Chapter 8: Applying the constructivist research design

This research was inspired by Guba and Lincoln’s (1985) conception of Naturalistic Inquiry and Charmaz’s (2006) constructivist conception of Grounded Theory. The rationale for the various research design decisions was indicated in the previous chapter. This chapter describes the research conducted in more detail and indicates any variance from the overall research strategy. On this basis, this chapter describes a four phase research design to gather and analyse information related to undergraduates, and a two phase research design to gather and analyse information related to academics. In addition, this chapter provides details of the ethical procedures followed, the parallel collaborative research study and additional information collected from my teaching.

8.1 Ethics

My school implements the University's research ethics review procedure which applies to all research carried out by staff or students involving 'human participants'. This consists of completing an ethics application form and, for research which is classified as 'low risk', participant consent forms and information sheets (see Appendices). In addition to administrative details, the application form briefly summarised the study’s aims, objectives and methodology, and then identified any “potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to participants”. I said that the participants in this research would suffer no physical harm, but recognised that the research conversations and focus groups had the potential for 'psychological harm'. Hence I stressed that “the aim of the interviews and focus groups [was] to listen to participants without judgement or assessment”. I also recognised the potential for students’ comments to influence my views of their academic abilities. Hence it was necessary to emphasise on the application form and participant information sheets that any comments made would not affect their academic grades. In addition, I recognised that focus group participants might disclose to third parties what was said during the focus groups. Hence, it was also necessary to state on the application form and participant information sheets that “participants will be asked to respect the confidentiality of all comments made by others”. The ethics application form also required various other statements to be made regarding the confidentiality of any data collected, how the data would not identify individuals and how any
associated documents and audio files would be stored in a secure place. All
documentation was reviewed by the research student’s supervisor and two
academics not related to the research. This was approved on 17th August 2008.

Since conducting the research, other ethical issues arose that were not anticipated
when the ethics application form was submitted. These primarily relate to the
anonymity of the participants. Firstly, the use of codes to hide the identity of
individuals was deemed insufficient. It became apparent that the text that described
the analysis of the information collected could indirectly identify individuals. For
example, by a process of elimination, an individual could be identified or, when
directly quoting what participant said, they might indirectly refer to an individual or
group. This necessitated either removing some direct quotes or deliberately making
the surrounding narrative more abstract. Secondly, Dr. Andrew Cox wanted to be
identified in any documentation related to the outcomes of this study. To
accommodate his wishes and to maintain consistency in presentation, he agreed
that I could simply identify him here as Academic 03.

8.2 Academics

In line with the research design, research conversations were considered the most
effective method to explore the research questions related to the academics in my
school. A three phase research design was originally proposed. The first phase
consisted of research conversations with all academics that taught undergraduates
and, for pragmatic reasons, were available between September and November
2008. These research conversations were intended to provide a diversity of views
and understandings that would be pursued in a second phase of research
conversations with specific academics, whose views and understandings needed
further exploration. A final third member checking phase was also proposed. In total
17 of 19 potential academics were involved in this research, the remaining two being
on study leave. All research conversations took place in the academic’s own office,
although the research conversation with Academic 06 took place at the academic’s
home due to their time constraints. After, reassuring each academic about
confidentiality and anonymity, and asking them to sign an ethical consent form, the
following statement was read out:
I am researching academics’ and students’ perceptions of what it means to be literate in the so called Digital Age. During this interview I am interested in your experiences, perception and pedagogies for being, what might be termed, ‘Internet literate’. By Internet, I actually mean computer applications (maybe on a PC, but could be on a mobile phone or PDA) that access other computer applications (usually on a server), frequently in different parts of the world, via networks using a agreed protocol (TCP-IP)

This was followed by questions adapted from the following list. That is, the list represents a set of potential prompts as opposed to survey interview or semi-structured interview schedule. As with the student focus groups and research conversations, the prompts consisted of a principal question followed by a subsidiary question (see Doyle, 2004b). It was reiterated throughout the research conversation that the primary focus of this research was undergraduates within my school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal question</th>
<th>Subsidiary question</th>
<th>Main research question addressed in 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. If the Internet disappeared tomorrow, would you miss it? What would you miss?</td>
<td>To what extent do you feel you will be using the Internet in the future?</td>
<td>RQ7-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How might you describe someone who is ‘Internet literate’?</td>
<td>Would you describe an ‘Internet literate’ student differently? What would be your perception of an Internet literate university? How would you describe a good or effective Internet user … someone who was Internet literate? What skills or understandings do you think people need be Internet literate?</td>
<td>RQ11-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Describe a task where you feel you are being ‘Internet literate’?</td>
<td>What do you feel is the most difficult aspect of using the Internet or its related technologies?</td>
<td>RQ8-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How ‘Internet literate’ would you consider yourself? Please explain?</td>
<td>Do you feel you now have all the Internet skills and understanding you need?</td>
<td>RQ8-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What do you think students use the Internet, and its related technologies, for?</td>
<td>How might students’ use of the Internet differ than your own?</td>
<td>RQ9-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How ‘Internet literate’ do you feel our students need to be?</td>
<td>What level of Internet skills and understanding do students need to successfully accomplish your module’s learning outcomes?</td>
<td>RQ10-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Whose role do you feel it is to facilitate Internet literate students? Why?</td>
<td>What do you feel is your role in facilitating Internet literate students? What do you feel is your contribution to facilitating Internet literate students?</td>
<td>RQ11-2008 RQ12-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Please tell me about anything that we have not covered during the interview and that you feel might be relevant to this research?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8.1 Academics’ research conversation prompts**

During the research conversations with academics, the term ‘Internet literate’ was used in a utilitarian way, like everyday uses of the terms ‘computer literate’, ‘number literate’ and ‘financially literate’ to mean someone who has a nominal level of computing, arithmetic and financial skills respectively. However, as information literacy is a key concept within my school, the terms ‘Internet literate’ and ‘Internet literacy’ have the potential to mean much more than a ‘nominal level of Internet skills’. As more academic research conversations were conducted, the conversations became increasingly less focused on the original list of questions to the point where I only asked the first question and directed the remainder of the
conversation at saturating the conceptual categories being developed. The latter first phase research conversations produced little new information to add richness to the core categories developed. Hence, the second research conversation phase was felt less necessary and, given the limited time available, was suspended.

All research conversations with academics were digitally sound recorded, transcribed shortly afterwards and analysed three times with the logistical support of NVivo9 software. The Appendices shows a screenshot of one analysis. Each analysis focussed on different aspects of the academics research conversations: content, for example, different ways in which academics conceived the Internet; processes, for example, different ways in which academics grappled with notions of literacy; and definitions, for example, how their Internet literacy-related definitions related to Bloom’s Taxonomy. As with the student coding, I used hermeneutic-dialectic (Section 7.5.4) techniques to analyse the information gathered, and undertook systematic constant comparison (Section 7.5.6). In addition, theoretical memo writing was undertaken throughout the analysis, with the final memos forming the academics analysis and discussion chapters of this thesis. Finally, the academics involved were e-mailed a copy of the analysis on 7th July 2010:

Dear X,

Back in November 2008 you kindly agreed to be interviewed for my PhD research. After two years and several writing iterations I have finally drafted the associated analysis chapter (see attached). Please would you look through to ensure I have not misrepresented your views? I will endeavour to correct any errors or misunderstandings.

Please note that you are interviewee X.

Thank you

Peter

As with the student member check phase, only four academics replied (Academics 08, 14, 16 and 18) saying that I had adequately represented their views. Academic 13 chose to place the transcript in my office tray, commenting on some typographical errors. There were no opportunities to enter into a dialogue. Again, the
delay of around 20 months between conducting the research conversations may have been a contributing factor.

8.3 Undergraduates

Guba and Lincoln (1989b) propose a two phase research design consisting of information gathering that is more exploratory and about exploring “What’s going on here?”, followed by a second phase where the various views and perspectives identified during the first phase are explored in more depth, “confronted, compared, and contrasted” (Guba and Lincoln, 2001). Whilst my previous interactions with students provided a sound basis for an in-depth investigation of their academic-related Internet literacies, my understanding of students’ non-academic Internet literacies was scant. Hence, Guba and Lincoln’s (1989b) two phase research design was initially adopted along with a third, member checking phase. In addition, after further consideration of the research context in 2011 (see RQ4-2011) a fourth phase was introduced to explore the extent to which undergraduates’ views and understandings had evolved since the initial two phases.

8.3.1 Exploratory phase

As aspects of the research purpose and aims relate to the transition between the students’ previous education and their new university degree, the Level 1 undergraduate information collection began soon after the students had begun their degree studies (September and October 2008). Arguably, their recollections of their previous education would be ‘fresher’ and the impact of their current university education would less affect their views and understandings. Given the exploratory nature of this phase of the research, and the need to conduct information collection within a short time span, focus groups were chosen as opposed to one-to-one research conversations or other information gathering methods (for example, observation). Arguably, focus groups would provide more diverse views (see Morgan, 1996; Barbour and Kitzinger, 1998; Glitz, 1998) and be a more effective method at this exploratory phase of the research.

All 24 undergraduates were invited to take part in one of four focus groups. It was emphasised that attendance was entirely voluntary and independent from their degree studies. Regardless, 20 students took part in one of four focus groups. The objective was to produce a provisional list of questions or prompts for use in the second phase. The number of students attending each focus group ranged from 3 to
7. After introducing the purpose of the focus group, giving reassurances about confidentiality and anonymity, and signing ethical consent forms, four key areas were explored. My role during the focus groups was to facilitate a research conversation by asking relevant and empathetic questions that encouraged the students to express their views and understandings in relation to the project's research questions (see Barbour and Kitzinger, 1998). A list of focus group prompts was used during each focus group based on the research questions and the Survey of Technology Use conducted with the previous cohort of undergraduates (Cox et al., 2008). The prompts follow Doyle's (2004b) recommendation that there should be a principal question followed by a subsidiary question. The subsidiary questions were only used when I felt the group had not thoroughly explored their views. The focus groups were digitally sound recorded and transcribed shortly afterwards. The following table contains the principal and subsidiary focus group questions and the research questions each principal question addresses. Where possible, the principal and subsidiary questions were adapted and woven into the focus group conversations as opposed to being asked in a survey-like manner.
One of the main purposes of the focus groups was to explore students' understanding of being Internet literate at the very beginning of their studies. Unlike the information gathering conducted with academics where it was assumed they had an understanding of the terms 'literacy' and 'information literacy', no equivalent assumption was made about undergraduates’ understandings of these terms. Hence, to explore students’ perceptions of being Internet literate it was necessary to
ask indirect questions related to how they had gained their Internet skills and understandings, what makes a good or effective Internet user and their view of their own Internet-related abilities. It was anticipated that from the answers to these questions, students’ perceptions of being Internet literate could be inferred.

The transcripts from the four focus groups were analysed using Grounded Theory techniques and the logistical (as opposed to conceptual) support of NVivo9 software. I endeavoured to use constant comparison (Section 7.5.6) and hermeneutic-dialectic (Section 7.5.4) techniques at all stages to ensure the codes developed were grounded in the information gathered. Coding was done at a themeby-theme level necessitating coding either phrases or sentences. After several iterations of open and focused coding, a set of tentative codes were produced consisting of 9 principal categories (for example, ‘conceptions of Internet’, ‘origins of Internet skills’, ‘perception of being Internet literate’) which were divided into 2 to 5 sub-categories (for example, the affective category was divided into ‘confident in own Internet abilities’, ‘lack of motivation to learn more’, ‘social pressure to use Internet’), which were in turn divided into further sub-categories. Whilst this first attempt produced valuable content categories, I felt that the categories failed to entirely capture undergraduates’ underlying motivations and feelings, and ultimately failed to entirely produce categories relevant to the research aims. According to Charmaz, “adopting gerunds fosters theoretical sensitivity because these words nudge us out of static topics and into enacted processes” (Charmaz, 2006). Hence, after the first attempt at coding, the focus group transcripts were reanalysed using gerunds revealing valuable new insights previously obscured by predominantly using categories composed of predominantly nouns and adjectives. These included: ‘sufficing’; ‘devaluing previous ICT education’; and ‘distinguishing between parents’ and students’ ICT comfort levels’ (see Table 8.3).

8.3.2 First developmental phase

During the second phase of student-related information gathering, all 24 BSc Information Management students were invited to one-to-one meeting related to the focus group just conducted. With the exception of one student who failed to respond to numerous e-mail requests, 23 meetings took place between April and May 2009. Research conversations were felt to be the most effective method of

31 This was done via e-mail, but all related e-mails have been deleted
eliciting the diversity of students’ views and ensuring students felt comfortable being critical of the views of the other students. The latter was felt important since, during the previous focus groups, students tended only to support each others’ statements rather than be critical. It was as if the students wanted to maintain group harmony. After reassuring the students about confidentiality and anonymity of the information gathered, and signing ethical consent forms, I read out a statement based on one of the focus group principal coding categories, followed by questions that prompted the student to judge the extent they felt the statement applied to them. The following table contains the statements read out, the question prompts, the research question addressed and the principal focus group coding category that the statement was derived from. As with the focus groups, the questions asked were adapted according to what had been said previously, and woven into the conversations as opposed to being asked in a survey-like manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Main research questions addressed</th>
<th>Principal focus group coding category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. During the previous focus groups, several students said that using the Internet was natural or implied it was almost instinctive.</td>
<td>To what extent do you feel using the Internet is natural or instinctive? Why do you feel this?</td>
<td>RQ3-2008</td>
<td>‘Naturally using and acquiring Internet skills’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Several students gave the impression that they were confident using the Internet and its applications.</td>
<td>To what extent do you feel confident using the Internet? Why do you feel this?</td>
<td>RQ3-2008, RQ4-2008</td>
<td>‘Being confident in own Internet skills and understandings’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Regarding the using the Internet and its applications, several students gave the impression that they learnt as much as they needed to.</td>
<td>To what extent would you agree? Why?</td>
<td>RQ2-2008, RQ3-2008, RQ4-2008</td>
<td>‘Sufficing (satisficing)’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. During the focus groups, some students viewed their previous ICT education favourably, whilst others viewed it unfavourably.</td>
<td>What is your view? Can you cite any evidence?</td>
<td>RQ5-2008, RQ6-2008</td>
<td>‘[De]valuing previous ICT education’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Several students spoke about “picking-up” their Internet skills (maybe by trial and error, advice from others, online tutorials etc.)</td>
<td>To what extent have you ‘picked-up’ your Internet skills? Why do you feel this? What does ‘pick-up’ mean to you?</td>
<td>RQ3-2008, RQ6-2008</td>
<td>‘Picking it up (ICT skills)’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.3 Undergraduate research conversation prompts (Continued next page)
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<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. When faced with a problem using the Internet or its applications, some students seemed to greatly value the opinion of others.</td>
<td>To what extent would you seek and trust someone’s opinions?</td>
<td>RQ5-2008 RQ6-2008</td>
<td>‘Trusting the views of others’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. During the previous focus groups several students had strong views about what was good Internet practice and almost looked down upon those that had other views.</td>
<td>To what extent do you feel your views are right?</td>
<td>RQ3-2008 RQ4-2008</td>
<td>‘Doing the right thing’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. During the previous focus groups some students pointed out that their parents were not as skilful as them at using the Internet.</td>
<td>To what extent do you feel a person’s age and their ability to use ICT are related? Why do you feel this?</td>
<td>RQ3-2008</td>
<td>‘Distinguishing between parents' and students’ ICT comfort levels’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. During the previous focus groups several students said they depended on the Internet “for everything”.</td>
<td>To what extent do you depend upon the Internet? Why do you feel this?</td>
<td>RQ1-2008 RQ2-2008</td>
<td>‘Depending upon the Internet’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. During the previous focus groups, several students felt pressure to use the Internet. For example, use ‘Facebook’ because everyone else was using it.</td>
<td>To what extent do you feel pressurised to use the Internet and its applications? Why do you feel this?</td>
<td>RQ1-2008 RQ2-2008</td>
<td>‘Feeling pressurised (or not) to conform’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. During the previous focus groups it became apparent that some students were very selective about what they used the Internet for.</td>
<td>To what extent are you selective about what you use the Internet for?</td>
<td>RQ1-2008 RQ2-2008</td>
<td>‘Discerning use of Internet’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please tell me about anything that we have not covered during the interview and that you feel might be relevant to this research?

Table 8.3 Undergraduate research conversation prompts (Continued)

To elicit a further understanding of their perceptions, additional tailored questions were woven into the conversations at appropriate moments. For example, after exploring whether one a student felt confident using the Internet, the student was then asked “what makes you confident and someone else not confident?” This technique seemed to draw out a more vivid response than the more direct focus group-type questioning, although students may have felt more comfortable answering questions one-to-one.

As before, the meetings were digitally sound recorded, transcribed shortly afterwards and analysed with the logistical support of NVivo9 software. The Appendices shows a screenshot of one analysis. Unlike the first phase, where there was an urgency to complete the focus group analysis promptly, the use of the
constant comparison and hermeneutic-dialectic techniques was more systematic and thorough. In total 292 categories and sub-categories were produced. In addition, I undertook increasingly more theoretical memo writing throughout the analysis, with the final memos informing the student analysis and the discussion chapter of this thesis.

8.3.3 Member checking phase

The aim of the third phase was to enter into a dialogue with each undergraduate relating to how I had represented them in this thesis. The following e-mail was sent on 15th November 2010 to each undergraduate in the research cohort:

Dear X,

Back in September 2008 you kindly took part in a focus group about being Internet literate. In the May of the following year you also took part in a one-to-one interview. Amongst many other things, I have been analysing the focus group and interview transcripts. I have just completed the first draft of the associated thesis chapter (see attached). Please would you have a look and let me know if I have misrepresented you? I will endeavour to correct any errors or misunderstandings.

Please note that you took part in Focus Group X and are student X.

Thank you

Peter Stordy

Unfortunately, only Student D and Student H replied simply saying that I had adequately represented their views. There were no opportunities to enter into a dialogue. The delay of around 18 months between phases 2 and 3 may have been a contributing factor. Students might have been more inclined to respond had the analysis been presented to them soon afterwards. In addition the undergraduates may have felt pressure to complete coursework due around that time.

8.3.4 Second developmental phase

The original research design was meant to be a snapshot of Level 1 undergraduate Internet literacies at the school-university transition. However, as this research increasingly focused on the pedagogic and curriculum implications of undergraduates’ Internet literacies, research question RQ4-2011 was added to
explore the impact of the current Information Management curriculum on undergraduates’ Internet literacies. The rationale of introducing RQ4-2011 was related to increasing the impact of this research. In addition, the final review of the literature revealed no previous research had been conducted in this area. If this research was meant to inform School discussions relating to the development of undergraduates’ Internet literacies, having some understanding of how the current curriculum influences undergraduates’ Internet literacies would be at least informative, if not crucial. If the current Information Management curriculum transforms undergraduates’ Internet literacies in a direction that my school’s academics view as positive, the need for curriculum and pedagogic change is reduced. However, if the current Information Management curriculum has little impact on undergraduates’ Internet literacies, the argument for curriculum and pedagogic change is stronger. Hence, the introduction of RQ4-2011 adds a longitudinal dimension to the research.

To ensure most aspects of the undergraduates’ studies that could have an impact on their Internet literacies where considered, this phase in the research was conducted in the last few weeks of their studies. The following e-mail was sent on 4\textsuperscript{th} May 2011:

Dear X,

Do you remember helping me with my Internet literacies research at the beginning of your BSc Information Management studies? Now you are about to finish, please could I interview you again? I would really appreciate your help and you might even enjoy it! Please go to: http://www.doodle.com/kferuwf4k8hvfxp4 and select the time that’s convenient for you.

Many, many thanks

Peter

Of the original 2008 Level 1 cohort, 20 students remained at Level 3. Of these, 12 agreed to take part in the fourth phase and 11 research conversations took place in my office\textsuperscript{32}. In hindsight, the month of May was not the best time to conduct the research conversations since all Level 3 students were submitting coursework and

\textsuperscript{32} One student agreed to take part, but failed to attend the meeting
completing their dissertations. Regardless, the students who did take part in research conversations appeared relaxed and pleased to be involved in the research again. There was even much nostalgic rumination of their first few weeks in my school. After reminding students about confidentiality and anonymity of the information gathered, and signing ethical consent forms, the research conversations were structured around statements that summarised the analysis of 2008 research conversations followed by a prompt relating to the extent they felt the statement was now true. The following table summarises this structure and, in addition to RQ4-2011, other research questions addressed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement relating to the 2008 analysis</th>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Main research questions addressed$^{33}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Students described those that were better at using the Internet as being more efficient. That is, they got things done quicker.</td>
<td>Now that you are completing your studies, to what extent do you feel this is now true?</td>
<td>RQ3-2008, RQ1-2011, RQ4-2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Most students tended to view the Internet as a vast information resource or a collection of Web pages.</td>
<td>Now you are completing your studies, how do you now view the Internet?</td>
<td>RQ2-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students felt that there was a set of basic skills and understandings necessary to use the Internet, and with these basics, you could then teach yourself everything else.</td>
<td>Now you are completing your studies, to what extent do you feel this is now true?</td>
<td>RQ3-2008, RQ5-2008, RQ3-2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Most students felt they had acquired their Internet-related knowledge by teaching themselves when needs arose. Only a few students felt they had been taught Internet-related knowledge at school or college.</td>
<td>Now you are completing your studies, to what extent do you feel the University has helped you acquire more Internet-related knowledge?</td>
<td>RQ5-2008, RQ6-2008, RQ3-2011, RQ4-2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Many students gave the impression that you could do almost anything on the Internet, particularly in terms of satisfying their information needs using Google.</td>
<td>Now you are completing your studies, how do you feel now?</td>
<td>RQ1-2008, RQ2-2008, RQ2-2011, RQ4-2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.4 Level 3 Undergraduate research conversation prompts (Continued on next page)

$^{33}$ RQ6-2011 is indirectly addressed in all questions asked
6. Whilst most students gave the impression that they were highly confident using the Internet, there were several students who not so confident.  
Now you are completing your studies, how confident are you about your Internet-related skills and understandings?  
RQ4-2008  
RQ4-2011

7. In addition to appearing confident, many students gave the impression that the Internet was fully integrated into their daily lives.  
Now you are completing your studies, to what extent is the Internet now integrated into your life?  
RQ1-2008  
RQ4-2008  
RQ1-2011

8. Despite students’ confidence with the Internet and claiming it was fully integrated into their lives, their use of the Internet was restricted to a few applications or web sites.  
Now you are completing your studies, to what extent do you feel you utilise the Internet’s potential?  
RQ1-2008  
RQ2-2008  
RQ4-2008  
RQ1-2011

9. All students claimed there was a gap between the way they used the Internet and the older generation. Whilst, most felt they learnt quicker and were more experienced, there were some students who felt the older generation was better.  
Now you are completing your studies, what do you feel about the Internet-related skills and understandings of your lecturers?  
RQ3-2008  
RQ13-2008  
RQ2-2011  
RQ5-2011

10. There was an overwhelming impression that Facebook figured highly in many students’ lives with a few describing it as an addiction.  
Now you are completing your studies, to what extent do you feel this is now true?  
RQ1-2008  
RQ2-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Main research questions addressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. Whilst the previous statements refer to the views of all or most students, the following statements refer to the views of just one or a few students. They all refer to what it is to be ‘Internet literate’ … ‘good at using the Internet’. I am particularly interested in any other areas that you feel are important in describing someone who is ‘Internet literate’. Please feel free to comment any of the statements I read out.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | RQ3-2008  
RQ2-2011  
RQ4-2011 |
| a) Being able to protect your online identity (e.g. “you have got to be … Facebook literate … if you don’t want everything about you being exposed … how to block people … how to put people in lists … protecting your … identity”) | |
| b) Have the knowledge to identify an online virus and the skills to deal with it (e.g. “the ability to spot a virus and cure it”) | |
c) Know about computer shortcuts (e.g. “press Alt and F4 to quickly close”)
d) Effectively using online technical knowledge (e.g. “set up a filter to stop like Spam coming in the in-box”)
e) Able to solve any Internet problems encountered (e.g. “I feel … I could overcome … problems and I … feel I would be able to resolve them”)
f) Using a wider range of Facebook’s features (e.g. “I’m not really Facebook literate, I don’t send blogs or start anything on Facebook. I have joined a few communities on Facebook”)
g) Have an understanding of the Internet’s infrastructure (e.g. “knowing what the Internet is, and like how it is formed and how it’s like all connected”)
h) Having an understanding about how web pages are constructed (e.g. “I know how to use HTML”)
i) Know how to use a browser (e.g. “What the different parts of the screen mean, like the bar at the bottom, the status bar at the bottom and the URL bar”)
j) Being able to identify key words or phrases in an online search (e.g. “what to search for, what words and phrases to use”)
k) Knowing the best online information sources (e.g. “know where to get the information from, rather than just Googling everything”)
l) Knowing the best search engine tool to find information (e.g. “use standard tools such as advanced searches and scholar searches”)
m) Being able to evaluate the information found from an online search (e.g. “figure out which information is good or not, which information is the thing you are looking … which results to rely on, and which not”)
n) Use Boolean expressions in a search

Table 8.4 Level 3 Undergraduate research conversation prompts (Continued)

8.3.5 Issues related to the researcher-student relationship

As previously stated, the motivation for this study was a genuine desire to understand undergraduates’ Internet literacies and improve teaching within my school. However, the choice of study was also motivated the need to ensure sufficient research participants. Back in 2004 I began researching school teachers’ perceptions of being Internet literate, but due to difficulties finding sufficient participants to be interviewed, the research was abandoned. With only three years of part-time study left, it was paramount that the revised research would have an almost guaranteed source of participants. Hence, the undergraduates in my school were chosen for all the reasons stated, but also because I felt they might be more
likely take part. In hindsight, this decision related to my relative position of power. My role affords me influence over what they study, their grades achieved and ultimately, their final degree classification. I also have power to indirectly increase the financial burden of their studies by forcing them to resubmit inadequate coursework and incur a university imposed resubmission charge. My position also affords me power beyond their studies when they require a reference for a job. Hence, underlying this research are issues related to my power over students and the extent this influenced the dynamics of the research conversations, what students said or did not say, their level of openness, and what counted as legitimate conversation. Despite efforts to facilitate research conversations that were relaxed and welcomed any views being expressed, issues related to power delimits this research. Other than using a third party or becoming a covert student, in effect the approach adopted by Selwyn (2007) where he became a Facebook ‘friend’ of students and observed their interactions at a distance, power issues related to the researcher-student relationship cannot be avoided, since they are implicit all relationships. However, by being open to these issues, by citing students’ comments where possible, by writing ongoing reflective comments and by sharing research outcomes with colleagues, this study attempts to make transparent the process that led to the research outcomes and their credibility. Furthermore, acknowledgement of the reflexivity that exists in the researcher-student relationship may lead to further insights when analysing the information collected.