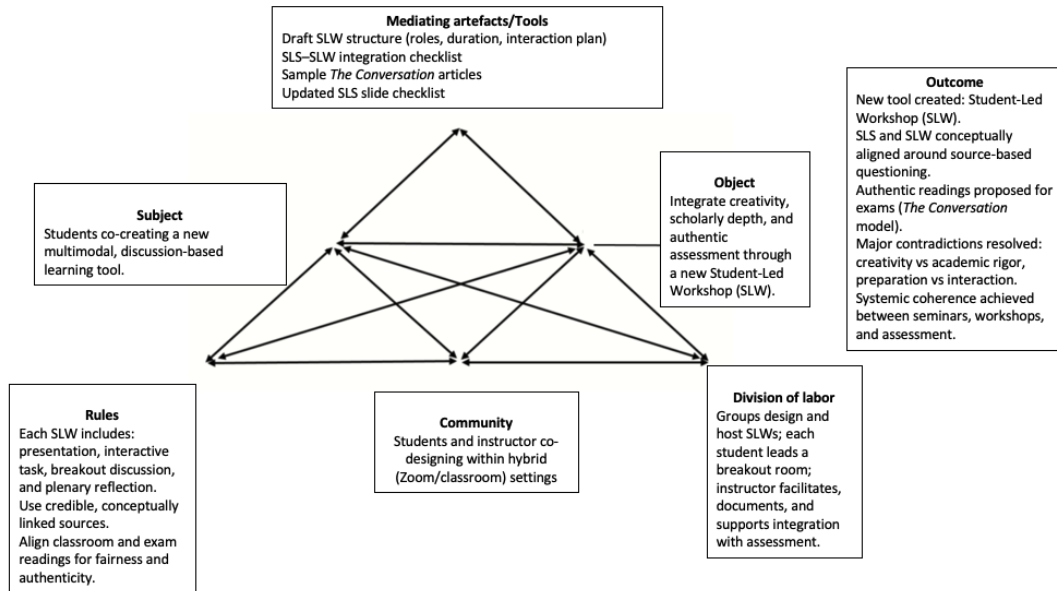


Figure 5-26 Revised Activity System Diagram - Intervention B Session 3

5.14 Session 4 (Intervention B)

5.14.1 Context

Session 4 was held two weeks after the modelling session with the same six participants. In the interim, groups developed their Student-Led Workshop (SLW) materials, including slides, selected readings, and interactive components. Two workshops were trialled during this 90-minute session: one based on a *Conversation* article on digital privacy, and the other on intercultural communication.

Both workshops followed the agreed 45-minute format: a short multimodal presentation, breakout-room discussions facilitated by presenters, and a concluding plenary Q&A. My role was limited to timekeeping and observation. The session examined how effectively the SLW supported participation, comprehension, and academic dialogue in practice, and what refinements were needed.

5.14.2 Design

Table 5-39 Design Intervention B Session 4

| Expansive Learning Action | Task # | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|---|---------------|--|---|---|
| Examining the model | 4.1 | Live SLW trials | Peer observations and feedback notes | Group reflection on challenges and strengths |
| Analysing participation and comprehension | 4.2 | Audience reflections | Comments on article difficulty and preparation gaps | Discussion of strategies for advance reading and annotation |
| Modelling improvement | 4.3 | Issues raised by presenters and participants | Time pressure, uneven engagement | Proposal for pre-reading, annotation, and question-generation before SLWs |

5.14.3 Report

The two Student-Led Workshops ran smoothly overall. Students valued the interactive format and breakout rooms, which supported more balanced participation. Yuka commented, “It felt more like a real seminar than a presentation,” and Tomoki added, “Everyone talked — not only the leaders.”

Several challenges emerged. Rie noted, “It was hard for the audience to understand everything because the article was new,” and Koji agreed, “We needed more time to read before the workshop.” Toshiyuki observed that “Some people were quiet because they were still trying to understand the text.”

In reflection, students recognised that reading unfamiliar texts during the workshop limited discussion depth. Megumi suggested, “Maybe we can post the article a week before,” and Rie added, “We could annotate and write short summaries or questions before the day.” Yuka proposed using these annotations to guide the final discussion: “If we bring our own questions, the discussion feels more ours.”

The group agreed on a new preparation protocol:

- workshop leaders would post articles at least one week in advance on Google Classroom;
- audience members would annotate digitally, highlighting key ideas, vocabulary, and questions;

- each student would prepare one comprehension and one critical-thinking question;
- student-generated questions would be prioritised during the Q&A.

This built directly on the annotation-and-question routines developed for SLS and marked the emergence of a shared, system-wide preparation practice.

Presenters also reflected on time management. Koji noted, “Forty-five minutes goes fast — breakout discussions sometimes need more time,” while Megumi observed, “It worked better when the question was clear and short.” These issues were recorded for further adjustment in Session 5.

5.14.4 Contradictions

Table 5-40 Contradictions Intervention B Session 4

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Connection to Earlier Sessions |
|---|-----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Preparation–Engagement (Secondary – Newly Articulated, Resolved) | Rules ↔ Object | Limited comprehension during Student-Led Workshops revealed that participation depended on structured pre-reading. The group introduced an advance annotation protocol to ensure everyone arrived prepared enough to engage meaningfully. | Students noted difficulty understanding SLW content without prior annotation; new pre-reading system adopted. | New contradiction , expanding B1–B3 concerns about preparation. Successfully <i>resolved</i> through a new shared preparation protocol. |
| Time–Depth (Secondary – Refined, Partially Resolved) | Tools ↔ Outcome | The 45-minute SLW format helped sustain discussion but restricted deeper exploration of complex ideas. Students proposed extending breakout-room time or narrowing question focus to balance breadth and depth. | Students reported “not enough time” to analyse difficult points; suggested longer breakout segments. | Refinement of the “Over-Preparation vs Interaction” contradiction from B1–B2. Shows maturation: the issue is no longer about <i>too much prep</i> , but about <i>insufficient depth</i> . |
| Authority–Ownership (Secondary – Positive Evolution) | Division of Labour ↔ Object | As students led workshops and peers annotated in real time, ownership shifted from presenters to participants. This marked increased collective agency but required clearer coordination to sustain shared responsibility. | Students took initiative in leading discussions; presenters and participants negotiated task roles. | Positive development of earlier <i>Participation Discomfort</i> and <i>Teacher-Centred Roles</i> (A1–A3, B1). No longer a barrier, now a productive reconfiguration of responsibility. |
| Authenticity–Accessibility (Secondary – Refined, Partially Unresolved) | Tools ↔ Object | Using <i>The Conversation</i> articles increased authenticity but also raised comprehension challenges. Students introduced scaffolding (glossaries, guiding questions) to maintain accessibility without reducing academic integrity. | Students reported difficult vocabulary and concepts; added pre-scaffolding to support uptake. | Refines Intervention B2’s “Monologic Tools and Source Integration” and A4’s “Textbook Limitations vs Authenticity.” The tension remains, but scaffolding marks forward movement. |

5.14.5 Transformative Agency

Table 5-41 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention B Session 4

| Agency Type | Evidence | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|---------------|---|--|-----------|
| Resisting | | | 0 |
| Criticising | Identified comprehension and time challenges | “It was hard for the audience to understand everything because the article was new.” (Rie) | 1 |
| Explicating | Clarified links between preparation and participation | “Some people were quiet because they were still trying to understand the text.” (Toshiyuki) | 1 |
| Envisioning | Proposed pre-distribution and annotation of articles | “Maybe we can post the article a week before.” (Megumi); “We could annotate and write questions before the day.” (Rie) | 2 |
| Committing | Agreed to adopt new pre-reading and question protocol | “Let’s share the article in advance and bring our own questions.” (Yuka) | 2 |
| Taking Action | Planned Google Classroom upload schedule and annotation task for next workshops | (Group plan finalised collectively) | 1 |

Total agency expressions: 7 Participants: All six

5.14.6 Outcome

By the end of Session 4, students had successfully trialled the Student-Led Workshop (SLW) format and identified limits related to comprehension and preparation time. In response, they co-created a new advance reading and annotation system requiring leaders to post articles one week early and all participants to prepare one comprehension and one critical question. This strengthened shared ownership and improved the quality of post-workshop discussion.

Participation was lively and peer-led, though the 45-minute format sometimes constrained deeper exploration. Students consistently linked practical problems to earlier seminar practices and generated solutions without prompts. The new annotation protocol represented a natural extension of their existing routines and marked further progress toward independent, collaborative learning.

Figure 5.30 presents the revised activity system emerging from Session 4.

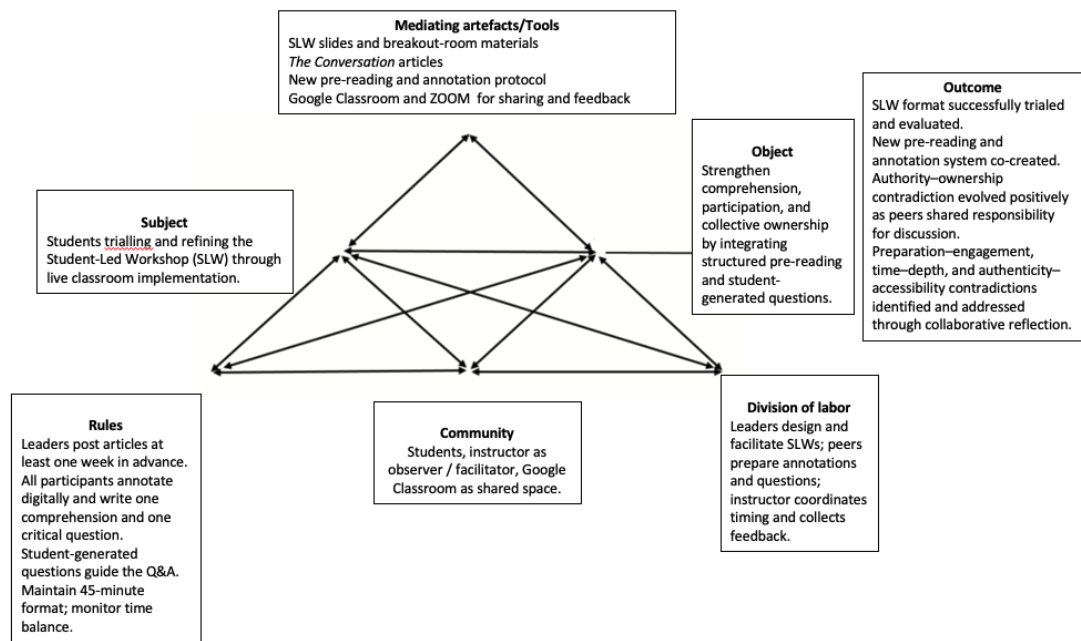


Figure 5-27 Revised Activity System Diagram - Intervention B Session 4

5.15 Session 5 (Intervention B)

5.15.1 Context

Session 5 took place two weeks after Session 4, after students had completed the Student-Led Seminars (SLS), one of two Student-Led Workshops (SLW), and one of the new unseen reading examinations, with one SLW and one exam still to come. The same six participants attended.

The session functioned as a refinement workshop addressing practical and assessment-related issues that had emerged through implementation. Discussion focused on sustaining creativity in SLWs, ensuring fair evaluation of student effort, and improving transparency between the new assessments and students' overall grades.

5.15.2 Design

Table 5-42 Design Intervention B Session 5

| Expansive Learning Action | Task # | First Stimulus | Mirror Data | Second Stimulus |
|---------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Analysing | 5.1 | Feedback from recent SLWs | Peer reflections and teacher notes | Comparison with original Transmedia criteria |
| Modelling | 5.2 | Concerns over GPA and fairness | Grade distributions and exam averages | Draft rubric incorporating creativity + effort |
| Modelling / Implementing | 5.3 | Group vs individual workload | Student self-reports | Proposal for hybrid (group + individual) marking model |

5.15.3 Report

The session opened with discussion of the Student-Led Workshops. While students agreed the SLWs were more engaging than earlier Transmedia presentations, several felt the format had become too uniform. Rie observed, “Everyone used the same slide layout and quiz — it felt safe but not exciting,” and Megumi added, “The Transmedia projects looked more creative, even if they weren’t so academic.”

This led to a discussion of what “creativity” should mean. Yuka commented, “Maybe creativity isn’t just about making games or videos. It’s how we show ideas clearly so people actually want to listen.” The group agreed that **Creativity & Originality** should return as a distinct assessment category, focused on clarity, engagement, and intellectual originality rather than decoration.

Grading and fairness then became the focus. Several students felt discouraged that, despite working with more demanding texts and unseen exams, their marks were lower. Koji explained, “Before, we just memorised word lists and could get ninety-five percent. Now we read real articles and the average is eighty. It feels unfair — we worked harder but got less.”

In response, the group proposed adding **Effort** as a grading category to recognise preparation and facilitation work not visible in final performance. Yuka summarised,

“Effort shows the work behind the grade. It’s fairer for students who really try, even if their English isn’t perfect.”

The group then discussed implementation. Toshiyuki suggested dividing marks between a group score for design and delivery and an individual score for language use and participation. Megumi recommended reintroducing peer-feedback forms so audience members could comment on clarity and engagement. By the end of the session, the group had finalised six assessment areas:

1. Creativity & Originality
2. Academic Content and Source Use
3. Effort & Preparation
4. Group Collaboration and Individual Contribution
5. Language Use and Delivery
6. Engagement and Facilitation

Before closing, students asked whether the new **Effort** and **Creativity** criteria could be applied retroactively to their own SLS and SLW marks to offset lower exam scores. I agreed and said I would consult the other section instructors about reviewing grades using the same principles.

I added that if the course aimed to encourage creativity and critical thinking, assessment needed to recognise effort and risk-taking, so that students who experimented with new ideas were not penalised.

5.15.4 Contradictions

Table 5-43 shows that three contradictions were articulated as students reflected on assessment and implementation

Table 5-43 Contradictions Intervention B Session 5

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Connection to Earlier Sessions |
|---|--------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Creativity vs Safety (Secondary – Refined) | Tools ↔ Object | Students continued to reproduce familiar formats rather than experiment, revealing a tension between creative risk-taking and the perceived “safe” path of predictable structures. Reinstating creativity as an assessment criterion reframed originality as both valued and assessable. | Students defaulted to known genres; discussion about adding creativity back into the rubric. | Refines B4’s “Authenticity–Accessibility” contradiction and earlier A4/A5 concerns about creativity versus academic value. Now reframed as a <i>safety behaviour</i> rather than a comprehension issue. |
| Effort vs Outcome (Secondary – New) | Rules ↔ Outcome | Lower exam scores in the unseen-text format created perceptions of unfairness, as students felt their effort was not reflected in numerical results. Adding “Effort” to the rubric recognised invisible labour and broadened the notion of fairness beyond performance alone. | Students equated unseen-text exam difficulty with unfairness; discussion of adding “Effort” as a criterion. | New contradiction arising from the shift to unseen-text assessment. Extends A5’s “Memorisation Exams vs Lasting Understanding” into a more nuanced fairness debate. |
| Group vs Individual Accountability (Secondary – Continued) | Division of Labour ↔ Community | Uneven contribution within groups generated concerns about fairness and responsibility. Clearer separation of group-level and individual-level grading, supported by peer-feedback tools, addressed workload imbalance. | Students noted inconsistent contributions; rubric adjustments clarified group vs individual marks. | Continuation of earlier “Participation Unevenness” contradictions (A3, A4, A5, B1). Progressively stabilised through better-defined assessment tools. |

Creativity vs Safety Contradiction (Tools vs Object):

Students tended to reproduce existing formats, limiting innovation.

Reinstating creativity as a criterion reframed originality as both valued and assessable.

(Refined from the earlier Authenticity–Accessibility tension.)

Effort vs Outcome Contradiction (Rules vs Outcome):

Lower exam scores created perceptions of unfairness.

Adding “Effort” to the rubric acknowledged invisible labour and reframed fairness beyond numerical performance.

(New contradiction arising from the shift to unseen-text assessment.)

Group vs Individual Accountability (Division of Labour vs Community):

Uneven workload prompted a clearer division between group and individual grading,

supported by peer-feedback tools.

(Continuation of earlier participation-unevenness contradiction.)

5.15.5 Transformative Agency

Table 5-44 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention B Session 5

| Agency Type | Evidence | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|---------------|---|--|-----------|
| Resisting | | | 0 |
| Criticising | Students questioned repetition and fairness | “Everyone used the same layout.” (Rie); “It feels unfair — we’re learning more but getting less.” (Koji) | 2 |
| Explicating | Defined creativity as intellectual engagement, not decoration | “Creativity means how we present ideas clearly.” (Yuka) | 1 |
| Envisioning | Proposed rubric changes and hybrid assessment | “We can have group and individual marks.” (Toshiyuki) | 2 |
| Committing | Agreed to add <i>Effort</i> and <i>Creativity</i> to rubric | “Effort shows the work behind the grade.” (Yuka) | 2 |
| Taking Action | Co-created final rubric and peer-feedback sheet | (Group consensus; rubric adopted for next cycle) | 1 |

Total agency expressions: 8 Participants: All six

5.15.6 Outcome

By the end of Session 5, students had reinstated **Creativity** and **Originality** as a core assessment criterion and added **Effort** and **Preparation** to recognise unseen labour. They designed a dual-level assessment system combining group and individual grading, agreed to reintroduce peer feedback for transparency, and asked that the revised criteria be applied retroactively to their own grades.

During the session, the group produced a draft rubric to visualise the new system (*Figure 5.31*). I later refined this into a final dual-level rubric that preserved all student-generated criteria while adding clarifications for assessment use. On the reverse side, I included the self-reflection section students had proposed, allowing them to assign provisional grades to themselves (*Figure 5.32*).

Student-Led Workshop Rubric

| Category | Excellent | Satisfactory | Needs Work |
|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Creativity & Originality | Very engaging and clear purpose; creative | Some creative ideas, but mostly standard | Lacks imagination or clear purpose. |
| Academic Content & Sources | Strong understanding; reliable sources explained clearly. | Some appropriate sources, but the link to the topic is not always clear. | Weak or missing evidence. |
| Effort & Preparation | Whole group clearly well-prepared; slides and timing effective. | Some uneven preparation or timing issues. | Little sign of shared planning. |
| Group Collaboration | Roles balanced; good teamwork | Some imbalance or confusion in roles | Little sign of shared planning. |
| Language & Delivery (Individual) | Clear, confident, easy to follow | Understandable but hesitant, or some errors | Hard to follow or too quiet |
| Engagement & Facilitation (Individual) | Actively involves the audience; keeps the discussion lively | Some effort to involve others | Minimal or no effort to engage. |
| <p>Self-Evaluation (to be completed after presentation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What went well? • How did we prepare and contribute as a group? • How effectively did we communicate and involve others? • What could we do better next time? | | | |

Figure 5-28 Draft SLW Rubric

| Assessment | Category | Excellent (17–20) | Good (13–16) | Satisfactory (9–12) | Could do better (5–8) | Limited (0–4) |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| Group (≈ 60 %) | Creativity & Originality | Exceptional imagination with clear academic purpose; design and activities engage and clarify ideas memorably. | Fresh, engaging approach with thoughtful communication. | Some original elements but generally conventional. | Predictable or derivative; limited creative effort. | Little or no creative design visible. |
| | Academic Content & Source Use | Strong conceptual depth and accurate integration of credible sources. | Well-chosen sources and mostly clear analysis. | Adequate ideas but shallow or uneven use of evidence. | Weak explanation or minimal analysis. | Lacks academic content or credible sources. |
| | Effort & Preparation | Exceptional collaborative preparation; materials polished, cohesive, and clearly rehearsed. | Clear group effort and good organisation; minor issues with timing or polish. | Reasonable preparation though uneven contribution. | Partial preparation or inconsistent quality across members. | Minimal collective effort; incomplete or poorly coordinated work. |
| | Group Collaboration & Design Quality | Excellent coordination; roles clear and balanced; design cohesive and effective. | Good teamwork with small imbalances; mostly coherent structure. | Some uneven contribution or organisation issues. | Limited teamwork; unclear roles or disjointed design. | Very poor cooperation; serious imbalance or lack of cohesion. |
| Individual (≈ 40 %) | Language Use & Delivery | Clear, confident, accurate language; pronunciation and pace enhance comprehension. | Mostly clear and accurate with minor errors; confident delivery. | Meaning generally clear despite occasional errors or hesitation. | Frequent errors or low audibility limit understanding. | Language use prevents comprehension or participation. |
| | Engagement & Facilitation | Outstanding ability to stimulate discussion and sustain peer engagement; audience fully involved. | Encourages participation and responds well to peers. | Some engagement achieved but uneven or brief. | Minimal interaction or weak facilitation. | Little or no effort to involve others. |

What You Need to Do

Read the rubric carefully. Circle the grade band you believe you achieved: **Excellent / Good / Satisfactory / Needs Improvement / Limited**

Write a number score (0–20) for *each* rubric category.

What part of your performance are you most proud of, and why?

How did you contribute to the group's preparation and design?

How well did you communicate and involve the audience?

What will you try to improve next time?

Figure 5-29 Finalised Student-Led Workshop Rubric (based on student-generated draft, Intervention B Session 5)

The discussion reflected a strong sense of shared responsibility for evaluation. Students were not only refining assessment tools but also renegotiating what fair grading should

mean, shifting from compliance toward a culture that valued imagination, effort, and trust alongside academic rigour.

Figure 5.33 presents the revised activity system following Session 5.

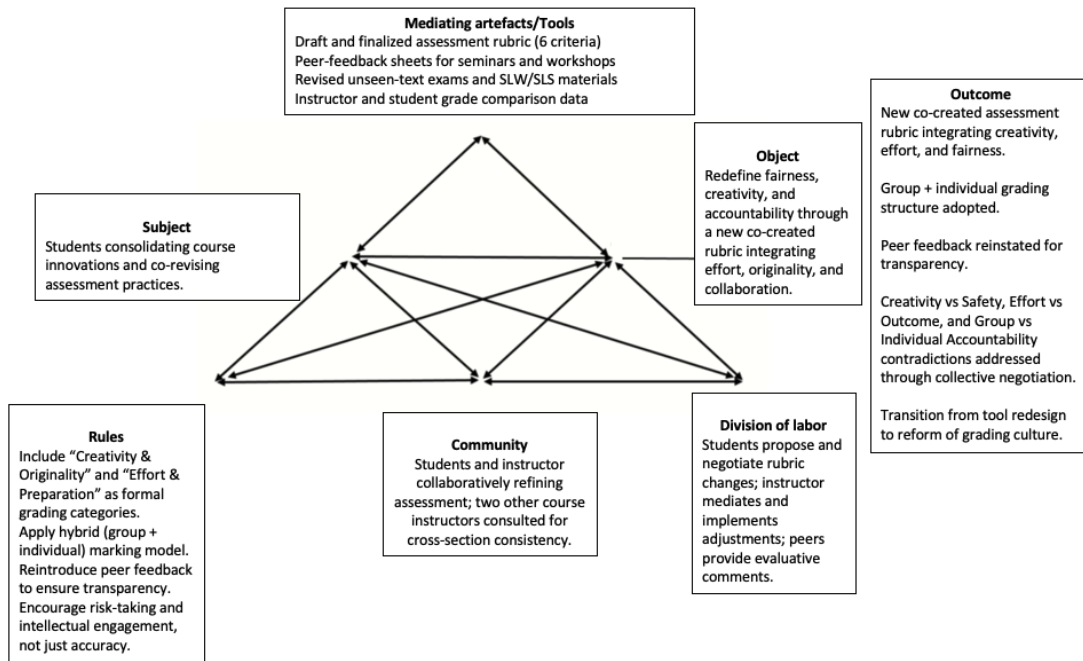


Figure 5-30 Revised Activity System Diagram - Intervention B Session 5

5.16 Focus Group (Intervention B)

5.16.1 Context

The final session of Intervention B was a one-hour focus group held in the last week of the semester, after all **Student-Led Seminars (SLS)**, **Student-Led Workshops (SLW)**, and **unseen examinations** had been completed and grades released.

The same six students took part. The meeting served as a collective reflection on how the redesigned course had functioned over the semester, what had changed since Intervention A, and what they would recommend for future cohorts.

5.16.2 Design

Prompts were organised around five themes that paralleled the core course components:

1. Seminar preparation and questioning (SLS)
2. Workshop creativity and engagement (SLW)
3. Fairness and effort in assessment
4. The new unseen examination format
5. Confidence, participation, and classroom atmosphere

Each theme followed the same pattern: recall of experience, identification of challenges or progress, and suggestions for next steps.

5.16.3 Report

Discussion began with seminar preparation. Students felt the new rule that everyone write a short summary had improved participation.

Rie said, “It was more equal. We all had to understand the article, not just listen to the leaders.”

Tomoki agreed: “Writing a summary helped me speak more because I already organised my ideas.”

Yuka noted that while some still struggled to express opinions spontaneously, “at least everyone came prepared — that made the talk smoother.”

The group agreed the SLS format now felt fairer and more focused than the previous year’s version.

The next topic was the Student-Led Workshops. Students described them as more creative and enjoyable than standard presentations, but still demanding.

Megumi reflected, “Preparing slides, quizzes, and discussions was hard, but it felt like real teaching.”

Koji added, “It’s more pressure, but more interesting — we actually used what we learned.”

Toshiyuki suggested keeping the 45-minute breakout format, but allowing “more freedom in how to design activities — not everyone wants to make a quiz.”

Rie added that posting the article a week earlier had worked well: “When people annotated before, the Q and A was much better.”

Turning to assessment, students revisited the Session 5 discussion on fairness.

Yuka said, “It really helped when you added ‘Effort’ and ‘Creativity’ to the grading — we felt the teachers saw our hard work.”

Koji observed, “Before, only the result mattered; now, the process matters too.”

The group agreed that this approach was more motivating, especially since exam scores were lower than before.

Megumi commented, “It’s okay that the exam is harder, but if effort is part of the grade, we don’t feel punished for trying.”

When discussing the **unseen exam**, reactions were mixed but thoughtful.

Tomoki said, “It was more stressful, but fair — it tests real reading, not memory.”

Rie added, “It showed what we can actually understand. But maybe give one practice test before the real one.”

Students accepted that average scores were lower (around 80%) but saw this as evidence of higher expectations rather than failure.

Finally, the group discussed **confidence and participation**.

Yuka remarked, “We’re not afraid to speak anymore. We know silence doesn’t help.”

Megumi added, “It’s still not easy, but it feels more like our class — not just the teacher’s.”

Toshiyuki concluded, “Now we build the class together. It’s different from before.”

5.16.4 Contradictions

Table 5-45 Contradictions Intervention B Focus Group

| Contradiction | Elements | Description | Evidence | Connection to Earlier Sessions |
|--|-------------------|---|---|--|
| Preparation vs Expression (Primary – Persistent) | Rules ↔ Outcome | Some students continued to prepare thoroughly but still hesitated to speak spontaneously during discussions, showing that cultural norms of caution and self-monitoring continued to constrain full dialogic participation. | Students noted they “prepared well but still hesitated to speak.” | Continuation of Participation Discomfort from A1–A3 and B1–B2; despite improved preparation routines, the underlying cultural rule contradiction remained. |
| Creativity vs Workload (Secondary – Partially Unresolved) | Tools ↔ Object | SLWs encouraged creative and multimodal design but required substantial preparation time. Innovation and workload pulled in opposite directions, revealing a tension between originality and feasibility. | Students described SLWs as “interesting but a lot of work.” | Refines creativity-related contradictions from A4–A5 and B2–B3; although academic rigour was stabilised, workload remained an unresolved practical constraint. |
| Effort vs Performance (Secondary – Persistent) | Rules ↔ Outcome | Lower scores on unseen-text exams continued to challenge students’ sense of fairness, as visible and invisible effort did not always correlate with numerical outcomes. | Students noted that “even with more effort, scores were lower.” | Continuation of B5’s Effort–Outcome contradiction , itself building on A5’s assessment tensions. Shows that institutional rules still conflicted with students’ evolving understanding of fairness. |
| Autonomy vs Standardisation (Secondary – New Tension) | Community ↔ Rules | Students valued the flexibility and ownership gained through SLS and SLW design, but worried that over-standardised rubrics might constrain creativity and reduce their autonomy. | Concerns that “too much standardisation” could limit creative choice. | |

These contradictions show that while the course had reached partial consolidation, expansive learning continued through critical reflection rather than further redesign.

5.16.5 Transformative Agency

Table 5-46 Expressions of Transformative Agency Intervention B Focus Group

| Agency Type | Evidence | Example Quote(s) | Frequency |
|---------------|--|--|-----------|
| Resisting | | | 0 |
| Criticising | Questioning lingering issues of fairness and workload | “It’s okay that the exam is harder, but effort should count.” (Megumi) | 1 |
| Explicating | Articulating how preparation supported confidence | “Writing a summary helped me speak more.” (Tomoki) | 1 |
| Envisioning | Proposing refinements like earlier article sharing and flexible activity formats | “Posting the article early made discussion better.” (Rie) | 1 |
| Committing | Endorsing continued use of revised rubrics and seminar structures | “Now the process matters too — it’s more motivating.” (Koji) | 1 |
| Taking Action | | | 0 |

Total agency expressions: 4 Participants: All six

5.16.6 Outcome

By the end of the focus group, students:

- Affirmed the value of the **SLS** and **SLW** formats as fairer, more participatory approaches to academic reading;
- Endorsed **Effort** and **Creativity** as long-term grading categories to maintain motivation;
- Accepted lower exam scores as evidence of deeper learning, provided grading remained balanced;
- Recommended retaining pre-reading and annotation for workshops;
- Emphasised the importance of teacher flexibility and trust in student initiative.

The focus group confirmed that the reforms of Intervention B had become internalised as shared practice.

Students no longer viewed themselves as passive recipients but as co-participants in shaping how learning and assessment worked.

Although small contradictions remained, the course had reached a stage of sustainable consolidation — a community of practice built on dialogue, fairness, and creativity.

5.17 Summary of Intervention B

5.17.1 Overview

This summary should be read in relation to the progression from the dialogic academic-reading activity system established in Intervention A (Figure 5.2) toward the more autonomous, multimodal configuration outlined at the beginning of Chapter 5 (Figure 5.3). Intervention B shows how that dialogic system was further re-mediated through continued student redesign under fully online conditions.

Across Sessions 1–2, students revisited unresolved contradictions and adapted the Student-Led Seminar (SLS) for online delivery. Sessions 3–4 marked the development and trialling of the Student-Led Workshop (SLW), a multimodal evolution of the earlier Transmedia Presentations. Session 5 and the focus group consolidated the redesigned system by renegotiating fairness, creativity, and assessment transparency. Overall, students shifted from adapting inherited dialogic routines to designing and regulating multimodal learning and evaluation practices, most visibly through the SLW.

Table 5-47 presents the distribution of expansive-learning actions across sessions. Table 5-48 maps these actions onto Engeström’s expansive-learning cycle, showing how specific sessions and artefacts contributed to the re-mediation of the activity system.

Table 5-47 Expansive Learning Actions Evidenced Across Intervention B

| Expansive Learning Action | Sessions Where Predominant |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Questioning | Session 1 |
| 2. Analysing | Sessions 1–2 |
| 3. Modelling | Sessions 2–3 |
| 4. Examining the Model | Sessions 3–4 |
| 5. Implementing | Sessions 3–5 Focus Group (reports of sustained use of practices) |
| 6. Reflecting | Sessions 4–5 Focus Group (discussion of benefits, limits, and fairness) |
| 7. Consolidating | Session 5 (partially) Focus Group (endorsement and recommendations for continuation) |

Table 5-48 Trajectory of the Expansive Learning Cycle During Intervention B (2020)

| Expansive-Learning Phase | Session(s) | Core Activity | Illustrative Tools / Outcomes |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| Questioning | B1 | Surfacing contradictions in the academic-reading activity system under online conditions | Mirror-data discussion; identification of inherited and newly emerging tensions |
| Analysing | B1–B2 | Exploring causes of contradictions | Group analysis of participation, preparation, and source-use norms |
| Modelling the New | B2–B3 | Designing new mediating tools and practices | Revised Student-Led Seminar (SLS) procedures; emergence of Student-Led Workshop (SLW) format |
| Examining the Model | B3–B4 | Testing and refining the new designs | Trial SLWs and seminar revisions; feedback on participation and academic alignment |
| Reflecting & Consolidating | B5; Focus Group B | Evaluating redesigned routines and negotiating continuation | Revised assessment criteria; collective endorsement and recommendations |

5.17.2 Contradictions

Four thematic contradictions shaped Intervention B:

1. **Over-Preparation vs Interaction (Tools ↔ Object)**

Carried forward from Intervention A: disproportionate time on solitary preparation limited live dialogue. The revised SLS protocol (short summaries from all; focused leader slides) recalibrated preparation and spontaneous discussion.

2. **Creativity vs Academic Rigour (Tools ↔ Rules)**

SLWs reopened multimodal creativity but raised questions about academic depth. Students stabilised this tension by grounding creative formats in self-chosen readings linked to textbook concepts and by co-constructing rubrics that valued originality alongside intellectual coherence.

3. **Fairness vs Performance (Rules ↔ Outcome)**

Unseen-text exams reduced average scores, triggering concerns about fairness and the visibility of effort. In response, assessment expanded to include Effort and Creativity, recognising behind-the-scenes labour in seminar/workshop design and facilitation.

4. **Autonomy vs Standardisation (Community ↔ Rules)**

Students valued ownership through SLS/SLW design but also wanted transparent criteria. This required ongoing balance between flexibility and shared standards, keeping assessment boundaries open to dialogue.

These contradictions indicate a shift from structural redesign toward cultural negotiation as students worked to stabilise autonomy while maintaining shared standards of academic rigour.

5.17.3 **Transformative Agency**

Transformative agency in Intervention B was distributed differently from Intervention A. Whereas agency in the first cycle was concentrated in critiquing and explicating inherited practices, Intervention B showed increased prominence of committing and taking action across successive sessions. Early sessions were characterised by explicating and envisioning as students articulated online participation challenges and adapted dialogic practices inherited from Intervention A. As the cycle progressed, committing and taking action became more frequent as students repeatedly trialled, refined, and extended redesigned practices through collective activity rather than teacher-led initiation.

By Session 5 and the focus group, agency shifted toward maintenance and consolidation: students stabilised shared norms, negotiated fairness, and refined evaluation practices rather than proposing new tools. This pattern aligns with later phases of expansive learning, where agency is expressed through sustained collective regulation of the activity system.

As in Intervention A, expressions of resisting were limited, and envisioning declined in the later sessions. Table 5-49 summarises the distribution of transformative agency across Intervention B.

Table 5-49 Distribution of Transformative Agency Across Intervention B

| Agency type | Session 1 | Session 2 | Session 3 | Session 4 | Session 5 | Focus Group |
|----------------------|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| Resisting | Initial scepticism about student responsibility in online setting | — | — | — | — | — |
| Criticising | Critique of passive online participation and unclear expectations | Critique of existing tools transferred from Intervention A | Continued critique focused on digital interaction | — | — | Evaluation of online vs in-person practices |
| Explicating | Explanation of silence and disengagement in Zoom environment | Linking issues to roles, tools, and online norms | Clear articulation of how tools mediated participation | Reflection on effectiveness of redesigned practices | Explicit recognition of changed participation | Collective articulation of learning process |
| Envisioning | — | Adaptation of earlier tools for online use | New ideas for multimodal workshops | Refinement of workshop design | — | — |
| Committing | — | — | Agreement to adopt Student-Led Workshops | Commitment to shared facilitation roles | Endorsement of SLW as standard practice | Support for institutionalisation |
| Taking action | — | — | Design and trial of SLW formats | Routine implementation of workshops | Consolidation and reflection | — |

In activity-theoretical terms, this pattern reflects a shift from agency oriented toward establishing dialogic participation to agency increasingly directed toward sustaining and regulating a more autonomous configuration of the academic-reading activity system.

5.17.4 Curriculum Changes

Intervention B consolidated and extended the student-generated reforms initiated in Intervention A, stabilising them into a coherent system of peer-led academic reading under online conditions. As in the earlier cycle, redesign focused primarily on new mediating artefacts (tools) and refined rules for participation, preparation, and evaluation, rather than changes to formal institutional roles or the division of labour.

At the level of tools, students refined the SLS so that all participants produced short written summaries, while seminar leaders prepared slides and discussion prompts supported by outside sources. They also co-created the SLW as a multimodal format combining presentation, interactive activities, and facilitated small-group discussion based on self-selected academic readings. Across both formats, advance annotation and student-generated questions became standardised preparation practices.

At the level of rules, students renegotiated assessment criteria to better reflect effort, creativity, and collaborative engagement. This included adoption of unseen-text reading examinations to prioritise interpretive reading over memorisation, and revision of rubrics to include Effort and Creativity alongside content- and language-based criteria. Responsibility for final grading decisions remained with teaching staff.

Together, these tools and rules re-mediated the activity system depicted in Figure 5.3 by extending dialogic participation into a more autonomous, multimodal configuration and redistributing responsibility for learning quality across the student community. The focus group confirmed broad endorsement of these practices, while also acknowledging ongoing tensions around creativity, workload, and fairness as constitutive features of the evolving learning culture.

5.18 Comparative summary of Interventions A and B

To illustrate how the learning activity evolved across the two cycles, **Table 5-50** compares the key features, contradictions, and outcomes of **Intervention A (2019)** and **Intervention B (2020)**, showing how expansive learning progressed from early questioning and modelling to sustained implementation and consolidation.

Table 5-50 Comparative Summary of Interventions A and B

| Dimension | Intervention A (2019) | Intervention B (2020) |
|---|--|---|
| Overall focus | Initiating expansive learning; surfacing contradictions in inherited, teacher-centred EAP practices. | Refining and extending student-created tools; inventing new multimodal and assessment frameworks. |
| Context & mode | In-person, semester-long Change Laboratory workshops. | Online (Zoom + Google Docs) cycle under COVID-19 restrictions. |
| Primary student-generated tools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-Led Seminar (SLS) combining annotation + Bloom-guided questions + peer feedback. • Peer-review checklists and feedback stems. • Transmedia Presentation checklist (revised from top-down version). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-Led Workshop (SLW) evolved from Transmedia Presentation—multimodal, self-selected readings, quizzes/games/videos, breakout-room debates. • Revised SLS using written summaries + leader slides. • New rubrics with <i>Effort & Creativity</i> categories. |
| Assessment changes | Proposal for unseen-text reading exams (not yet implemented). | Unseen-text exams adopted; average scores lower but greater authenticity and comprehension. |
| Key contradictions addressed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation discomfort / passive role identity. • Teacher authority vs student initiative. • Limited authenticity of textbook tools. • Uneven preparation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over-preparation vs interaction. • Creativity vs academic rigour in SLWs. • Fairness vs performance (grading). • Autonomy vs standardisation in rubrics. |
| Transformative agency | Dominant forms: <i>Criticising, Explicating, Committing</i> . Students began co-designing tools and routines. | Dominant forms: <i>Committing & Taking Action</i> . Students independently trialled and refined practices; negotiated grading and fairness. |
| Pedagogical trajectory | From teacher-centred instruction to dialogic co-design. | From dialogic co-design to multimodal autonomy and shared assessment culture. |
| Representative innovations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rotating seminar roles. • Peer feedback sentence stems. • Authentic outside readings. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLWs replacing Transmedia Presentations. • Unseen-text exams. • Effort + Creativity as grading criteria. |
| Overall outcome | Established a dialogic framework and collective responsibility for preparation and discussion. | Consolidated a sustainable, student-generated system integrating academic rigour, creativity, and fairness. |
| Expansive learning phase reached | Questioning → Modelling → Early Implementation. | Implementation → Reflection → Consolidation. |
| Resulting shift | Transmission → Dialogue | Dialogue → Multimodal Autonomy |

The comparison shows how the course developed across two expansive-learning cycles. In Intervention A, students' agency was concentrated in questioning and modelling, with redesign focused on routines operating within the inherited curriculum. In Intervention B, the new cohort moved more quickly into implementation and consolidation, extending student-led design into multimodal tasks and assessment practices. Transformative agency therefore shifted from exploratory critique toward sustained, collective action.

This pattern is summarised in Table 5.51, which compares the distribution of coded expressions of transformative agency across the two interventions. Percentages are calculated relative to the number of students in each cohort, with values above 100% indicating multiple instances per student on average.

Table 5-51 Evolution of Transformative-Agency Types Across Interventions A and B

| Agency Type | A (2019) % | B (2020) % |
|----------------------|------------|------------|
| Resisting | 14.3% | 0.0% |
| Criticizing | 107.1% | 133.3% |
| Explicating | 92.9% | 100.0% |
| Envisioning | 128.6% | 150.0% |
| Committing to Change | 107.1% | 166.7% |
| Taking Action | 92.9% | 100.0% |

The table shows an increase of envisioning, committing to change, and taking action. Agency in Intervention B was thus not only more frequent but more developmentally advanced, indicating a shift from reflection to coordinated action.

As shown in Figure 5.3, this development aligns with the broader pedagogical trajectory from **Transmission** → **Dialogue** → **Multimodal Autonomy**. Across both interventions, contradictions acted as generative forces for collective change. Through cycles of questioning, modelling, and implementation, students re-mediated inherited practices and progressively redefined the object of activity—from reproducing knowledge to collaboratively producing understanding.

Transformative agency emerged through collective negotiation of tensions around authority, fairness, and academic purpose rather than through individual initiative. By the end of Intervention B, this agency had stabilised in shared routines and tools—peer-led seminars, multimodal workshops, and transparent rubrics—that reshaped the course’s pedagogical logic. These findings support the claim advanced in Section 2.3.9 that CHC learners’ agency becomes visible when participation is structured, relational, and oriented toward meaningful contribution.

Chapter 6 examines this trajectory through Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, analysing how students’ actions instantiated expansive-learning phases, how tools and

rules mediated agency, and what this implies for the sustainability of pedagogical innovation in EMI higher education.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter interprets the study's findings in relation to English-medium instruction (EMI), learner agency among Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) students, and curriculum co-design. Rather than restating results, it offers a theoretical synthesis of how CHC students expressed, developed, and sustained transformative agency when they were invited to co-develop a semester-long EAP academic reading curriculum at a Japanese EMI liberal arts institution. The discussion draws on two Change Laboratory interventions—one face-to-face (Intervention A) and one online (Intervention B)—through which students collectively analysed and redesigned the academic-reading activity system.

Grounded in Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Engeström's expansive-learning framework, learner agency is understood here not as an individual disposition or sudden behavioural shift, but as a relational and collective achievement. Across both interventions, students' actions challenge deficit framings of CHC learners that portray them as passive, deferential, or lacking critical engagement (Tweed & Lehman, 2002; Wingate, 2015; Macaro, 2018). Transformative agency emerged through the design of the Change Laboratory itself: by foregrounding contradictions in students' academic practices, embedding structured support within tasks, and enabling cumulative engagement across successive phases of expansive learning. Agency was thus mediated through evolving tools, rules, and shared responsibilities rather than enacted through individual assertiveness alone.

The chapter addresses two related aims. First, it revisits the three research questions, explaining how contradictions, agency, and student-led innovation unfolded developmentally across the two intervention cycles. Second, it articulates the study's contributions to research on CHC learner agency, EMI pedagogy, and curriculum co-design, showing how student-led redesign of curricular tools, participation norms, and

assessment practices can support dialogic and increasingly autonomous forms of learning.

The chapter is organised as follows. Section 6.2 synthesises findings from Interventions A and B in relation to the research questions. Section 6.3 outlines the study's key contributions to knowledge within existing scholarship on CHC learners and pedagogical change. Section 6.4 then considers implications for future research and practice, particularly for EMI and EAP contexts seeking to foster learner agency through structured, participatory curriculum design.

6.2 Addressing the Research Questions

This section revisits the study's three research questions in light of the findings presented in Chapter 5. Rather than treating each question as an isolated analytic unit, the discussion adopts a developmental perspective to show how contradictions, transformative agency, and student-led innovation were interconnected across the two Change Laboratory interventions. To foreground continuity and historical progression, the discussion distinguishes between Intervention A (face-to-face) and Intervention B (online), with the latter building directly on the tools, practices, and expectations established in the former.

The analysis draws on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and expansive learning theory (Engeström, 2001, 2015), alongside the concept of transformative agency (Haapasaari et al., 2016), to interpret how students identified tensions within the inherited curriculum and acted collectively to reshape the tools mediating their learning. Attention is given not only to what students did, but to how agency emerged through interaction with evolving rules, artefacts, and divisions of labour within the activity system.

RQ1 examines how contradictions within the academic reading curriculum were surfaced and reframed through Change Laboratory activity. RQ2 then focuses on how CHC students expressed transformative agency while co-developing tools and practices in response to these contradictions. Finally, RQ3 considers how student-led innovations

extended beyond individual interventions to influence practices, norms, and organising principles of EMI/EAP academic reading over time.

6.2.1 RQ1: What contradictions in the academic reading curriculum are surfaced in the Change Laboratory?

RQ1 examines the contradictions that became visible when the academic reading curriculum was examined through the Change Laboratory. The focus is not on individual student behaviour, but on the curriculum as a historically developed activity system whose tools, rules, and expectations shaped patterns of participation and learning.

Across both interventions, the most persistent contradictions lay between the stated object of the course—interpretive, discussion-based academic reading—and the transmission-oriented tools and rules through which reading was organised. Students were expected to engage critically with texts and with one another, yet relied on textbooks, comprehension questions, and assessment practices that prioritised accuracy, coverage, and recall. This tool–object contradiction constrained opportunities for dialogue while placing responsibility for participation and learning outcomes on students without providing mediational support aligned with the course’s stated aims.

In Intervention A, these tensions surfaced early through students’ accounts of uncertainty, silence, and discomfort during discussion. Through Change Laboratory dialogue, such experiences were reframed as structural rather than individual problems. As students collectively analysed participation norms, preparation routines, and assessment expectations, contradictions became increasingly visible at the level of tools and rules rather than learner disposition. This reframing was critical in shifting the analytic focus from perceived learner deficiency to systemic misalignment within the activity system.

As dialogic practices were introduced, new tensions emerged. While tools such as the Student-Led Seminar supported participation more effectively, contradictions persisted around uneven preparation, peer evaluation, and grading transparency. These rule–object and rule–community contradictions reflected a partial transformation of the

activity system: participation practices shifted more rapidly than assessment structures, producing tensions characteristic of a system in transition from transmission-oriented to dialogic organisation.

In Intervention B, many of the same contradictions reappeared in altered form. Because students inherited dialogic tools and an established expectation of co-design, participation itself was less problematic. Instead, contradictions centred on sustainability, fairness, and autonomy, particularly in relation to online delivery, multimodal tasks, and assessment standards. These tensions reflected further movement toward a more autonomous configuration of the activity system, in which responsibility for learning quality was increasingly distributed across students and teachers.

Read historically, the contradictions identified across both interventions did not disappear but were reconfigured as the object of activity shifted. The Change Laboratory thus made visible a progression of systemic tensions: from contradictions associated with transmission-based reading practices, through those accompanying dialogic redesign, to challenges linked to sustaining more autonomous forms of academic learning. These contradictions created the conditions under which students later acted on the curriculum through collective redesign, which is taken up in RQ2.

6.2.2 RQ2: How do CHC students express transformative agency when co-developing tools and practices?

RQ2 examines how Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) students expressed transformative agency while co-developing curriculum tools and practices during the Change Laboratory interventions. Transformative agency is understood here in activity-theoretical terms, following Haapasaari, Engeström, and Kerosuo's (2016) six discursive and practical manifestations: resisting, criticising, explicating, envisioning, committing, and taking action. These manifestations are treated not as individual traits but as socially mediated forms of action emerging in response to contradictions within the activity system.

In Intervention A, expressions of transformative agency emerged gradually. Early Change Laboratory sessions were dominated by criticising and explicating, as students

articulated problems with memorisation-oriented reading tasks, unclear participation expectations, and the risks associated with peer evaluation. These actions were cautious and typically framed collectively rather than individually, reflecting sensitivity to hierarchy, face, and group alignment. Critique was often positioned as shared concern rather than personal complaint, consistent with CHC interactional norms and with the need to maintain relational harmony within the group.

As discussions progressed, students increasingly engaged in envisioning alternative ways of organising academic reading and discussion. This was most evident in proposals for more structured seminar formats, clearer preparation routines, and transparent participation expectations. Transformative agency became more visible when students moved into committing and taking action through the co-design and trialling of concrete artefacts, including the Student-Led Seminar routine, peer-feedback checklists, and vocabulary preparation tools. These artefacts anchored agency in shared activity rather than individual assertion, enabling students to enact change without directly challenging teacher authority. Once tools were in use, students collaboratively refined them, indicating a growing sense of ownership and responsibility for the learning process.

In Intervention B, expressions of transformative agency appeared earlier and with greater confidence. Students inherited not only the tools developed in Intervention A but also an established expectation that curriculum redesign constituted legitimate student work. As a result, explicating and envisioning were evident from the initial sessions, particularly in relation to online participation constraints and the affordances of multimodal task design. Students progressed more rapidly into committing and taking action, most clearly in the redesign of the Transmedia Presentation into the Student-Led Workshop. This redesign integrated self-selected readings, multimodal materials, and peer-facilitated discussion, reflecting a more advanced stage of collective agency.

Across both interventions, resisting was limited and short-lived. When it occurred, it was typically expressed as hesitation around peer assessment, grading responsibility, or fairness, rather than as rejection of curriculum co-design itself. Importantly, expressions of transformative agency were rarely individualised. Proposals tended to accumulate, with one contribution prompting further suggestions, revisions, or endorsements. This

cumulative, or “snowballing,” pattern illustrates how transformative agency developed through collective engagement with shared tools rather than through isolated acts of participation.

Overall, CHC students expressed transformative agency through a sequence of dialogic and practical actions that moved from critique toward sustained co-development. Agency was mediated by tools, supported by shared rules, and embedded in collaborative activity rather than enacted as individual assertiveness. This pattern directly challenges deficit accounts of CHC learners as passive or dependent, showing instead that when students are positioned as legitimate contributors to curriculum design, their agency becomes visible as collective, developmental, and practice-changing.

Using Haapasaari et al.’s (2016) six manifestations of agency, Figure 6.1 summarises the dominant forms expressed at each stage as students progressed through Engeström’s (2001) expansive learning sequence. In Intervention A, agency developed incrementally, with criticising and explicating preceding envisioning, committing, and later taking action as redesigned tools were trialled in practice. In Intervention B, students began further along the expansive learning cycle, moving quickly into envisioning, committing, and taking action, with cumulative agency evident from the early sessions.

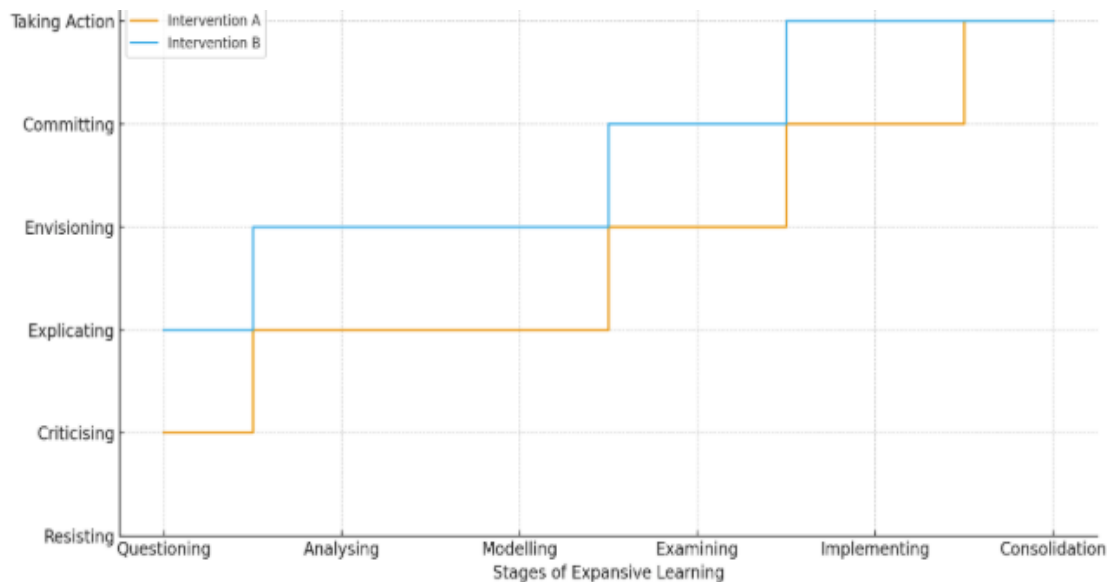


Figure 6-1 Manifestations of Transformative Agency Across Expansive Learning Stages

Across both interventions, contradictions—particularly tool–object and rules–object contradictions—served as the primary stimulus for transformative agency.

Collaborative design activities remained the principal site of change, as students critiqued inherited practices, modelled alternatives, and enacted new tools. Most importantly, agency was socially distributed and cumulative: tentative contributions in Intervention A created the conditions for faster, more confident co-design in Intervention B, demonstrating how transformative agency can build across cohorts rather than emerging anew in each cycle.

6.2.3 RQ3: How can student-led innovations influence the practices and tools of EMI/EAP education over time?

RQ3 examines how student-led innovations influenced the practices, tools, and organising principles of EMI academic reading over time. Rather than focusing on isolated classroom activities, this question addresses how locally generated tools and routines reshaped the wider activity system, producing cumulative and sustainable pedagogical change across cohorts. The discussion adopts a developmental perspective, conceptualising learner agency as a collective, tool-mediated capacity that expands historically as students gain greater influence over curriculum design and enactment.

Across the two Change Laboratory interventions, innovation unfolded as a developmental trajectory rather than a series of discrete reforms. In Intervention A, student-generated tools such as the Student-Led Seminar (SLS), peer-feedback checklists, and annotation protocols disrupted a predominantly transmission-oriented model of academic reading, in which learning was organised around teacher explanation, textbook reproduction, and individual preparation. These tools reoriented classroom practice toward dialogic participation by foregrounding shared interpretation, peer explanation, and collective responsibility for meaning-making. This shift marked an initial expansion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as students began to act beyond individual capacity through structured dialogue and shared mediational means.

Within this trajectory, the Student-Led Seminar emerged as a germ cell of a new form of academic reading activity in the activity-theoretical sense. What began in Intervention A as a tentative redesign of seminar roles and preparation routines was progressively stabilised through repeated use, refinement, and cross-cohort inheritance, so that by Intervention B “doing an SLS” signalled a collectively understood way of organising reading, preparation, and discussion rather than a one-off activity. The SLS routine—short summaries from all participants, leader slides, shared annotation and questioning—and the subsequent Student-Led Workshop format together functioned as a germ cell that condensed the key principles of the emerging dialogic, student-led activity system, and could be expanded, elaborated, and adapted across tasks and cohorts. In this sense, SLS and SLW operated not merely as isolated tools but as emerging shared concepts that structured how students, teachers, and materials were expected to interact in the academic reading course over time.

Crucially, the influence of these innovations extended beyond their immediate use. Tools developed tentatively in Intervention A became stabilised reference points in Intervention B, where students inherited not only the artefacts themselves but also the expectation that curriculum redesign constituted legitimate student work. This inheritance enabled a further expansion of the ZPD, supporting a shift from dialogic co-design toward multimodal autonomy within collectively negotiated constraints. This transition was most clearly visible in the evolution of the Transmedia Presentation into the Student-Led Workshop (SLW). In this later phase, students independently selected

readings, designed multimodal learning activities, negotiated assessment criteria, and refined practices through collective reflection, indicating that learner agency had become sustainable rather than episodic.

Over time, student-led innovations reshaped not only pedagogical tools but also the rules, division of labour, and assessment culture of the activity system. Peer feedback moved from informal commentary to structured formative dialogue; assessment practices expanded to recognise effort and creativity alongside content knowledge; and responsibility for facilitating learning was progressively redistributed from teacher to students. These changes reflect a redefinition of the object of the activity system—from reproducing academic knowledge to collaboratively producing understanding through dialogue and design.

Figure 6.2 synthesises this longitudinal influence by conceptualising the expanding Zone of Proximal Development across the three activity systems identified in the study: Transmission, Dialogic, and Autonomous. Rather than depicting development as individual progression, the figure represents the ZPD as a collective, tool-mediated space that widens and becomes increasingly future-oriented as students move from teacher-mediated participation toward student-led curriculum innovation. Read developmentally, Figure 6.2 captures the pedagogical trajectory traced across the study: **Transmission** → **Dialogic Participation** → **Multimodal Autonomy**, showing how learner agency expanded across successive cohorts.

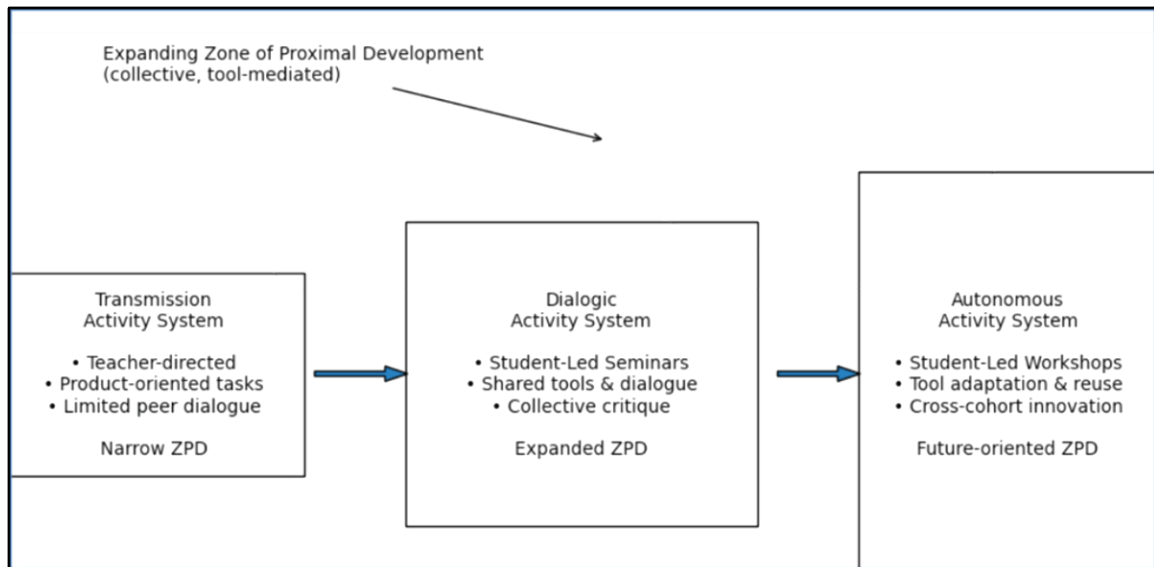


Figure 6-2 Expanding Zone of Proximal Development

While Figure 6.2 illustrates developmental movement over time, Figure 6.3 presents the reconfigured activity system that had emerged by the end of Intervention B, capturing how student-led innovations consolidated into a stable system configuration. In this final activity system, the subject is positioned as an active co-designer of learning rather than a recipient of instruction; the tools include student-generated artefacts such as Student-Led Seminars, Student-Led Workshops, annotation protocols, and peer-feedback frameworks; and the object of activity is redefined as the collaborative construction of academic understanding rather than the reproduction of textual knowledge.

Figure 6.3 also illustrates how innovation extended to less visible dimensions of the activity system. Rules were re-mediated to emphasise transparency, fairness, and shared responsibility, while the division of labour shifted toward collective facilitation, peer assessment, and distributed authority. The community expanded to recognise students as legitimate contributors to curriculum design, and outcomes came to include sustained participation, creative autonomy, and transferable learning practices across cohorts. Read together, Figures 6.2 and 6.3 demonstrate how the expansion of the ZPD was consolidated into a reconfigured activity system, allowing student-led innovations to persist beyond the immediate context of the interventions.

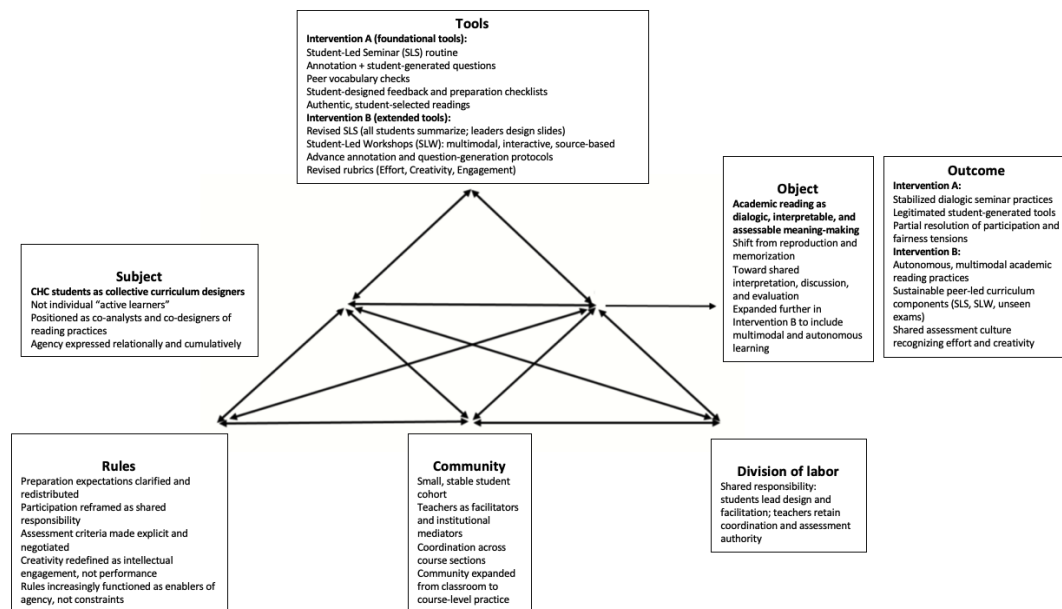


Figure 6-3 Reconfigured Activity System Following Student-Led Curriculum Redesign

These innovations were not externally imposed reforms but the cumulative outcome of student-led redesign across two expansive learning cycles. Practices initially developed to address local contradictions became durable components of the curriculum, shaping expectations for subsequent cohorts. In this sense, student agency extended beyond participation within a single course to influence the longer-term organisation of EMI academic reading.

Overall, RQ3 demonstrates that when CHC students are positioned as legitimate co-designers, their innovations can move beyond temporary classroom strategies to reconfigure tools, norms, and assessment practices over time. The resulting pedagogical shift—from transmission, through dialogue, to autonomous multimodal learning—shows how structured, collective redesign can generate sustainable change in EMI/EAP contexts.

6.2.4 Developmental Synthesis Across the Research Questions

This section synthesises how contradictions, transformative agency, and student-led innovation formed a developmental sequence across the two Change Laboratory interventions. The three research questions collectively trace how systemic tensions within the inherited academic reading curriculum created the conditions for collective action, how CHC students expressed transformative agency in response, and how student-led redesign reshaped practices and tools over time.

RQ1 established that the central challenges of the course were structural rather than dispositional. Contradictions between the stated object of interpretive, discussion-based reading and the transmission-oriented tools and rules through which learning was organised constrained participation while obscuring their systemic origins. By making these contradictions visible, the Change Laboratory redirected analytic attention from individual learners to the activity system itself, rendering curriculum redesign both necessary and legitimate.

Building on this diagnostic phase, RQ2 demonstrated that CHC students expressed transformative agency through a sequence of dialogic and practical actions, moving from critique and explication toward envisioning, committing, and taking action. Agency emerged as a collective, tool-mediated process rather than as individual assertiveness, accumulating across interactions and becoming stabilised in shared artefacts such as Student-Led Seminars and peer-feedback frameworks. These actions remained sensitive to relational norms and institutional expectations, illustrating how agency can be exercised within existing structures rather than through open resistance.

RQ3 extended this analysis longitudinally, showing how student-led innovations influenced the organisation of EMI academic reading beyond a single intervention cycle. Tools developed in response to local contradictions became inherited practices, supporting a shift from dialogic participation toward more autonomous, multimodal learning within collectively negotiated constraints. Over time, these innovations reconfigured not only pedagogical tools but also rules, divisions of labour, and assessment practices, indicating that learner agency had become sustainable rather than episodic.

The findings trace a developmental trajectory from transmission-oriented reading practices, through dialogic redesign, to a more autonomous configuration of the activity

system. This trajectory was not linear; contradictions persisted and were reconfigured as the object of activity evolved. Engagement with these tensions enabled students to expand their collective Zone of Proximal Development and assume greater responsibility for shaping the conditions of their learning.

This synthesis positions transformative agency as an emergent property of structured, participatory curriculum design rather than as a fixed learner attribute. It also provides a conceptual foundation for the contributions to knowledge outlined in the following section.

6.3 Contributions to Knowledge

This study makes six original contributions to research on Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learner agency, English-medium instruction (EMI), and curriculum co-design. Collectively, these contributions extend the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 by moving beyond deficit-oriented and individualised accounts of learner agency, and by offering a developmental, activity-theoretical account of how agency emerges, accumulates, and becomes stabilised through participatory curriculum redesign in an EAP context.

Beyond these individual contributions, the study also demonstrates the significance of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory for designing sustainable curriculum change. By treating contradictions, expansive learning, and transformative agency as interconnected features of the academic reading activity system rather than as abstract concepts, the research shows how CHAT can generate durable pedagogical innovations: student-designed tools such as Student-Led Seminars, Student-Led Workshops, preparation protocols, and revised assessment criteria were not only created within the Change Laboratory but stabilised as part of the course infrastructure and taken up by subsequent cohorts and additional instructors. In this sense, the value and impact of the new practices lie in their historicity and transferability—they embody learners' transformative agency in material form, enabling curriculum change to accumulate across time and contexts rather than remaining confined to a single intervention.

Methodologically, the study is also unusual in that the Change Laboratory was implemented by a course instructor working with their own students, rather than by an

external research team. This insider researcher–interventionist positioning raises important questions about power, trust, and feasibility, but the findings suggest that, when carefully designed, such an arrangement can create a productive space for student–staff co-analysis and co-design. The work therefore indicates that Change Laboratory approaches may be promising for other practitioner-researchers seeking to foster curriculum change and learner agency in EMI/EAP settings, particularly where access, time, and institutional resources for external interventions are limited

Contributions 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 address the *developmental nature of learner agency*. Building on research reviewed in Section 2.3, which has tended to conceptualise CHC learner agency in terms of individual participation, adaptation, or dispositional traits, these contributions show how agency develops cumulatively through collective activity. Contribution 6.3.1 reframes agency as a snowballing, within-cohort process grounded in shared tool design, while Contribution 6.3.2 extends this analysis across cohorts, demonstrating how learner agency can persist historically through the inheritance and re-mediation of student-generated curriculum artefacts.

Contributions 6.3.3 and 6.3.4 focus on *mediational mechanisms* that enable transformative agency. Responding to gaps identified in Sections 2.3 and 2.4—particularly the limited attention given to pedagogical artefacts and contradictions in EMI/EAP research—these contributions show how agency is anchored in concrete objects of activity. Contribution 6.3.3 repositions curriculum tools as generative mediators of agency, while Contribution 6.3.4 demonstrates how contradictions identified by students within practices they actively inhabit function as productive catalysts for expansive learning, rather than as obstacles to participation.

Contributions 6.3.5 and 6.3.6 address *assessment culture and participation structures* in EMI/EAP contexts. Extending the literature reviewed in Section 2.4, which frequently portrays assessment as teacher-driven and opaque and structure as potentially constraining for CHC learners, these contributions demonstrate the potential for alternative arrangements to be nurtured. Contribution 6.3.5 shows how assessment culture can be reshaped through collective student negotiation when contradictions around fairness and effort are made visible, while Contribution 6.3.6 shows how clear rules, defined roles, and explicit criteria can function as enabling scaffolds for agency when they are co-designed rather than imposed.

Each contribution is discussed in turn below, with explicit reference to the relevant strands of literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and to the empirical analysis presented in Chapter 5.

6.3.1 Contribution 1: Reframing CHC Learner Agency as Snowballing Collective Transformation

This contribution reframes Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learner agency as a collective, cumulative process that develops through shared tool design and iterative participation, rather than as an individual disposition or overt act of resistance. It shows how culturally cautious, relationally oriented actions can accumulate into substantial curriculum transformation when learners are positioned as legitimate co-designers of academic practice.

As reviewed in Section 2.3, research on CHC learners in EMI and EAP contexts has frequently interpreted agency through individual participation patterns, often foregrounding deference to authority (Section 2.3.1), group harmony (Section 2.3.3), fear of failure (Section 2.3.4), and perceived passivity (Section 2.3.6). Although recent studies caution against essentialising these traits (Sections 2.3; 2.3.8), agency is still commonly conceptualised as something learners either possess or lack, rather than as a property of collective activity that develops over time.

Analysis across the full Change Laboratory project demonstrates a different pattern. Rather than appearing as discrete moments of resistance, transformative agency emerged incrementally through small, culturally legitimate actions that gained momentum as students worked repeatedly on shared tools and practices. Early expressions of agency were tentative and relational. For example, in Session 1 of Intervention A, students framed critique indirectly, as shared concern rather than individual challenge (e.g. questioning reliance on textbooks while emphasising the need to preserve group harmony; Section 5.3.3). These contributions aligned with Haapasaari et al.'s (2016) early manifestations of criticising and explicating (Section 5.3.5), and

surfaced contradictions between inherited monologic tools and the dialogic object of academic reading.

Across subsequent sessions, similar forms of agency accumulated through collective design activity. Students co-created mediating artefacts—peer-feedback checklists, seminar instruction sheets, sentence stems, rotating roles, preparation protocols, and assessment criteria—that gradually redistributed responsibility for meaning-making, preparation, and evaluation (Sections 5.4–5.7). Each artefact stabilised earlier critique into shared practice, enabling further action without requiring students to violate culturally valued norms of politeness or deference. What initially appeared as cautious participation thus functioned as the foundation for sustained curricular redesign.

By the focus group phase, agency was no longer expressed primarily through critique or proposal but through collective ownership and forward-looking commitment, as students advocated embedding redesigned practices for future cohorts (Sections 5.8; 5.9.3). This progression illustrates how agency snowballed: early, low-risk contributions enabled tool creation; tools enabled redistribution of roles; redistributed roles enabled further agency.

Conceptually, this contribution is important because it encourages researchers in CHC learner agency and EMI/EAP pedagogy to focus less on visible assertiveness, individual voice, or direct challenge as indicators of agency, and more on how agency develops through collective, mediated action over time. It challenges deficit narratives that equate silence or caution with passivity and demonstrates that, when contradictions are surfaced and legitimised within structured participatory settings, CHC learners are capable of driving substantial curricular change within a single cohort.

6.3.2 Contribution 2: Extending Transformative Agency Across Cohorts through Curriculum Historicity

This contribution shows that transformative agency among Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) learners is not confined to the participation of a single cohort, but can extend across successive cohorts through the historicity of learner-generated curriculum tools and practices. While Contribution 1 demonstrated how agency can develop

cumulatively within a cohort through shared tool design, this contribution demonstrates that agency can also persist beyond cohort boundaries when student innovations are stabilised and carried forward as part of the course infrastructure. In this sense, learner agency is shown to be inter-cohort and historically mediated, rather than limited to individual dispositions or momentary acts of participation.

This finding addresses a limitation in much of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, where learner agency in EMI and EAP contexts is typically conceptualised as situational, individual, or cohort-bound. Studies often focus on how CHC learners adapt to pedagogical conditions within a fixed timeframe, frequently portraying agency as fragile, temporary, or dependent on particular teaching strategies. The present study extends this work by showing that agency can accumulate across time even in semester-based programmes, not through continuity of participants, but through the inheritance and re-mediation of learner-designed tools, routines, and articulated contradictions.

Empirical support for this claim is visible in the relationship between the two Change Laboratory interventions. In Intervention A, students gradually articulated contradictions in the inherited academic reading curriculum and responded by designing new mediating artefacts, including revised Student-Led Seminar formats, peer-feedback tools, preparation protocols, and routines for integrating outside sources (Chapter 5, Sections 5.4–5.7). These artefacts were not treated as provisional outcomes of discussion, but were trialled, refined, and normalised through regular classroom use. By the end of the semester, they had become embedded in the ordinary organisation of the course rather than remaining cohort-specific innovations (Sections 5.8–5.9).

Because these learner-generated tools and documented contradictions were carried forward into curriculum materials and teaching routines, the subsequent cohort began their engagement under different conditions. Rather than first identifying problems or questioning inherited practices, students in Intervention B engaged immediately with existing tensions and treated them as prompts for further development (Sections 5.10–5.11). As a result, agentic actions such as modelling alternatives, committing to changes, and enacting redesigned practices appeared earlier and with greater coherence than in the earlier intervention (Sections 5.11.5; 5.17). Later innovations, including the Student-Led Workshop format, extended earlier practices rather than replacing them, illustrating developmental continuity rather than repetition (Sections 5.13–5.16).

A key mechanism enabling this cross-cohort development was the role of the ordinary classroom as an enactment space alongside the Change Laboratory workshops. Learner-designed tools were embedded in weekly teaching, revised through use, and shared across parallel course sections. This allowed student innovations to stabilise within a single semester and become baseline conditions for subsequent cohorts, even though the student population itself changed. Developmental continuity was thus carried by curriculum artefacts and routines rather than by individuals.

For researchers working on learner agency in EMI, EAP, and CHC contexts, this contribution has two important implications. First, it challenges accounts that treat agency as necessarily short-lived or tied to individual learner dispositions, showing instead how agency can become durable when student contributions are allowed to reshape curriculum infrastructure. Second, it addresses concerns in the literature that semester-based programmes offer insufficient time for meaningful learner agency to develop. The findings demonstrate that sustained, student-led curriculum transformation is possible in short programmes when the outputs of one cohort are preserved and taken up by the next.

By foregrounding curriculum historicity rather than cohort continuity, this contribution reframes CHC learner agency as a collective, developmental process embedded in course design. It shows that students need not repeatedly confront the same constraints in isolation; instead, earlier cohorts can alter the conditions of participation for those who follow. This extends existing research by shifting analytic attention from individual adaptation to the longer-term effects of learner-driven change within institutionalised teaching programmes.

6.3.3 Contribution 3: Repositioning Curriculum Tools as Generative Mediators of Transformative Agency

This study shows that curriculum tools functioned as primary mediators of transformative agency, rather than as neutral supports for learning. While research on educational processes supporting learner agency among Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) students (Section 2.4) emphasises scaffolding, participation norms, relational support, and institutional structures, it rarely treats pedagogical artefacts themselves as

sites of agency. This is particularly striking in EMI and EAP contexts, where learning activity is organised through worksheets, rubrics, feedback forms, and assessment formats. The present findings indicate that CHC students did not simply act within pre-given tools, but progressively became co-designers of the artefacts that reorganised their academic reading activity.

Across both Change Laboratory interventions, students' earliest and most sustained expressions of transformative agency focused on concrete curriculum tools, including Student-Led Seminar (SLS) worksheets, peer-feedback checklists, annotation protocols, seminar slides, source-evaluation guides, assessment rubrics, and unseen-text examinations. Rather than beginning with abstract critique of pedagogy or authority, students engaged with how these artefacts shaped participation, interaction, and academic value. In CHC contexts, where direct confrontation of teachers or curricular goals may be constrained, critiquing tools provided a culturally legitimate and pedagogically productive way to articulate problems and propose change.

In Intervention A, early critique clustered around tools mediating reading and feedback. Concerns about textbook-driven comprehension tasks and monologic worksheets crystallised in what was later analysed as the Monologic Tools contradiction. Students described frustration that existing materials supported individual preparation but not dialogue or shared meaning-making, leading to proposals for alternative annotation schemes, question types, and integration of outside sources. Similarly, *senpai-kōhai* pressures surfaced through discussion of the peer-feedback form rather than interpersonal critique. By redesigning the checklist into a Yes/No format and later adding sentence stems, students embedded norms of harmony and emotional safety directly into the artefact. Cultural constraints were thus re-mediated through tool redesign rather than resisted explicitly.

As the expansive learning cycle progressed, tools became shared sites for modelling new practice. The SLS worksheet functioned as a collaborative design object across Sessions 2–5 of Intervention A. Students iteratively revised roles, question structures, preparation requirements, and links to outside readings, using the artefact itself to diagnose participation problems and test refinements. Uneven preparation, over-reliance on notes, and limited interaction were treated not as individual failings, but as indicators

that the tool required further development. Transformative agency was enacted through material revision as much as through discussion.

This pattern extended into Intervention B, where student-generated tools from the earlier cohort functioned as inherited boundary objects. Rather than beginning by identifying problems anew, students immediately refined and extended existing artefacts. The SLS worksheet was revised to require written summaries and leader-prepared slides, addressing persistent hesitation and uneven engagement. The Source Guide emerged through tool-mediated discussion of academic credibility and gradually stabilised criteria that later shaped seminar preparation, Student-Led Workshop (SLW) design, and unseen-text exam expectations. Agency here was cumulative and distributed, embedded in artefacts that structured future action rather than tied to individual disposition.

The most pronounced instance of tool-mediated innovation was the emergence of the SLW. Students' critique of the Transmedia Presentation as creative but insufficiently academic did not lead to rejection of multimodality, but to the invention of a new pedagogical form that recombined earlier tools. By integrating structured discussion, interactive tasks, breakout-room facilitation, and self-selected academic sources, the SLW resolved the Creativity vs Academic Rigour contradiction identified in Intervention B. This illustrates how new practices can emerge through artefact recombination rather than through ideological opposition to existing pedagogy.

Tools also mediated changes in assessment culture, an area rarely foregrounded in CHC-focused EMI research. In later sessions of Intervention B, students used rubrics and feedback tools to articulate concerns about fairness, effort, and creativity in relation to unseen-text exams. The addition of Effort and Creativity as explicit assessment categories emerged from concrete negotiation over how assessment tools recognised student work, rather than from abstract appeals to equity. Through these artefacts, students reshaped evaluative norms while formal authority remained with teachers, demonstrating how transformative agency can operate within institutional constraints through material redesign.

The findings indicate that curriculum tools were central drivers of expansive learning. For CHC learners in structured, exam-sensitive environments, pedagogical artefacts

provided viable channels for critique, experimentation, and innovation. More broadly, the study suggests that learner agency in EMI and EAP contexts may be most effectively supported not by participation alone, but by inviting students to co-design the artefacts through which participation, learning, and assessment are organised.

6.3.4 Contribution 4: Recasting Student-Identified Contradictions as Generative Catalysts for Transformative Agency

Section 2.3 of the literature review shows that tensions commonly associated with Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learning—such as deference to authority, fear of failure, discomfort with peer evaluation, and concern for fairness—are typically framed in EMI and EAP research as constraints on participation (Sections 2.3.1–2.3.6). Even where these tensions are acknowledged as culturally situated rather than deficit-based, they are most often treated as obstacles to be mitigated through pedagogical design rather than as resources for learning (Section 2.3.8). This study makes a distinct contribution by showing that when students worked on contradictions they had themselves identified within practices in which they were already active participants, those same tensions became the primary drivers of transformative agency.

Rather than asking students to “participate more” within pre-given activities—as is common in EAP classrooms discussed in Section 2.4—the Change Laboratory interventions positioned students as analysts of their own participation conditions. As a result, contradictions were not externally diagnosed by teachers or researchers, but surfaced from within students’ lived engagement with the academic reading course. This shift proved crucial: contradictions were experienced not as personal shortcomings, but as collective problems embedded in shared tools, rules, and routines.

In Intervention A, Session 1 (Chapter 5), this process began when students encountered mirror data drawn from surveys and artefacts reflecting their everyday classroom experience. Daiki’s observation—“Maybe we just accept the textbook... and miss some new ideas”—did not challenge the teacher or the curriculum directly, but pointed to a tension between monologic reading tools and the course’s stated emphasis on discussion. Because this contradiction was grounded in a practice students were already

performing, it was immediately recognisable and discussable. Similar tensions emerged around discomfort with speaking, uncertainty about discussion expectations, and reluctance to evaluate peers—issues widely documented in CHC research as participation constraints (Sections 2.3.1, 2.3.3, 2.3.6).

Once articulated, these contradictions prompted early forms of transformative agency—criticising and explicating—in Intervention A, Sessions 1–2 (Chapter 5). Crucially, students did not frame these issues as individual weaknesses. Haruto’s comment that peer feedback felt difficult “because of senpai–kohai pressure” located the problem in the rules governing interaction rather than in student confidence. This reframing made critique culturally legitimate and opened a space for collective redesign.

From this point, contradictions consistently triggered modelling and redesign. In Intervention A, Sessions 2–4 (Chapter 5), discomfort with hierarchical evaluation produced the Yes/No peer-feedback checklist; dissatisfaction with textbook dependence led to the integration of outside sources into the Student-Led Seminar; and uneven preparation patterns resulted in clearer role division and question-writing guidelines. Each redesign addressed a contradiction students had experienced directly in their own participation, reinforcing the sense that change was both necessary and possible.

In Intervention B, contradictions were taken up more rapidly and explicitly. In Intervention B, Session 1 (Chapter 5), students revisited inherited tensions concerning hesitation to speak, over-reliance on the teacher, and solitary preparation. Statements such as “We wait for the answer instead of exploring together” show that contradictions were now treated as design prompts rather than problems to be endured. This accelerated movement into modelling reflects the cross-cohort continuity discussed in Contribution 2, but here the focus is on how contradictions functioned as *ongoing objects of student work*.

Throughout Intervention B, Sessions 2–4 (Chapter 5), contradictions continued to generate new tools and practices: concerns about source relevance led to the Source Guide checklist; the tension between creativity and academic rigour, surfaced through critique of Transmedia Presentations, led to the invention of the Student-Led Workshop; and difficulties with comprehension during workshops resulted in new pre-

reading and annotation routines. In each case, contradictions were not abstract tensions but frictions experienced within activities students were actively performing.

A particularly significant extension of this process occurred in Intervention B, Session 5 (Chapter 5), when contradictions reshaped assessment culture. Students articulated a perceived mismatch between effort and outcomes following unseen exams—“we worked harder but got less”—a concern often reported in the CHC literature as leading to compliance rather than critique (Section 2.3.4). Here, however, students used the contradiction to propose new assessment categories recognising Effort and Creativity, a hybrid group–individual marking structure, and renewed use of peer-feedback tools. This demonstrates that when contradictions are collectively owned and situated within students’ own practices, even assessment rules become negotiable.

Across both interventions, contradictions also supported sustained, cross-cohort agency. Tensions identified in Intervention A (Sessions 1–5) became the analytical starting points for Intervention B (Sessions 1–5), enabling later students to enter the redesign process with a shared language for critique. By the focus-group discussions reported in Chapter 5, students described contradictions not as failures but as normal features of a living system—“now we build the class together.” This reframes contradiction from something to be avoided into something to be worked on.

This contribution is important for researchers working in EMI, EAP, and CHC contexts because it shifts the analytic focus from participation as behaviour to participation as design work. The findings suggest that learner agency is most powerfully expressed not when students are encouraged to speak more within fixed activities, but when they are invited to analyse and redesign the very practices in which they are already engaged. Contradictions, in this sense, are not merely structural tensions: they are pedagogical resources that can catalyse collective, culturally grounded transformation when students are positioned as co-designers of their learning environment.

6.3.5 Contribution 5: Reframing Assessment Culture Through Collective Negotiation

This study contributes to EMI and EAP research by demonstrating the *potential* for assessment culture to be reshaped through student-led collective negotiation, even within a Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) context where assessment is typically portrayed as teacher-driven and opaque. As discussed in Section 2.4, much of the literature treats assessment in EMI settings as a fixed institutional mechanism that students must interpret, adapt to, or endure. Within this work, CHC learners are frequently characterised as deferential to teacher authority (Chan, 1999; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), strongly performance-oriented (Biggs, 1996; Cross & Hitchcock, 2007), and reluctant to question assessment norms (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Befu, 2001). The findings of this study complicate that depiction by showing how assessment can become an object of collective inquiry and redesign when students are positioned as legitimate participants in negotiating contradictions they themselves experience.

Evidence for this contribution emerges most clearly during Intervention B, particularly in Session 5 and the subsequent focus group. Following the introduction of unseen-text examinations, students articulated a shared concern about the misalignment between learning effort, depth of engagement, and numerical outcomes. Koji's observation in Session 5 — “Before, we just memorised word lists and could get ninety-five percent. Now we read real articles and the average is eighty. It feels unfair — we worked harder but got less” — represents a direct critique of an assessment logic that privileges surface performance over sustained academic work. Importantly, this critique did not reject challenge or difficulty; it questioned whether existing assessment criteria adequately reflected the kind of learning the course now required.

This concern developed into collective problem-solving rather than complaint. During the same session, students proposed explicit revisions to the grading system, most notably the introduction of **Effort & Preparation** as a formal assessment criterion. Yuka's assertion that “Effort shows the work behind the grade” reframed assessment as a means of recognising invisible academic labour, rather than as a narrow measurement of test performance. In doing so, students addressed a contradiction between institutional rules and the pedagogical object of deep academic reading, extending earlier concerns about memorisation-based assessment into a more systemic negotiation of evaluative values.

At the same time, students identified a related tension surrounding creativity and risk. Rie’s critique that “Everyone used the same slide layout — it felt safe but not exciting” highlighted how assessment practices can inadvertently encourage conformity. In response, students reinstated **Creativity & Originality** as a valued criterion, redefining creativity not as decorative flair but as intellectual clarity, thoughtful design, and meaningful engagement with content. This move challenged common assumptions that CHC learners’ preference for structure necessarily suppresses creativity; instead, it showed how demands for clarity and fairness can coexist with, and even support, creative academic work.

Across Intervention B Session 5, students collaboratively designed a revised assessment framework that included a hybrid group–individual grading system, transparent rubrics linking effort, creativity, and academic content, and peer-feedback mechanisms to support accountability. These were operational tools rather than symbolic gestures. Their subsequent adoption within the course, and uptake by additional faculty members teaching parallel sections, demonstrates that the students’ proposals were institutionally credible and pedagogically viable.

The focus group further confirms the cultural significance of this shift. Students consistently contrasted the revised assessment system with their prior educational experiences, emphasizing that grades were no longer experienced as unilateral judgements but as outcomes shaped by shared criteria and visible processes. Koji’s summary — “Before, only the result mattered; now the process matters too” — captures this reorientation succinctly. Assessment became something students understood, discussed, and helped to shape, rather than something simply received.

This contribution does not suggest that CHC assessment cultures are inherently participatory, nor that teacher authority disappears. Instead, it demonstrates the *potential* for assessment culture in EAP contexts to be renegotiated when contradictions around fairness, workload, and learning purpose are made visible and when students are given structured means to act on them. The Change Laboratory created such conditions through double stimulation, collective dialogue, and legitimate opportunities for redesign.

In this way, the study reframes CHC learners' relationship to assessment. Rather than interpreting diligence, accuracy, and risk aversion as signs of passivity, the findings show how these orientations can become drivers of transformative agency when aligned with transparent, negotiable assessment practices. Assessment emerges not as a fixed constraint on agency, but as a powerful site for its development.

6.3.6 Contribution 6: Structuring Agency Through Rules, Roles, and Clarity

This contribution builds directly on Section 2.4, which identifies clear expectations, transparent communication, and calibrated scaffolding as particularly important for Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learners. The present study extends that literature by demonstrating that structure itself can become a vehicle for transformative agency when rules, roles, and criteria are not merely imposed by teachers but co-negotiated and refined by students.

Much research characterises CHC learners as preferring structured learning environments due to deference to authority, fear of error, or concern for social harmony (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Bailey, 2005). Such preferences are often interpreted as limiting learner agency. The findings of this study complicate that interpretation. Across both Change Laboratory interventions, students did not resist structure; instead, they repeatedly sought to tighten, clarify, and standardise tools, routines, and assessment criteria. Importantly, these requests did not signal passivity. Rather, they reflected an effort to create conditions under which participation, critique, and responsibility could be exercised more confidently and equitably.

A striking pattern across Chapter 5 is that students never explicitly asked for greater openness or reduced guidance. Instead, they consistently worked to make expectations more explicit and participation more predictable. This contrasts with assumptions in some co-design literature that student involvement naturally leads to demands for freedom or reduced constraint. In this study, agency emerged through the collective refinement of structure, not through its removal.

This dynamic is evident in the early redesign of the peer-feedback process in Intervention A (Chapter 5, Intervention A, Session 2). When students expressed

discomfort evaluating peers due to senpai–kohai hierarchies, they did not reject peer feedback itself. Instead, they redesigned the tool to make critique culturally manageable. Haruto explained that grading peers felt inappropriate because of hierarchical pressure, while Mai noted that a Yes/No checklist “allows feedback without hurting feelings.” By simplifying and formalising the feedback process, students created a rule-bound space in which critique could occur without threatening relational harmony. Here, structure enabled participation rather than suppressing it.

A similar pattern appears in the refinement of seminar roles. Students did not challenge the Student-Led Seminar format; they strengthened it by clarifying responsibilities. In Intervention B (Chapter 5, Intervention B, Session 1), concerns were raised that uneven preparation undermined discussion quality. Toshiyuki observed that some peers “only annotate” and therefore did not fully understand the text. The group’s response was not to relax expectations but to formalise them: all students would prepare written summaries, and seminar leaders would present slides. This redistribution of labour made preparation visible and equitable, supporting more confident engagement in discussion. Increased structure, in this case, generated increased agency.

The development of the Student-Led Workshop (SLW) illustrates how clarity functioned as a precondition for agency rather than a constraint. When students critiqued the Transmedia Presentation in Intervention B (Chapter 5, Intervention B, Session 2), they did not ask for fewer rules or more creative freedom. Instead, they questioned the academic legitimacy of existing practices. Koji asked whether a presentation could be “creative but not so academic,” while Megumi proposed clearer criteria for evaluating outside sources. These concerns led to the creation of explicit source-evaluation checklists and workshop guidelines that anchored creativity within shared academic standards. Creativity was not abandoned; it was structured.

The same logic underpinned students’ engagement with assessment reform. When unseen reading exams resulted in lower averages despite increased effort (Chapter 5, Intervention B, Session 5), students did not reject the assessment outright. Instead, they questioned the fairness of outcomes relative to effort and proposed structural solutions. Koji’s observation that “we worked harder but got less” led to the introduction of explicit Effort and Creativity categories in the rubric. Again, agency was exercised through the reconfiguration of rules rather than through opposition to them.

This contribution therefore reframes structure in CHC learning contexts. Rather than viewing rules, roles, and clarity as constraints on agency, the study demonstrates their potential to function as cultural and cognitive scaffolds for transformative action when they are open to negotiation. For CHC learners, clear structure reduces interpersonal risk, distributes responsibility fairly, and stabilises innovation. These conditions make it possible for students to take ownership of curriculum tools, discussion practices, and assessment criteria with confidence.

For EAP and EMI pedagogy, the implication is not that structure should be relaxed, but that it should be made visible, discussable, and co-designed. When students are invited to work on the rules that govern their participation—rather than simply to participate more—structure becomes a means through which agency is enacted and sustained, rather than a barrier to it.

6.4 Discussion Summary

This chapter has examined how Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learners expressed transformative agency across two Change Laboratory interventions embedded within an EMI EAP academic reading course. Rather than reproducing deficit narratives that portray Japanese EMI students as passive, dependent, or reluctant to engage critically, the discussion has shown that agency emerged gradually, collectively, and in culturally coherent ways. Students did not simply adapt to inherited practices; they identified contradictions within the curriculum, critiqued the tools that structured their participation, and worked collaboratively to redesign seminars, workshops, reading routines, and assessment practices.

Six interrelated contributions were developed. First, learner agency was shown to emerge as a snowballing collective process within a cohort, as small, relationally cautious actions accumulated into substantive curricular change. Second, this developmental process extended beyond a single cohort, as learner-generated tools and articulated contradictions were stabilised and inherited, enabling later students to enter the redesign process under altered conditions. Third, curriculum tools were repositioned as generative mediators of agency, functioning not as neutral supports but as central objects through which critique, modelling, and innovation were enacted. Fourth, contradictions identified by students within practices they actively inhabited were

shown to function as productive catalysts for expansive learning, rather than as constraints on participation to be minimised or managed by teachers.

The final two contributions addressed assessment culture and participation structures in EMI/EAP contexts. The discussion demonstrated the potential for assessment practices to be reshaped through collective student negotiation when contradictions around fairness, effort, and learning purpose were made visible and discussable. It also showed that clear rules, defined roles, and explicit criteria did not suppress agency; instead, when co-designed by students, they functioned as cultural and cognitive scaffolds that enabled confident, equitable participation. Across the interventions, agency emerged not through the removal of structure, but through its collaborative refinement.

While most Students as Partners (SaP) scholarship is situated in Western, Anglophone universities and is rarely framed in terms of “CHC students in English-medium instruction (EMI) settings”, the patterns observed in this study nonetheless resonate with SaP principles of shared responsibility, relational pedagogy, and co-design. The Change Laboratory can be read as a context-sensitive partnership space in which CHC-majority students negotiate criteria, redesign tools, and re-frame their roles, extending SaP insights into a Japanese EMI EAP setting. In this sense, the study responds to the relative absence of SaP-informed work in the CHC EMI literature by demonstrating how partnership-like practices can emerge when students are positioned as curriculum co-designers within an activity-theoretical, expansive-learning framework.

The findings demonstrate that transformative agency can develop within a single semester when students are given structured opportunities to interrogate the tools that organise their learning, work productively on contradictions they themselves experience, and participate in the redesign of pedagogical practices. Agency was enacted not as individual assertiveness or resistance, but as collective design work embedded in the activity system of academic reading. In this way, the discussion returns directly to the concerns raised in Chapter 2, where CHC learner agency was conceptualised as culturally situated, relationally mediated, and structurally enabled. This chapter has shown how those principles were realised in practice, and how learner agency became visible, cumulative, and transformative through participatory curriculum co-design.

Chapter 7 now synthesises these contributions and considers their broader theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications, before outlining directions for future research and institutional practice.

Chapter 7: **Conclusion**

7.1 Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the study's aims, findings, and contributions, and positions them within wider debates on learner agency, curriculum design, and EMI/EAP instruction in CHC contexts. Whereas Chapters 5 and 6 presented detailed empirical analysis and articulated six specific contributions to knowledge, the purpose of this chapter is to consolidate those insights, reflect on their significance, and clarify what the study enables future researchers, educators, and institutions to do differently.

The chapter proceeds in seven sections. Section 7.2 synthesises the findings across both Change Laboratory interventions, organised in relation to the three research questions. Section 7.3 interprets the six contributions to knowledge, explicitly linking them back to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Section 7.4 outlines directions for future research that build directly on these contributions. Section 7.5 addresses implications for pedagogy and programme design, while Section 7.6 discusses limitations and their implications for interpretation. The chapter concludes in Section 7.7 by returning to the central problem posed in Chapter 1 and summarising how the study repositions CHC learner agency within EMI/EAP research.

7.1.1 Synthesis of Findings

This study set out to investigate how CHC learners express transformative agency when invited to analyse and redesign their academic reading curriculum, and how such agency develops across time and cohorts. Across two Change Laboratory interventions, students engaged in sustained collective analysis of their learning activity, identified contradictions embedded in inherited tools and routines, and enacted a series of curriculum innovations that reshaped participation, preparation, and assessment. This section synthesises the principal findings in relation to the three research questions.

7.1.2 Contradictions Surfaced Across the Two Interventions

Across both interventions, students identified contradictions grounded in their experience of academic reading rather than in abstract pedagogical critique. In Intervention A, early Change Laboratory sessions surfaced tensions such as Participation Discomfort, Passive Role Identity, Monologic Tools, and Uneven Preparation. These reflected enduring features of the inherited curriculum, including reliance on teacher explanation, limited peer interaction, strong emphasis on accuracy, and weak alignment between preparation and seminar participation. As discussed in Sections 5.3–5.5, students explicitly linked these tensions to cultural norms surrounding error avoidance, hierarchy, and social harmony.

In Intervention B, these contradictions persisted but were articulated with greater analytical precision. Drawing on tools and concepts inherited from the first cohort, students identified deeper systemic tensions, including Over-Preparation vs Interaction and Effort vs Assessment Recognition. For instance, the introduction of unseen-text reading examinations was framed not as pedagogical failure but as misalignment between effort, learning value, and grading practices (Section 5.8). This shift from experiential discomfort to structural analysis suggests that students' capacity to identify contradictions developed over time.

Contradictions surfaced in Intervention A also functioned as resources for Intervention B. Rather than beginning anew, the second cohort entered the expansive-learning cycle with an inherited analytical vocabulary, enabling earlier movement into redesign and helping to explain their more rapid progression toward curriculum innovation.

7.1.3 Expressions of Transformative Agency

Students' expressions of transformative agency followed a clear developmental trajectory across the two interventions. In Intervention A, agency emerged through Criticising and Explicating existing practices, particularly seminar participation and peer feedback, before moving toward Envisioning alternatives such as the Student-Led Seminar (SLS) and structured peer-feedback checklists. This sequence mirrors stages

identified in expansive-learning research (Engeström, 1987, 2016; Haapasaari et al., 2016). As shown in Sections 5.4–5.6, these proposals were cautious, highly structured, and oriented toward fairness and interpersonal safety.

In Intervention B, agency took more sustained and future-oriented forms. From the outset, students refined inherited tools, questioned the academic value of existing multimodal tasks, and proposed more integrated formats such as the Student-Led Workshop (SLW). Dominant expressions of agency included Envisioning, Committing, and Taking Action (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). By the final focus group, agency had become collective and self-regulating, with students positioning themselves as custodians of curriculum quality rather than recipients of instructional design.

These findings challenge assumptions that CHC learners lack agency or merely require encouragement to “speak up,” assumptions often associated with portrayals of CHC students as passive or overly deferential (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Instead, agency became visible when students were positioned as legitimate contributors to the redesign of tools, rules, and participation structures, consistent with research describing relational and contextually grounded forms of agency among CHC learners in internationalised programmes (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006).

7.1.1 Curriculum and Participation Reshaped Through Co-Design

Student-led innovation reshaped the academic reading curriculum in cumulative and systemic ways, consistent with expansive-learning accounts of tool-mediated change in activity systems (Engeström, 1987, 2016). In Intervention A, students developed classroom-level tools, including the Student-Led Seminar (SLS), annotation protocols, and peer-feedback checklists, which mediated collaborative academic literacy development (Haapasaari, Engeström, & Kerosuo, 2016; Wingate, 2015). These tools redistributed responsibility for meaning-making from the teacher to the group while maintaining high levels of structure (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

Intervention B extended these innovations into a more coherent curriculum architecture. The Student-Led Workshop (SLW) integrated seminar discussion, multimodal resources, and facilitated peer interaction within a single design, aligning with research

linking multimodal, student-designed tasks to deeper engagement and agency in EMI/EAP contexts (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011). Assessment practices were also reworked, with students co-designing rubric categories that recognised effort, creativity, and conceptual coherence, making evaluation criteria more explicit and negotiable (Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2015).

A defining feature of this process was cumulative development across cohorts, reflecting expansive-learning perspectives on the historicity of activity systems (Engeström, 2016). Intervention B students treated inherited tools as provisional and open to refinement, positioning themselves as agents in ongoing course redesign rather than passive recipients of a fixed curriculum (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). By the end of the cycle, curriculum design was framed as a collective task, consistent with formative-intervention approaches that conceptualise curriculum as re-mediated across cycles of activity (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

7.2 Interpreting the Contributions

Chapter 6 set out six original contributions grounded in the empirical analysis of the two Change Laboratory interventions. This section interprets those contributions in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the theoretical orientation outlined in Chapter 3, clarifying their conceptual significance and scope.

The six contributions are revisited thematically. The first two are interpreted in relation to the developmental and cumulative nature of learner agency, both within a single cohort and across successive cohorts. The third and fourth focus on mediational mechanisms, examining how curriculum tools and contradictions functioned as drivers of expansive learning. The final two address assessment culture and participation structures, showing how student-led redesign reshaped evaluative norms and enabled agency in structured, exam-sensitive EAP contexts.

Each subsection that follows therefore builds on the contributions articulated in Chapter 6 by positioning them within the wider EMI/EAP literature and by drawing out their theoretical and pedagogical implications.

7.2.1 Reframing CHC Learner Agency as Snowballing Collective Transformation

Contribution 1 reframes Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learner agency as a snowballing collective transformation rather than an individual disposition or episodic act of participation. This study shows how agency developed incrementally through shared activity, accumulating as students collaboratively redesigned tools, routines, and expectations within their academic reading course.

Much of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, particularly Section 2.3, approaches CHC learner agency through individualised behavioural indicators, often interpreting silence, caution, or reliance on structure as signs of limited agency. Even sociocultural accounts tend to emphasise individual adaptation to pedagogy rather than examining how agency emerges historically through collective participation. This study shifts the focus by conceptualising agency as something that builds through interaction and reuse over time.

Figure 7.1 visualizes this by mapping snowballing collective transformation onto themes that have traditionally shaped interpretations of CHC learner agency. Rather than treating orientations such as deference to authority, concern for harmony, fear of failure, or preference for structure as constraints, the figure shows how these orientations can function as conditions for agency when learners are positioned as legitimate co-designers of curriculum tools and routines.

| CHC agency theme in the literature (Chapter 2) | Typical interpretation in EMI/EAP research | Reinterpretation in this study (Contribution 1) | Empirical manifestation (Chapter 5) |
|--|---|--|--|
| Obedience to authority (Section 2.3.1) | Learners avoid challenging teachers; agency appears limited | Deference shapes <i>how</i> critique is expressed, not whether it occurs | Critique framed through tools and routines rather than direct opposition (Intervention A, Session 1) |
| Group Conformity & Social Harmony (Section 2.3.3) | Desire to maintain relationships inhibits participation | Harmony motivates collaborative, low-risk forms of collective action | Redesign of peer-feedback tools to protect relational balance (Intervention A, Sessions 2–3) |
| Fear of failure and perfectionism (Section 2.3.4) | Learners avoid risk and public contribution | Risk is managed through shared artefacts that distribute responsibility | Structured seminar roles and question formats enable participation (Intervention A, Sessions 3–5) |
| Perception of Passivity (Section 2.3.6) | Silence interpreted as passivity or disengagement | Cautious talk functions as early-stage agency that accumulates over time | Gradual shift from indirect critique to sustained co-design (Intervention A → Focus Group) |
| Preference for structure and clarity (Sections 2.4.1–2.4.4) | Seen as dependence on guidance rather than autonomy | Structure becomes the scaffold through which agency is enacted | Collective tightening of rules, roles, and criteria (Intervention A & B) |
| Individualised notions of agency (Sections 2.3.1., 2.3.4, 2.3.6) | Agency measured by assertiveness or voice | Agency conceptualised as collective, cumulative, and tool-mediated | Snowballing redesign of curriculum tools across sessions |

Figure 7-1 Snowballing collective transformation in CHC learner agency.

Across the Change Laboratory interventions, agency did not appear as a sudden shift in learner behaviour but emerged through small, cautious contributions that gained force as they were taken up by peers, stabilised in shared artefacts, and reused across sessions resulting in cumulative development of ideas over time.

This snowballing dynamic also operated across cohorts. As shown in Chapter 6, the second cohort inherited tools, contradictions, and design logics generated by the first, allowing them to engage more rapidly in curriculum redesign. Agency thus became embedded in practices that structured participation for future students, rather than remaining tied to individual learners or single semesters.

By foregrounding this process, Contribution 1 challenges deficit-oriented interpretations of CHC learner behaviour and reframes caution, structure-seeking, and relational sensitivity as potential resources for transformation. Figure 7.1 therefore serves as a conceptual bridge between the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the empirical analysis in Chapters 5 and 6, positioning snowballing collective transformation as a central lens for understanding how agency emerged in this study.

7.2.2 Extending Transformative Agency Across Cohorts through Curriculum Historicity

This study's second contribution is to show that transformative agency among CHC learners can extend beyond a single cohort through the historicity of learner-generated curriculum tools and practices. Rather than being confined to a semester or group, agency persisted and accumulated when student-designed artefacts were stabilised within the curriculum.

Much EMI and EAP research treats learner agency as situational and cohort-specific, focusing on how particular groups respond to pedagogy within fixed timeframes (Macaro, 2018; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; King, 2013). Short courses are therefore often assumed to offer limited scope for sustained development. This study challenges that assumption by showing that continuity depends less on individual persistence than on the preservation and re-mediation of shared tools, routines, and articulated contradictions, consistent with expansive-learning accounts of historically evolving activity systems (Engeström, 1987, 2016; Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

As shown in Chapter 6, tools developed in Intervention A—including revised Student-Led Seminar formats, peer-feedback checklists, and preparation protocols—were embedded into routine practice and carried forward into the following year. Students in Intervention B therefore entered under altered conditions: key contradictions had already been named, core tools were in place, and participation structures were no longer treated as natural or fixed.

This shift shaped how agency was expressed. Rather than beginning with cautious critique, the second cohort moved quickly into refinement, extension, and recombination of inherited practices. Innovations such as the Student-Led Workshop built directly on earlier tools, indicating developmental continuity rather than repetition. Agency thus operated at the level of curriculum evolution, not only classroom interaction.

Conceptually, this contribution extends activity-theoretical accounts of expansive learning by showing how expansive trajectories can unfold across cohorts within short-cycle programmes. It also challenges assumptions that CHC learner agency is fragile or

easily disrupted by institutional constraints, demonstrating that when curriculum artefacts are treated as shared and revisable, agency can remain durable even in assessment-driven contexts.

7.2.3 Repositioning Curriculum Tools as Generative Mediators of Transformative Agency

The third contribution of this study is to show that curriculum tools function as generative mediators of transformative agency, rather than as neutral supports for learning. Sociocultural and activity-theoretical research has long emphasised the role of artefacts and mediational means in shaping human action (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998; Engeström, 1987). However, research on CHC learner agency reviewed in Section 2.4 tends to focus on scaffolding, participation norms, and institutional structures, with less attention to pedagogical artefacts themselves. This study demonstrates that in EMI and EAP contexts, agency was enacted primarily through tools, consistent with Change Laboratory research that treats transformative agency as artefact-mediated work on the activity system (Virkkunen, 2006; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013; Haapasaari et al., 2016).

Across both Change Laboratory interventions, students' earliest and most sustained agentic actions focused on concrete artefacts, including seminar worksheets, feedback checklists, annotation protocols, source guides, rubrics, and assessment formats. Rather than challenging teachers or curricular aims directly, students framed problems as design issues embedded in tools. In a CHC context where direct confrontation can be sensitive, this tool-focused approach offered a legitimate way to question participation norms, academic value, and fairness, echoing research on harmony, deference, and relational forms of agency among CHC learners (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006).

As shown in Chapter 6, contradictions were first expressed through dissatisfaction with how tools shaped interaction, such as monologic worksheets that limited dialogue or peer-feedback forms that intensified senpai–kohai pressure. Redesigning these artefacts allowed students to address tensions without rejecting norms of harmony, aligning with expansive-learning studies in which contradictions are surfaced and worked through changes to mediating artefacts.

Over time, curriculum tools became shared spaces for collective problem-solving. Issues such as uneven preparation, superficial discussion, or formulaic creativity were treated as signs that tools needed further development rather than as individual shortcomings. In this way, transformative agency operated through repeated cycles of artefact redesign that reshaped expectations for participation.

In Intervention B, inherited tools functioned as boundary objects that structured further innovation. Students refined and recombined existing artefacts to create new forms, most notably the Student-Led Workshop. This shows that agency was distributed across people and tools and embedded in artefacts that guided future action rather than in individual disposition alone.

This contribution extends sociocultural and activity-theoretical accounts of agency by showing that, in structured and exam-sensitive settings, agency was most often exercised through curriculum tools. For CHC learners, artefacts such as worksheets, rubrics, and feedback forms provided culturally acceptable ways to question practice, try alternatives, and shape the course collectively (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). The findings suggest that in EMI and EAP contexts, learner agency may be fostered less by encouraging students to speak more and more by involving them in the design of the tools that structure learning, interaction, and assessment.

7.2.4 Repositioning Contradictions as Student-Identified Catalysts for Expansive Learning

The fourth contribution of this study is to show how contradictions became starting points for learning when students themselves identified and worked on them. This aligns with expansive-learning theory, which understands contradictions as drivers of development and transformative agency (Engeström, 1987, 2016; Engeström & Sannino, 2010). While Cultural-Historical Activity Theory treats contradictions as productive tensions, research on EMI and EAP in Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) contexts often presents them as problems, such as cultural mismatch, reluctance to speak, or resistance to unfamiliar teaching approaches (Section 2.3; Aizawa & Rose, 2019; King, 2013; Ryan & Louie, 2007). This study instead shows that contradictions

were part of students' everyday learning experiences and became productive when learners were able to address them collectively.

A key difference concerns how contradictions were identified and who acted on them. In this study, contradictions were not defined in advance by the teacher or researcher. Instead, they emerged from activities students were already engaged in, including seminar preparation, peer feedback, multimodal presentations, and assessment. This reflects formative-intervention approaches in which participants surface tensions from within their own activity systems (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013; Sannino, Engeström, & Lemos, 2016). Because these contradictions arose from familiar practices, students treated them as concrete and relevant rather than as abstract theoretical issues.

Mirror data played an important role in this process. Discussing contradictions through mirror data helped students frame tensions as shared design problems rather than as personal weaknesses or cultural limitations, consistent with research showing that mirror data can shift attention from individual deficits to systemic issues (Haapasaari et al., 2016). Problems such as preparing extensively but speaking little, balancing creativity with academic rigour, or investing effort without seeing it recognised in assessment were understood as features of course organisation. Students responded by proposing practical changes to tools, roles, and assessment criteria. This allowed learning and redesign to proceed without direct confrontation with authority or rejection of institutional expectations, which is particularly relevant in CHC contexts that value harmony and indirect negotiation (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006).

The study also shows that contradictions became productive only when students were recognised as legitimate contributors to addressing them. This contrasts with much EMI and EAP research, where tensions are described but remain unaddressed in teaching practice (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; King, 2013). In this study, contradictions supported reflection, experimentation, and change because students had both the support and the permission to redesign parts of the course, in line with research on transformative agency in formative interventions.

Overall, this contribution demonstrates that contradictions can function as practical tools for learning in CHC contexts. Rather than treating participation difficulties as individual or cultural problems, the findings suggest they often point to unresolved

tensions in the learning system itself (Engeström, 1987, 2016). When students are supported to identify and work on these issues together, contradictions become drivers of change rather than obstacles to agency.

7.2.5 Reframing Assessment Culture Through Collective Negotiation

The fifth contribution of this study is to show that assessment culture in EMI/EAP contexts can be reshaped through student-led collective negotiation, even in Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) settings where assessment is often portrayed as teacher-driven and opaque (Li, 2013; Aizawa & Rose, 2019). Literature reviewed in Sections 2.3 and 2.4 commonly frames assessment as a constraint on learner agency, reinforcing performance orientation, risk aversion, and deference to authority (Biggs, 1996; Ryan & Louie, 2007; Wingate, 2015). This study shows that such conditions do not eliminate agency but can provide a context in which alternative assessment practices emerge when students are meaningfully involved in design.

Rather than treating assessment as a fixed institutional given, the Change Laboratory process enabled students to examine how assessment aligned with learning effort, participation, and academic purpose. This reflects expansive-learning accounts in which contradictions in assessment function as starting points for redesign (Engeström, 1987, 2016). Importantly, students' engagement did not take the form of abstract critique of grading policy. It emerged from contradictions experienced in practice, particularly after the introduction of unseen-text reading examinations, when students perceived a mismatch between increased effort and lower average scores—a pattern also noted in EMI/EAP research on assessment misalignment.

Students' responses illustrate a form of agency rarely highlighted in CHC-focused EMI research. They did not challenge assessment standards or ask for leniency. Instead, they sought clearer alignment between learning processes and evaluation criteria. Through collective discussion, students proposed concrete refinements to rubrics, including explicit recognition of effort, preparation, and creativity. These proposals align with academic literacies and assessment-for-learning research that emphasises transparency and negotiated criteria (Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2015), reframing assessment from one-way judgement to a shared representation of academic work.

Crucially, assessment redesign occurred through material artefacts rather than direct challenge to authority. Rubrics, criteria descriptors, and feedback tools became mediational means through which students articulated concerns about fairness, transparency, and academic integrity. This mode of engagement is culturally congruent with CHC norms that value harmony and indirect negotiation of classroom power (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006).

This contribution therefore complicates assumptions that CHC learners accept assessment norms uncritically or lack the capacity to engage with evaluative structures. The findings suggest that when assessment criteria become shared objects of joint activity, students can contribute meaningfully to their redesign, supporting recent work on learner agency in assessment (Nieminen & Hilppö, 2020; Nieminen & Tuohilampi, 2020). Assessment culture, in this sense, is not simply imposed but can be co-constructed through structured dialogue and tool-mediated negotiation.

Overall, the study demonstrates the potential for participatory assessment cultures in EMI/EAP programmes that remain academically rigorous while becoming more transparent, motivating, and developmentally aligned. It extends research on dialogic pedagogy and formative interventions by showing that assessment itself can become a site of expansive learning when students are authorised to act on it collectively (Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

7.2.6 Structuring Agency Through Rules, Roles, and Clarity

The sixth contribution of this study is to show that clear rules, defined roles, and explicit criteria can function as enabling conditions for transformative agency among CHC learners, rather than as constraints on participation. While literature reviewed in Sections 2.3 and 2.4 often links CHC learners' preference for structure to deference, risk aversion, or compliance (Biggs, 1996; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Ryan & Louie, 2007), the findings of this study suggest a different interpretation. Here, structure provided the conditions through which agency became culturally legitimate, collectively enacted, and sustainable.

Across both Change Laboratory interventions, students did not ask for greater openness or fewer rules. Instead, they repeatedly worked to clarify expectations, standardise

procedures, and define responsibilities. This pattern challenges assumptions—common in dialogic and student-centred pedagogy—that agency is best fostered through loosened control or open-ended autonomy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015; Hino, 2012). In this context, agency was enabled not by removing structure but by collaboratively redesigning it.

The Change Laboratory process made it possible for students to treat structure as a design resource. Rules, roles, and criteria became shared objects of discussion rather than fixed constraints, echoing formative-intervention research in which participants re-mediate rules and divisions of labour within activity systems (Engeström, 1987; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). By negotiating feedback formats, seminar responsibilities, preparation requirements, and assessment criteria, students transformed structure into a shared framework that distributed responsibility more evenly and reduced interpersonal risk. This was particularly important in a CHC context, where concerns about harmony, face, and hierarchy shape participation (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; King, 2013).

Students' orientation toward clarity should not be read as conservatism or resistance to change. Instead, it functioned as a way of stabilising innovation. Clear procedures allowed students to experiment with new practices—such as peer-led seminars, workshops, and revised assessment criteria—without exposing individuals to unnecessary social or academic risk. In this sense, structure acted as a mediating bridge between cultural norms and pedagogical change, consistent with sociocultural accounts of tools and rules as mediators of agency (Vygotsky, 1978; Engeström, 1987).

This contribution extends existing accounts of learner agency by showing that, for CHC learners, agency may be most effectively enacted through structured co-design rather than through expectations of spontaneity or individual assertiveness (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). When clarity is collectively negotiated, learners are better positioned to participate confidently in redesigning curriculum tools, participation norms, and evaluative practices.

For EMI/EAP contexts, these findings point to the value of pedagogical frameworks that combine explicit structure with participatory design, aligning with research on EMI reforms that emphasise transparent expectations and collaborative curriculum

development (Aizawa & Rose, 2019; Macaro, 2018). In such frameworks, structure does not limit agency but becomes one of its key enabling conditions.

7.3 Implications for Pedagogy and Programme Design

The findings suggest that CHC learners benefit from structured opportunities to co-design curriculum tools rather than from open-ended invitations to participate. Pedagogical designs that foreground tool inspection, guided comparison, and explicit criteria can create culturally coherent conditions for agency.

At a programme level, this points to the value of preserving learner-generated artefacts across cohorts, embedding contradiction-surfacing activities into course cycles, and involving students in aspects of assessment design within clearly defined parameters.

7.4 Limitations

A number of limitations shape how the findings of this thesis should be interpreted. I do not see these limitations as flaws, but as conditions that define the scope of the claims I can make. In each case, I outline how the limitation was anticipated or managed, how it shaped the analysis, and what it means for interpreting the findings and answering the research questions

7.4.1 Duration and structure of the Change Laboratory cycles

Each Change Laboratory intervention took place within a single 15-week semester, comprising five CL workshops supported by weekly classroom enactment. This design was intentional. From the outset, I was aware that institutional constraints would limit the duration of each cycle, and the study was therefore designed to examine short-cycle expansive learning rather than long-term institutional reform. This approach is consistent with a substantial body of Change Laboratory research conducted within comparable timeframes (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013; Haapasaari et al., 2016; Engeström, 2015).

This temporal boundary necessarily limits claims about long-term stabilisation. The dataset ends with the conclusion of Intervention B, and it is therefore not possible to demonstrate empirically whether the innovations documented here persisted unchanged

across later cohorts. Claims about sustainability should accordingly be read as evidence of potential rather than proof of long-term institutional consolidation.

However, this limitation does not undermine the core research questions. RQ1–RQ3 focus on how contradictions were identified, how transformative agency was expressed, and how student-led innovations reshaped curriculum practices within the interventions. These processes were fully observable within semester-length cycles and were documented through multiple data sources.

While several elements developed through the interventions have since been embedded in the course textbook I edited and contributed to that we have been trialling for the past year (Brown, Reid, Sim, & Williams, 2026), this is treated as contextual background rather than empirical evidence, as it lies outside the formal dataset.

7.4.2 Single-nationality cohort and the role of Japanese in collaborative work

All participants in this study were Japanese students educated within a Confucian Heritage Culture context. This was a deliberate design choice. I wanted to examine CHC learner agency in depth without the added complexity of intercultural group dynamics. As a result, the study offers a fine-grained account of agency development in a CHC-majority EMI setting, but it does not claim direct transferability to more culturally diverse classrooms.

Students also made strategic use of Japanese during breakout-room work, particularly in Intervention B. This was not something I set out to study, but it became clear during analysis that Japanese was used primarily to speed up task-focused negotiation rather than for social interaction. In practice, this translanguaging appeared to support rapid articulation of contradictions and collaborative decision-making.

This context matters. In multilingual EMI settings where no shared L1 exists, interactional dynamics may differ substantially. I do not claim that L1 use was necessary for agency to emerge, but readers should be cautious when extrapolating the *interactional* features of this study to other contexts. The contribution lies in the design

principles and mediational processes, not in the specific language choices available to this cohort.

7.4.3 Researcher positionality and the dual teacher–facilitator role

Throughout the study, I occupied a dual role as classroom teacher, course coordinator, and Change Laboratory facilitator. This positioning was intrinsic to the CL methodology, which assumes researcher participation as an insider rather than a neutral observer. I was conscious of this from the outset and maintained reflexive notes to track how my role shaped classroom interaction and design decisions.

My insider status likely fostered trust and may have made students more willing to articulate critique than they would have been with an external facilitator. At the same time, my institutional authority may have influenced what students perceived as feasible or legitimate, particularly in relation to assessment reform.

I do not see this as a contradiction in the study. One of the central findings is that transformative agency emerged within institutional constraints rather than in opposition to them. However, readers should interpret the findings as illustrating how agency can develop in teacher-embedded CL contexts. Future studies using external facilitators or cross-institutional teams would help to clarify how far these dynamics depend on the relational features of this specific setting.

7.4.4 Assessment-driven context and structure-seeking tendencies of CHC learners

The study took place within an intensive, assessment-driven EAP course where grades and progression were highly salient for students. Combined with CHC learners' well-documented preferences for clarity, predictability, and fairness, this context likely shaped the form of student-led innovations observed.

This was not an unexpected limitation, nor does it undermine the findings. Students' repeated efforts to tighten instructions, clarify roles, and formalise rubrics reflect both cultural learning values and institutional assessment pressures. Rather than viewing this

as a constraint on agency, I argue in Contribution 6 that structure functioned as a cultural and cognitive scaffold for agency in this context.

That said, readers should be cautious about assuming that similar forms of structured innovation would emerge in less assessment-sensitive environments. The study demonstrates how agency was enabled *here*, not how it must always be enabled.

7.4.5 Limited tracking of institution-wide uptake

Although two additional faculty members trialled elements of the student-designed toolkit, I did not systematically investigate programme-level adoption or longer-term institutional change. This reflects the focus of the study: learner agency rather than organisational reform.

As a result, I cannot make claims about institution-wide transformation. References to wider uptake are included to indicate credibility and feasibility, not to suggest systemic change. Readers should therefore interpret this study as documenting how students reshaped curriculum practices within a bounded setting, rather than as an evaluation of institutional change processes.

7.4.6 Boundaries of the dataset

The dataset includes CL workshops, classroom enactments, student-created artefacts, and a final focus group for each cohort. This provides a rich account of agency within the academic reading course, but it does not follow students into later EMI courses or examine whether their design practices transferred beyond EAP reading.

This limits the claims I can make about long-term developmental trajectories or cross-domain transfer. However, it does not restrict my ability to address the research questions, which are explicitly situated within the academic reading activity system. Future research tracking students across courses would be well placed to explore how the forms of agency documented here travel beyond the original context.

7.5 Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest several directions for future research that build directly on its contributions rather than opening entirely new lines of inquiry. The suggestions below extend the forms of transformative agency, curriculum redesign, and cross-cohort development documented across the two Change Laboratory interventions.

First, future research could examine the durability of student-generated curriculum tools across multiple cohorts. This study showed that learner-designed artefacts—such as seminar sheets, source guides, and assessment rubrics—can support snowballing collective transformation across two cohorts. Longer-term studies could trace how such tools are maintained, adapted, or abandoned over three or more cohorts, helping to clarify when learner agency becomes institutionalised and when it fades. This would extend Contribution 2 by specifying the conditions under which curriculum historicity is sustained in semester-based programmes.

Second, comparative studies could explore tool-mediated agency in culturally mixed or multilingual EMI settings. The present study focused on a CHC cohort to examine culturally situated agency in depth. Future research could investigate whether similar patterns of structured co-design, contradiction-based redesign, and preference for clarity emerge in more diverse classrooms, or whether different cultural configurations produce alternative trajectories of agency. This would allow further testing of the claims advanced in Contributions 1 and 6.

Third, further work could examine the role of language choice and translanguaging in design-oriented agency. In this study, students' use of Japanese during collaborative redesign appeared to support rapid articulation of contradictions and collective decision-making. Future research might explore how such processes operate where no shared L1 exists, or where institutional EMI policies restrict L1 use. This would extend Contribution 4 by examining how contradictions become actionable under different linguistic conditions.

Fourth, there is scope to investigate assessment redesign as a site of learner agency beyond EAP contexts. Contribution 5 showed that students could negotiate assessment criteria when tensions between effort, fairness, and outcomes were made visible. Future studies could explore whether similar processes occur in discipline-specific EMI

courses, where assessment stakes and epistemic norms differ, and whether participatory assessment cultures can be sustained in such settings.

Fifth, future research could examine how different facilitator roles shape design-oriented agency in Change Laboratory–informed pedagogies. As noted in the limitations, my dual role as teacher and CL facilitator likely influenced how agency was expressed. Comparative studies involving external facilitators, co-facilitation models, or student-led design sessions could clarify how authority configurations affect students’ willingness to critique, redesign, and commit to change.

Finally, this study points to the need for research on the transfer of design-oriented agency beyond the original activity system. While this thesis documents agency within academic reading, it does not track whether students later applied similar design logics in other courses. Longitudinal research following students across programmes could examine whether participation in curriculum co-design supports broader capacities for institutional critique, collaborative problem-solving, or pedagogical innovation.

7.6 Concluding remarks

This thesis examined how Confucian-Heritage Culture (CHC) learners in a Japanese English-medium university expressed transformative agency when invited to analyse and redesign elements of their academic reading curriculum. The study shifts attention away from whether students were sufficiently “active” within existing pedagogical structures and toward how they acted *on* those structures through collective critique, tool redesign, and negotiated change.

The central finding is that CHC learner agency is not best understood as individual assertiveness or verbal participation. Instead, agency emerged as a developmental, collective process grounded in work on shared tools, rules, and routines. Students identified contradictions within practices they already inhabited and addressed them through culturally legitimate design activity. This matters because it challenges deficit interpretations of silence, caution, or preference for structure that continue to shape EMI and EAP pedagogy.

A second key contribution concerns time and sustainability. The study shows that transformative agency need not be confined to a single cohort. Learner-generated tools

and articulated contradictions altered the conditions of participation for subsequent students, allowing agency to accumulate across semesters. This directly addresses concerns that short, assessment-driven programmes cannot support meaningful learner agency and suggests that continuity can be carried by curriculum artefacts rather than by stable participant groups.

Assessment emerged as a particularly significant site of transformation. When contradictions between effort, fairness, and outcomes became visible, students did not comply or disengage; they negotiated. Their redesign of assessment criteria demonstrates that CHC learners can engage critically with evaluative norms when negotiation is structured and legitimate. This matters because assessment is often treated as a fixed constraint on agency rather than as a potential object of collective redesign.

Across the study, structure consistently enabled rather than restricted agency. Clear roles, explicit criteria, and predictable routines reduced interpersonal risk and made participation in critique and redesign feasible. This finding complicates assumptions that agency requires loosened control or open-ended autonomy. In this context, agency was enacted *through* structure, not in opposition to it.

Although the empirical focus was an EAP reading course, the implications extend to EMI more broadly. The Change Laboratory methodology highlighted the potential for students to act as analysts and designers of their learning environments when contradictions are surfaced and tools become shared objects of inquiry. The significance of this lies not in evaluating the methodology itself, but in demonstrating a practicable way of cultivating agency without requiring cultural assimilation or abandoning harmony-oriented norms.

The wider implication of this thesis is therefore straightforward: the question is not whether CHC learners are capable of agency, but whether educational systems recognise and support the forms of agency they are positioned to enact. When learners are invited to work on the mediational means of learning, agency becomes a collective practice through which curriculum, participation, and assessment can be transformed in durable ways.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Research Instruments

- Learning Disposition Survey (pre-intervention)

Learning Disposition Questionnaire

- (1) Nationality
- (2) Culture you identify with most
- (3) Please explain why you chose this answer.

- (4) In which country did you go to school?

If the answer is *Japan*, skip to Question 6.

(4.1) Elementary school

(4.2) Middle school

(4.3) High school

- (5) What was the main language of instruction at your school?

- (6) What kind of schools did you attend?

A: Public B: Private C: International D: Mixed

Have you spent time studying abroad?

If yes, where and for how long?

Before answering the next questions, please read the definitions below:

Passive learning is teacher-centred. Students listen to the teacher and follow instructions without questioning or sharing ideas. Passive learners prefer to quietly absorb information and may not interact with classmates or the teacher.

Active learning is student-centred. Students participate actively by discussing, asking questions, and engaging in tasks. Active learners enjoy interaction and dialogue.

- (7) What kind of learning did you experience in elementary school?

A: Mostly passive learning

B: A mix of passive and active learning

C: Mostly active learning

Please explain your answer.

(8) What kind of learning did you experience in middle school?

A: Mostly passive learning

B: A mix of passive and active learning

C: Mostly active learning

Please explain your answer.

(9) What kind of learning did you experience in high school?

A: Mostly passive learning

B: A mix of passive and active learning

C: Mostly active learning

Please explain your answer.

(10) What kind of learner do you think you are?

A: Passive learner

B: Mostly passive

C: Both passive and active

D: Mostly active

Please explain your answer.

(11) When is it appropriate to share ideas and ask questions in class?

A: Usually not appropriate

B: Only for controversial or difficult points

C: Often appropriate

D: Always appropriate

(12) Did the Senpai–Kohai relationship influence your behaviour at school or university?

(13) If you are not from Japanese culture, what do you think of the Senpai–Kohai concept?

(14) What do you think of the phrase “Never disagree with a senior person in a group setting such as a meeting”?

Do you agree? Please explain.

(15) At school, did you feel comfortable asking questions *one-to-one* in your native language?

How about at AIU?

Please explain your answer.

(16) Did you feel comfortable asking questions *in front of the class* in your native language?

How about at AIU?

Please explain your answer.

(17) If you don't know the answer to something in class, what do you do?

A: Wait until after class and research or ask friends

B: Wait until after class and ask the teacher

C: Ask during class

Please explain your answer.

(18) If you think the teacher made a mistake in class, what would you do?

A: Do nothing

B: Ask after class

C: Politely ask in class

D: Say in class that you think a mistake was made

Please explain your answer.

(19) Do concepts such as *kao* (face), *menboku*, and *taimen* help explain why some students avoid asking questions in class?

Please explain your answer.

(20) If you disagree with the teacher's opinion, what would you do?

A: Say nothing

- B: Ask after class
- C: Ask during class
- D: Politely explain your disagreement during class

Please explain your answer.

(21) The proverb “Deru kugi wa utareru” (“The nail that sticks up gets hammered down”) is said to pressure people to conform.

Do you think this reflects Japanese society today?

- A: Yes, strong pressure to conform
- B: Yes, but less than before
- C: No
- D: No, individuality is easily expressed

Please explain your answer.

(22) What is the main reason you chose to study at AIU?

- A: To get a good job after graduating
- B: To get a good education and a good job
- C: To improve language and communication skills
- D: To interact with people from around the world

Please explain your answer.

Appendix B

Focus Group Themes Mapped to Research Questions and Analytical Constructs

| Focus Group Theme | Intervention A Focus Group (2019) | Intervention B Focus Group (2020) | Primary Research Question(s) Addressed | Analytical Focus |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| Preparation and participation | Reflection on annotation protocols, Bloom-guided questions, and vocabulary checks | Reflection on written summaries, advance annotation, and seminar preparedness | RQ1: How do CHC students' participation practices change when they co-design learning routines? | Transformation of participation norms; Subject–Object relations |
| Seminar / workshop design | Evaluation of redesigned Student-Led Seminars and use of student-selected readings | Evaluation of Student-Led Workshops as multimodal, peer-led learning events | RQ2: How do students exercise agency in redesigning pedagogical tools? | Mediating artefacts (tools); dialogic vs multimodal mediation |
| Assessment and fairness | Reflection on unseen-text exams and rubric clarity | Reflection on Effort, Creativity, and hybrid group–individual assessment | RQ3: How do student-generated practices reshape assessment norms? | Rules–Outcome contradictions; fairness and visibility of effort |
| Creativity and workload | Limited discussion (emerging concern) | Explicit evaluation of creativity vs preparation time in SLWs | RQ3 | Tools–Object contradictions; feasibility vs innovation |
| Confidence, voice, and classroom culture | Comparison with high-school learning; shifts in perceived authority | Reflection on confidence, silence, and shared ownership of the class | RQ1 & RQ2 | Transformative agency; identity and role reconfiguration |
| Future orientation / consolidation | Recommendations for embedding tools for the next cohort | Endorsement of practices and conditions for sustainability | RQ3 | Consolidation phase of expansive learning |

Appendix C.1 Coding Tree

Level 1: Activity System Components

- **Rules**
 - Harmony norms
 - Politeness norms
 - Assessment expectations
 - Participation expectations
- **Tools / Mediating Artefacts**
 - Textbook activities
 - Annotation templates
 - Peer-feedback checklists
 - SLS/SLW procedures
 - Rubrics and criteria
 - Presentation tools (slides, videos)
- **Community**
 - Class cohort
 - Small-group partners
 - Teacher–student relationships
- **Division of Labour**
 - Teacher-led vs. student-led routines
 - Group roles (leader, facilitator, summariser)
 - Individual vs. shared responsibility
- **Object / Outcome**
 - Understanding readings
 - Dialogic participation
 - Collaborative meaning-making
 - Academic autonomy
 - Creative–academic integration

Level 2: Cross-Cutting Contradictions (Semantic Codes)

- **Harmony ↔ Expression**
- **Authority ↔ Autonomy**
- **Safety ↔ Risk**
- **Fairness ↔ Flexibility**
- **Academic ↔ Authentic**
- **Reproduction ↔ Dialogue**
- **Over-Preparation ↔ Interaction**
- **Creativity ↔ Academic Rigor**

Level 3: Transformative Agency (Haapasaari et al., 2014)

- **A1 Resisting** – rejecting current practices
- **A2 Criticising** – pointing out problems
- **A3 Explicating** – identifying underlying causes
- **A4 Envisioning** – proposing alternatives
- **A5 Committing to Change** – volunteering solutions
- **A6 Taking Action** – implementing new practices
- **A7 Consolidating** – stabilising new routines

Appendix C.2 Sample Anonymised Coded Extracts

A small selection is provided here (3 extracts per intervention) to demonstrate analytic transparency. Full transcripts are securely archived.

C.2.1 Excerpts from Intervention A (2019, In-Person)

| Student Excerpt | Codes Applied | Analytic Note |
|---|--|--|
| “Maybe we just accept the textbook too easily and miss new ideas.” (Daiki) | <i>Authority ↔ Autonomy;</i> <i>Reproduction ↔</i> <i>Dialogue; A2 Criticising</i> | Identifies passive reception as a structural habit; early critique of monologic tools. |
| “It’s scary to say something negative, but the checklist helps me sound polite.” (Sora) | <i>Harmony ↔ Expression;</i> <i>Safety ↔ Risk; A3</i> <i>Explicating → A5</i> <i>Committing</i> | Shows awareness of cultural constraints and willingness to use mediating tools to overcome them. |
| “Outside readings feel adult. I think it makes the discussion more real.” (Yuna) | <i>Academic ↔ Authentic;</i> <i>A3 Explicating; A5</i> <i>Committing</i> | Demonstrates emerging academic identity linked to authentic texts. |

C.2.2 Excerpts from Intervention B (2020, Online)

| Student Excerpt | Codes Applied | Analytic Note |
|--|---|---|
| “We study alone too much — maybe that’s why we can’t build ideas together.” (Tomoki) | <i>Passive Role Identity;</i> <i>Community–Subject</i> <i>tension; A3 Explicating</i> | Reveals systemic pattern of individualised study limiting collective construction of meaning. |
| “The SLW is not only showing—it’s teaching and discussing.” (Koji) | <i>Creativity ↔ Academic</i> <i>Rigor; A4 Envisioning</i> <i>→ A6 Taking Action</i> | Reframes multimodal work from performance to academic facilitation; demonstrates expanded agency. |
| “Now I understand how the tools make us think differently.” (Rie) | <i>Tool–Object alignment;</i> <i>Consolidating (A7)</i> | Reflective awareness of the mediational role of tools; evidence of consolidation phase. |

Appendix D – Sample Transcripts / Excerpts

The following excerpts illustrate the transcription conventions, coding practices, and analytic procedures used in the study. They are anonymised and selective rather than comprehensive. Full transcripts and artefacts are securely archived and available upon request.

D.1 Sample Transcript: Intervention A – Session 2 (Peer Feedback Workshop)

Context: Students were testing the first version of the peer-feedback checklist. The teacher acted only as facilitator.

| Line | Transcript (Anonymised) | Analytic Notes / Codes |
|------|---|---|
| 1 | Sora: “It’s difficult to say negative things... I don’t want to sound rude.” | Harmony ↔ Expression; A2 Criticising |
| 2 | Teacher: “What would help make it easier?” | Facilitative prompt |
| 3 | Aoi: “Maybe we can start with something positive first.” | A4 Envisioning |
| 4 | Daiki: “Like: ‘I liked how you... but maybe you could...’ Something polite.” | Tool-building; A5 Committing |
| 5 | Yuna: “If we have example sentences, we can give advice safely.” | Safety ↔ Risk; A3 Explicating |
| 6 | Haruto: “Let’s add a line to our checklist.” | Taking Action (A6) |

Commentary:

This segment shows a clear move from discomfort (Lines 1–2) to *envisioning* and *committing* to new communicative tools (Lines 3–6). Students collectively designed the first set of positive/critical stems.

D.2 Sample Transcript: Intervention A – Session 4 (Authentic Readings Discussion)

| Line | Transcript (Anonymised) | Analytic Notes / Codes |
|-------------|--|---|
| 1 | Daiki: “Textbook articles are too simple. Real articles feel more... meaningful.” | Academic ↔ Authentic; A2 Criticising |
| 2 | Aoi: “But choosing is scary. What if I choose something too hard?” | Safety ↔ Risk; A3 Explicating |
| 3 | Yuna: “If we choose together, it’s less pressure.” | Community; A4 Envisioning |
| 4 | Takumi: “Maybe teacher checks the level but we decide the topic.” | Authority ↔ Autonomy; A5 Committing |
| 5 | Sora: “That feels fair.” | Fairness ↔ Flexibility |

Commentary:

Students co-constructed a shared model of autonomy supported by teacher guidance, resolving fear of difficulty through collaborative selection.

D.3 Sample Transcript: Intervention B – Session 1 (Digital SLS Redesign)

| Line | Transcript (Anonymised) | Analytic Notes / Codes |
|------|--|--|
| 1 | Tomoki: “We study alone too much—maybe that’s why we don’t build ideas together.” | Passive Role Identity; A3 Explicating |
| 2 | Megumi: “If we write questions and show them first, discussion is easier.” | A4 Envisioning |
| 3 | Toshiyuki: “Leaders can make slides, others write summaries. Balanced.” | Division of Labour; A6 Taking Action |
| 4 | Koji: “We always wait for the teacher. Maybe we don’t need to.” | Authority ↔ Autonomy; A2 Criticising |
| 5 | Yuka: “If everyone prepares one short summary, it’s fair.” | Fairness ↔ Flexibility; A5 Committing |

Commentary:

Dialogue shows rapid movement toward self-directed redesign, with students shifting from critique to action within minutes.

D.4 Sample Transcript: Intervention B – Session 3 (SLW Prototype Testing)

| Line | Transcript (Anonymised) | Analytic Notes / Codes |
|------|--|--|
| 1 | Koji: “SLW is not just showing a video—it’s teaching and discussing.” | Creativity ↔ Academic Rigor; A3 Explicating |
| 2 | Rie: “We need sources. Not only creative parts.” | Academic Content; A4 Envisioning |
| 3 | Yuka: “Our idea was fun, but maybe not academic enough.” | Safety ↔ Risk; A2 Criticising |
| 4 | Tomoki: “Let’s add one reading and two questions.” | A6 Taking Action |
| 5 | Group: “Yes, that makes it more balanced.” | Consolidating (A7) |

Commentary:

Students developed criteria for balancing creativity with scholarly content, which later became part of the SLW rubric.

D.5 Transcription Conventions Used

- **Bold:** speaker names
- [...] omitted text
- All student names are **pseudonyms**

D.6 Summary

These extracts demonstrate:

- how contradictions surfaced in real dialogue,
- how agency types (criticising, envisioning, committing, taking action) were identified,
- and how analytic memos link student statements to CHAT constructs.

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