Part-time PhD students' learning journeys in UK universities in changing times: influences of academic, professional and personal relationships and life events

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Abstract

This narrative research explores part-time PhD students' learning journeys in UK universities in changing times. It identifies how academic, professional, and personal relationships and life events influence students' experiences regarding: doctoral learning, belonging, engagement, academic confidence, and achievement. The study considers how changing ideologies and contexts influence part-time doctoral journeys. I conducted narrative life story interviews with 15 part-time PhD students in two UK universities, six of whom I interviewed twice. Data collection also included in-depth interviews with three doctoral education directors and a self-reflective account of my own journey. 'Experiential' narrative analysis (Patterson, 2013) identified turning points and developments in participants' journeys. Cross-sectional thematic analysis also identified themes across interviews. Analysis was informed by three lenses. Bourdieu's concepts of 'capital', 'habitus', 'field', 'disposition' and 'playing the game' (1977; 1988), illuminate how part-time PhD students develop doctoral learning, academic confidence, achievement, and agency. Wenger's 'Social Learning Theory' (1998); and 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015) conceptualise how part-time PhD students develop belonging, collective 'resilience', creativity, 'competence' and 'knowledgeability' related to participating and engaging in varied 'communities of practice'. Neoliberalism helps to contextualise ways in which HE changes and discourses influence part-time PhD students' experiences. Combined experiences of unequal opportunities, overwhelming life events, and academic challenges often adversely affected part-time PhD students' mental health, resulting in demotivation and disrupted progress. Supervisors' and peers' support was significant in this context. As their journeys progressed, participants acted with greater agency, and over time engaged in varied academic and research communities in the wider 'landscape of practice'; where 'peripheral participation' over time provided participants with opportunities for 'meaning' making and creativity, and to rethink their doctoral journeys (Wenger, 1998, p185). Engaging in communities within the university and in the wider landscape are crucial in helping part-time PhD students to develop doctoral 'competence' and 'knowledgeability' (Wenger, 1998). Implications are for: policy makers, doctoral colleges, graduate schools and supervisors to enhance support for part-time PhD students by providing accessible mental health provision, funding, learning spaces, training, 'student focused' supervision (Brew and Peseta, 2009), and opportunities for students to engage in research communities both within and outside the university. Students should focus on their wellbeing alongside study; seek appropriate support; take breaks when overwhelmed; aim to achieve short term goals; make their voices heard in supervision; and participate in research and academic communities within and outside their universities.

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Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

For John and Joyce, my parents.

Introduction

This study has adopted a narrative inquiry approach to explore part-time PhD students' learning journeys in United Kingdom (UK) universities in changing times; and ways in which their experiences are influenced by academic, professional, and personal relationships and life events. While this PhD has gained a deep understanding of individual students' unique journeys, it has also identified patterns and similarities in their narratives, and the contextual factors and discourses that frame their experiences in higher education. The literature and methodological approach that underpin this research, and ways in which this study provides an original contribution to knowledge are discussed at greater length in the Conclusion.

The literature reviewed that supports this PhD suggests that there are a range of factors that influence PhD students' experiences and journeys in relation to this research topic and these are elaborated in Chapters One and Two. To provide some background to this study, substantial previous research has focused on ways in which working relationships with supervisors and peers influence the engagement, learning development and success of PhD students during doctoral study (Pyhältö and Lonka, 2009; Shacham and Od-Cohen, 2009; Kiley, 2009; Gardner, 2010; Parker, 2009; Kiley and Wisker, 2009; Trowler, 2022). In this context, PhD students' experiences are found to vary, for instance, according to university type, discipline, mode of study, gender, (Becher, 1981; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Bennett and Turner, 2013), and stage of study (Kiley, 2009; Kiley and Wisker, 2009; Gardner, 2010).

However, a small number of previous studies suggest that, in addition to supervisors and peers, colleagues, relationships with family and friends in conjunction with life events, for example, births and deaths, are significant in influencing some PhD students' learning and engagement throughout the different phases of their doctoral study. These studies have provided the basis for further exploratory research in this context and my main rationale for conducting a PhD that has focused on this topic (Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013). An inquiry exploring how academic, professional, and personal relationships and life events influence part-time PhD students' learning journeys in UK universities in changing times has not been explored in previous research; and hence, this research provides an original contribution to knowledge. Other ways in which this study provides an original contribution to knowledge will be explained in the Conclusion.

Another crucial element of this research has been to consider and explore ways in which UK doctoral education has changed over the past few decades. This has helped to gain an understanding of the overarching context within which part-time PhD students experience their doctoral journeys in UK universities in changing times. Park (2005) argues that: in the twenty-first century students' objectives in pursuing doctoral study are evolving, from conducting research that produces new knowledge to training and acquiring appropriate skills for professional life outside the academic world. In this context of change in doctoral education, employability has become an increasingly important agenda for the government and UK universities (Research Councils United Kingdom (RCUK), (2005); Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), (2014); Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), (2009). However, it is important to consider whether it should be the role of universities to focus on student employability. As Kreber argues "some critics caution that universities could far too easily lose sight of such traditional values as curiosity driven research (2006, p7)." Curiosity is the reason for many students to start a PhD, and this point is supported by Collini (2012) who argues that research should have no limits.

Aims and Objectives

This research has:

1. explored part-time PhD students' learning journeys in UK universities in changing times (when this research was conducted between 2015 and 2023).

2. identified ways in which academic, professional, and personal relationships and life events influence part-time PhD students' experiences and perceptions relating to:
   a. their learning development
   b. their engagement in doctoral study
   c. changes in their academic confidence over time
   d. their achievement
   e. belonging to academic communities and environments within and outside their universities
   f. the changing context and ideology of HE doctoral education

The findings of this study enhance understanding of part-time PhD students' experiences and contribute to knowledge in the field of doctoral learning where a gap in knowledge existed. This is explained in greater detail in the Conclusion.

Methodological approach

The methodological approach that was adopted for this research is explained fully in Chapter Three. In summary, a qualitative approach was suitable to explore part-time PhD students' complex experiences and how these are influenced by relationships and life events (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003; Lewis, 2003). For this purpose, narrative inquiry was considered appropriate to explore individual part-time PhD students' unique doctoral journeys; ways in which their lives and learning connect; and because their diverse experiences may not follow national statistical trends. This research has also followed Gergen's argument that narrative research "often attempts to give voice to the unheard or marginalized in society" and has allowed research participants to reflect on their life stories "in their own terms", which are important ethical, epistemological, and ontological aspects of this study that will be discussed further in Chapter Three (2009, p66). Other research studies adopted a narrative inquiry approach in exploring the experiences of PhD students (Cummings, 2007; Wisker et al., 2010). The ways in which this PhD has adopted narrative methods and epistemological approaches that are different to those studies, are also discussed in Chapter Three.

Overview of thesis chapters

The contents of this thesis are arranged as follows. Chapter One consists of literature, which: expands on some of the themes discussed in the introduction; explores the theories that inform this research, including Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'capital', 'disposition' and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977; 1982; 1988; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977); Wenger's 'Social Theory of Learning' (1998) and 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner, 2015). Chapter Two discusses and critiques recent changes in UK higher education, specifically doctoral education; reviews previous literature and research into the influences of Higher Education (HE) changes on doctoral students' experiences; and outlines the research questions. Chapter Three incorporates the Methodology for this study and includes sections on: Deweyian Pragmatism, Social Construction, Narrative Inquiry, Research Methods and Ethics, followed by a Conclusion. Chapter Four incorporates findings relating to two stages of structural analysis of six PhD student narrative interviews. This chapter presents elements of the six student journeys that relate to turning points and life events and how these influence their doctoral journeys. Chapter Five includes a narrative

and self-reflective overview of my own position and experiences as a part-time PhD student. Chapter Six presents a thematic analysis of all narrative interviews with all fifteen doctoral student participants and discusses the influences of academic and peer relationships on part-time PhD students' journeys. Chapter Seven incorporates findings of two stage in-depth interviews with doctoral college directors in two universities, presenting their unique perceptions and cross-sectional themes in this context. This chapter also discusses recent changes in UK doctoral education and in the universities where the interviews were conducted, their influence on part-time PhD students' learning journeys, and the overarching doctoral HE context that frames participants' experiences. Chapter Eight is a discussion chapter that shows how the theories presented in the literature review support the research findings. Chapter Nine presents the conclusion, discusses the implications of this research, what contribution to knowledge this research provides followed by a summary of ideas for further research.

Chapter One: Variations in PhD students' experiences explored through two conceptual lenses

This chapter explores and discusses literature relating to variations in PhD students' experiences; and theoretical lenses that help to conceptualise their experiences. This part of the literature review explores and discusses themes in relation to part-time PhD students' experiences. These relate to:

1. Variations in PhD students' experiences according to part-time and full-time mode of study; gender; discipline; home or international student status; and university type.
2. A conceptual section focusing on debates regarding 'structure' and 'agency' (Archer, 1982), in relation to part-time PhD student experiences. This refers to Bourdieu's concepts of 'capital', 'habitus', 'disposition' and 'field' (1977; 1982; 1988) and Etienne Wenger (Trayner's) 'Social Theory of Learning' (1998), encompassing a more recent conceptualisation of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The second part of the literature review that focuses on UK HE changes since 1960 and how these contextualise more recent changes in doctoral education is presented in Chapter Two, including a discussion of discourses that influence HE change such as globalisation, marketisation and 'neoliberalism' (Rudd and Goodson, 2017). The scope of the literature is informed by these themes. It is also informed by referring to literature relating to doctoral education and contextual HE changes in countries where English is the first language used for teaching in universities (for example, UK, United States (U.S), Canada and Australia). The main exception to this is in the Conceptual section, where there are references to the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron. The scope of the review also relates to literature, most of which was published post-2000. However, there are references to key theorists that precede 2000, and references to some literature and government legislation from the 1960s onwards, which are necessary to explain how UK HE has changed over recent decades. The literature review concludes with the research questions.

How do PhD students' experiences vary?

One important aspect of this research has been to explore the varied and unique experiences of individual PhD students. Hence, this part of the literature review concerns aspects of diversity among PhD students and what previous research found relating to the experiences of students from different

backgrounds. To provide additional scope for this review, this section focuses primarily on variations in doctoral students' experiences according to university type, mode of study, discipline, gender and whether they are home or overseas students. In the literature review, these areas stand out as significant in relation to this PhD research topic. Although this part of the literature review discusses what previous research found concerning different groups, this study has explored what is unique in individual PhD students' experiences and has not compared groups. In this context, this PhD has followed Anderson and Williams' argument that "there is no typical student since students are variously differentiated by gender, ethnic origin, age, etc. (2001, p7)"; and it has not created a typology of part-time PhD students.

Differences between part-time and full-time doctoral students' experiences

At the time of this review, a recent UK Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) report (Bennett and Turner, 2013, p22; Pitkin, 2021) identified part-time students as a group who were less satisfied with the "research culture" during their courses in comparison to full-time students. Previous research identified the reasons behind this dissatisfaction as relating to the isolation that part-time postgraduate students often experience (Deem and Brehony, 2000; Watts, 2008; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Teeuwsen, Ratkovié and Tilley, 2014). Watts (2008), Gardner and Gopaul (2012) and Teeuwsen et al. (2014) all found that part-time PhD students often balance different roles, responsibilities and identities including: professional, family and academic; that their time spent at university is often minimal; and hence many do not experience a sufficient sense of being part of a peer learning community or community of practice. In this context, Leonard and Becker found that "Part-time students find research cultures harder to enter and sustain than full-timers and may not always even be aware that they are eligible to attend events or join professional academic societies due to poor communication by academic units" (2009, p79). This difficulty that part-time PhD students experience (and some full-time doctoral students) in feeling a sense of belonging to a research culture may also relate to conflicting life events, (Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012). In this context, the difficulties that doctoral students faced in their PhDs during the Covid-19 pandemic is reflected by Donohue et al. (2021) who found that doctoral students' contact with peer community, mental health and motivation were adversely affected by the Covid pandemic, associated lockdowns and their impact on universities. As Watts (2008) discusses, part-time PhD journeys are longer than full-time PhD journeys, part-time PhD students are often older than full-time students, and their PhD journeys are likely to be affected by crises and life events,

which requires "empathy" (p371) on the part of their supervisors. In this context, PhD students including part-time PhD students may rely on support from other people outside their university and course research community (Leonard and Becker, 2009). For instance, a study by Gardner and Gopaul (2012) suggests that rather than receiving support from university-based communities, part-time PhD students often benefit most from the support of family and colleagues, although they still want more support from peers. Part-time PhD students' experiences may also vary according to discipline, as suggested by Gardner and Gopaul (2012) who found that part-time PhD students in Science and Engineering feel lonelier and more isolated from their peer-communities where full-time students are the norm; and that part-time students in Education feel less isolated possibly because part-time students are more usual in this discipline. Gardner and Gopaul (2012) and Watts (2008) found that part-time PhD students' frequent sense of isolation can negatively influence their wellbeing, self-esteem, and engagement. Gardner and Gopaul (2012) stress that such findings contrast with the experiences of professional doctorate students who are automatically part of a learning community through attending taught seminars. This section helps identify the experiences of part-time PhD students as the primary focus of this research.

Varied experiences of doctoral students in relation to gender

Previous research argues that women are another group who experience specific challenges during their doctoral journeys, that men do not experience to the same extent (Cao, 2001; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013; Browne and Watson, 2010). For instance, Cao suggests that women PhD students experience greater stress than men relating to feelings of loneliness within their academic environment, balancing life and study and worries over employment prospects (2001). In addition to stress, Browne and Watson (2010) discuss more tangible challenges that women PhD students experience such as being responsible for children, caring for a partner or elderly parents, and the impact of pregnancy and interruptions to career and study that these factors relate to. Aitchison and Mowbray (2013) describe ways in which women PhD students' difficulties in balancing study and other aspects of life, including home or family life, are associated with strong emotions linked to stress. They suggest that relationships, including those with peers and family, significantly influence women PhD students' stress and levels of motivation and engagement during their learning journeys, both positively and negatively. However, it is important to critically assess these ideas and to ensure that this PhD study does not represent women's identities as gender stereotypes, which some of the research described above is in danger of doing. Men also experience many of the difficulties

described above.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that patriarchal culture is present in many countries including the UK. For instance, a recent report by the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) at the time of this literature review, showed that more men than women were employed in higher paid jobs and in managerial roles (ONS, 2013). However, as Brooks argues, it is also important to be "cautious of concepts such as 'patriarchy', women's 'oppression', experience and even 'gender' as used in traditional feminist analysis (1997, p5)". Following Brooks' argument, in exploring the experiences of women doctoral students in HE, this PhD study has also explored the "the diverse and contradictory way women experience power…, intersected by factors such as race, ethnicity, class, age and nationality (1997, p5)". Doctorates may be a way for women to develop their identities and perceive themselves differently. For instance, Parr (2001, p58) argues that education is a means for mature women to empower themselves:

> "This link between education, agency and changing identities is crucial, as is their use of the term 'confidence', in encapsulating a particular form of agency; the ability to define and assert one's needs."

In this context, Choi (2012, p55) describes how a Chinese woman born and living in Hong Kong began to perceive herself differently and developed greater confidence in her ability to succeed professionally and academically during teacher training at college. Although both men and women have been interviewed in this PhD study, and their experiences vary, as reflected in the research findings, this research has not compared the experiences of men and women.

Variations among experiences of international or overseas and home PhD students

Previous studies found that in comparison to home UK students, some international postgraduate students find transitions, when studying in UK HE or universities in other English-speaking countries, for example, Australia, challenging. This is because their previous culturally inflected experiences of education in their countries of origin contrast strongly with new experiences and academic expectations in English speaking higher education (Kiley, 2000; Wisker, 2000; Grant, et al., 2008). Such differences in educational cultural traditions have been described as 'Confucian' or 'Collectivist' as opposed to 'Socratic' or 'Individualist' (Kingston and Forland, 2008, p205). However, as McSweeney (2002), Bilecen (2013) and Goode (2007) point out there are dangers of

stereotyping international students of specific nationalities as theoretically adhering to Confucian or Socratic educational traditions. As they suggest, this can be misleading, serving to strengthen international students' identities as being 'different' in the eyes of UK academic staff and students, or those from other English-speaking nations (McSweeney, 2002; Bilecen, 2013; Goode, 2007). In this context, Brown and Holloway (2008, p246) argue that experiences vary from individual to individual and that adjustment should be conceptualised as a complex and individual process. As with the discussion of gender differences in the previous section, while overseas students and home students have been interviewed as part of this research, this study has not compared the experiences of home and international students, although students' individual experiences are reflected in the research findings. In this context, Kiley (2000) and Wisker, Robinson and Jones (2011) discuss the importance of supervisors' awareness of international PhD students' culturally inflected experiences of prior education and how clear communication in cross-cultural supervision is essential in supporting international PhD students' transition, progress and stages of achievement in doctoral study.

PhD students' varied experiences according to discipline

As mentioned above, earlier research identifies traditional disciplinary differences, which influence ways in which doctoral students work with colleagues and peers (Biglan, 1973; Becher, 1994; Becher and Trowler, 2001). Biglan (1973) introduced the concept that research students' experiences cannot be generalised across disciplines, since each discipline has a different culture, and customary approach to working with other people. Becher (1994) classified disciplines into four categories including 'pure sciences', 'humanities', 'technologies' and 'applied social sciences'; and he explored and highlighted ways in which researchers interact and work with others in the context of each grouping. Gardner (2009; 2010) combined the ideas of Biglan (1973) and Becher (1994) to conceptualise ways in which levels of US PhD student marginalisation or isolation vary in the context of different disciplines. The 'social and intellectual' isolation of doctoral students in different disciplines is also discussed by Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2000, p176). For instance, they discuss how "for the research student in a more individualized discipline, the responsibility for success or failure is more personally felt", whereas with reference to science disciplines they argue that "the social relations of the laboratory and the research group can clearly mitigate social isolation" (Atkinson and Parry, 2000, op.cit.). In this context, Gardner's research (2009) found that in Mathematics and Engineering disciplines, which had a low rate of PhD completion, students'

lacked peer support, whereas in high completing departments including English, Psychology and Communication, PhD students had positive experiences of support from peer learning communities.

However, it is also important to consider ways in which twenty-first century changes in HE are influencing PhD students' experiences of working in the context of different disciplines, and how traditional concepts of such differences may be questioned. Trowler et al. (2012) and Bamber (2012) for instance argue that in twenty-first century higher education "disciplinary knowledge systems are fluid, dynamic and constantly nudged by non-disciplinary policies, initiatives, and HE trajectories. (p34)". Bamber suggests that HE agendas relating to "enterprise, employability, income generation, credit accumulation" and a "push to interdisciplinarity" relate to ways in which traditional disciplinary differences and identities are changing (2012, p38). Hence, while Biglan's (1973) and Becher's (1994) frameworks are useful to conceptualise students' varied experiences according to discipline, it is also important to consider the shifting nature of disciplinary cultures in changing HE contexts, and the diverse nature of part-time PhD students' individual experiences across disciplines, related 'Communities of Practice' (Wenger, 1998), and research environments.

University type

PhD students' experiences may also vary according to university type. Scott (1995) formulated a useful typology, which reflects the wide diversity of institutions in UK HE. Scott refers to some universities as unique types because they are ancient or offer a particular provision, for example, Oxford, Cambridge, London, Durham, which are all members of the Russell Group; and the Open University, which offers remote study provision (Scott, 1995, p43-53). Other main types are defined by Scott as follows:

- civic (set up in major cities in 1800s, e.g., Birmingham)
- redbrick (set up in cities in 1900s, e.g., Exeter)
- technological universities (developed from Colleges of Advanced Technology, e.g., Cardiff)
- old new universities (built on campus locations in 1960s, e.g., Sussex, Kent)
- new universities (former polytechnics, which became universities in 1990s, for example Brighton, Bournemouth)

(Scott, 1995, p43-53)

However, since the 1990s UK university types and the focus of different types has shifted further. For instance, a more recent typology of UK HE institutions according to clusters is provided by Howells, Ramlogan, and Cheng as follows (2008, p24).

Table 1: Cluster classifications of UK higher education institutions (Howells, Ramlogan and Cheng (2008, p24).

	Cluster name	**Cluster type & description**
1	Research-Led, Third Mission	Large, international, highly research-intensive, high knowledge exploitation and enterprise oriented, but low overall growth and low research income growth
2	Local Access	High access, low overall growth, high research growth (but from small base)
3	Elite Research	Large, international, research-intensive universities, low research growth, high overall growth
4	London Metropolitan Specialists	Research intensive, high research growth, but low overall growth
5	High Teaching Growth	High student growth rate, average overall growth and below average size, slightly above average research income, but low research growth
6	Research Oriented, Teaching Growth	Generally large, research-intensive institutions, enterprise focused, with high student growth, but below average research growth
7	Open	Large, high access, domestic focused university

In this context, Tight (2009) and Collini (2012) discuss how while there has always been a hierarchical difference between what kind of provision different types of institutions offer, this is

always changing. Universities that were originally more vocationally focused when first set up, for example, civic universities, then became research-intensive over time. As Collini argues, this has been a continuing trend throughout the history of HE and it is still happening in post-1992 universities:

> "The newer and different types of institution increasingly shed their distinctiveness and more and more conformed to the culturally dominant model….The pull has always been towards being a national rather than a local institution; towards offering a full spectrum of subjects; towards offering postgraduate rather than undergraduate degrees; towards supporting research as well and teaching; and towards the autonomy and prestige traditionally associated with (though in recent years fast being lost by) the older universities." (Collini, 2012, p29)

Hence, in the new millennium 'new' universities, which evolved from older institutions, such as polytechnics, have become increasingly research focused. Although they were not defined as research-intensive, the boundaries between older research-intensive universities and newer research focused universities began to blur (Sikes, 2006; Scott, 2014). In the recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise (2021) some new universities received increases in research funding (Williams, 2021). However, the aspirations of newer universities are still often challenged by the fact that they have less funding behind them than older universities, As Tight argues:

> "… older institutions have had longer than newer ones to be successful...they tend to be larger than average, and to have more post-graduate and non-UK students. Newer institutions, in attempting to compete with those longer established… tend to have larger undergraduate populations, and to focus more on part-time and UK students…" (2009, p121)

In these different HE contexts experiences of PhD students vary, and the way in which doctoral education is provided in UK institutions continues to be inconsistent and individual according to each university (Park, 2005; Mellors-Bourne, Robinson and Metcalfe, 2016). For instance, some, but not all UK universities run doctoral induction or training programmes delivered through a doctoral college, training centre or graduate school. This may considerably influence students' opportunities to meet research peers and learn research skills (Park, 2005; Lunt et al., 2013). In addition, according to Bourner et al. (2001), a greater proportion of pre-1992 UK universities were offering professional doctorates (PD) in comparison to post-1992 universities in 2001. However, this situation changed and the proportion of post-1992 universities offering professional doctorates

in 2016 rose to 41 compared to 37 pre-1992 UK universities (Mellors-Bourne et al., 2016). According to Mellors-Bourne et al. (2016, p21), only "86 out of the 123 English institutions investigated currently provide PD programmes", so that a proportion of UK universities were still not providing professional doctorates. In this context, as Park (2005) suggests, the research environment in research-intensive and newer vocational universities is varied. Hence the experiences of PhD students may vary in these different university contexts, which has become another focus for exploration in this research. In this context, Universities UK (Ramsden and Brown, 2002) refer to the division of universities into two broad categories of pre-1992 and post-1992:

> "There are on many measures, differences between the post-1992 universities and other providers. Equally, it has been noted that the pre-1992 university sector is itself diverse, because of the differentiation between universities with medical schools and those without." (Ramsden and Brown, 2002, p40)

While recognising that the character of each HE institution is distinct and changing, University A was selected as an example of a post-1992 university, and University B was chosen as an example of a pre-1992 university as varied HE contexts for this study. The rationale for choosing these universities is discussed further in Chapter Three. This part of the literature review has provided a snapshot of ways in which PhD students from diverse backgrounds experience their doctoral journeys differently. However, this PhD research has not compared groups or university types and it has not represented disciplines or students belonging to these disciplines as groups. This research has reflected the diversity of student experiences in different disciplines; it has explored the learning journeys of PhD students as individuals in varied UK HE contexts; and it has considered varied experiences of part-time PhD students, including the role that different demographic characteristics have played and intersected in this context.

Two conceptual lenses to illuminate the exploration of part-time PhD students' journeys.

The literature discussed so far in this chapter has helped to inform this study's aims, objectives, and research questions. In addition, there are two broad sociological theories that have helped inform the research analysis concerning ways in which individual students' lives and learning journeys interact. Firstly, Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'capital', 'habitus' and 'disposition' (1977, 1982, 1988) relate to ways in which part-time PhD students develop: doctoral learning (related to 'educational capital'), academic confidence (related to 'educational and social capital'), and

achievement (related to 'educational and academic capital') throughout their doctoral journeys. These terms are explained in greater depth below. In this context, relationships and life events may play a role in part-time PhD students making choices and decisions, both consciously and unconsciously, as agents within the 'field' of HE structures. This is discussed at greater length below. Secondly, Wenger's 'Social Theory of Learning' (1998) and Etienne and Beverley Wenger-Trayner's framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (2015, p13) concern ways in which part-time PhD students develop agency, 'social learning', 'belonging', 'meaning' making, collective 'resilience', 'competence' and 'knowledgeability' in relation to interaction with different relationships, for instance with supervisors and peers, and varied academic and research 'Communities of Practice' during their doctoral journeys. In this context, ways in which part-time PhD students experience more peripheral participation in university doctoral communities of practice (including supervisors, peers, and the doctoral college or graduate school) in comparison to full-time PhD students are also discussed (Wenger, 2009; Teeuwsen, Ratkovié and Tilley, 2014; Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2015 b).

It is important to clarify that this research adopted a Social Constructionist epistemological position (Gergen, 2009; Burr, 2006), where participants in both interview stages were engaged in the research process and were invited to participate by commenting on research analysis and findings. In this context, analysis was inductive rather than deductive, and this research has not fitted with, proven or disproven these conceptual frameworks. However, in combination, these theories enabled the "duality of structure and agency" referred to by Margaret Archer (1982, p459; 2007) that are ontologically and epistemologically important in this study, which are discussed in greater depth in the Methodology Chapter (Three). According to Hopwood (2010, p105), exploring structure, for instance HE and university structures, and agency in research "enables us to empirically account for the contexts of people's actions as causally influencing as well as being influenced by those actions".

How Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'capital', 'disposition' and 'habitus' relate to PhD students' journeys.

Bourdieu's constructs of 'field', 'capital', 'disposition' and 'habitus' (1982; 1988) have frequently been adopted in educational research to conceptualise what Rawolle and Lingard describe as "reproduction and change in societies", of which education, including HE and doctoral education, is a part (2013, p2). In this context, Rawolle and Lingard explain how the concepts of 'capital' and

'habitus' evolved from Bourdieu's theory (1988) that, "education acted as a sorting institution that functioned to divide groups primarily through the valuing of cultural capital" and that "cultural capital was implicit in school curricula and pedagogy, and was aligned with, embodied, assumed and possessed by certain classes" (Rawolle and Lingard, 2013, p120). However, despite difference in a person's class or background, as Bourdieu and Passeron argue, students can acquire and accrue 'educational' and 'social capital' (forms of 'cultural capital') through their educational journeys, which can at HE level compensate for inherited forms of 'cultural capital' (1977).

> "It must be borne in mind that within the system of factors constantly restructured by its own action, the relative weight of the determinations due to the initial class membership steadily declines to the advantage of the academic determinations which retranslate them." (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p255)

In this context, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) conceptualise how doctoral students have already acquired strong 'educational' and 'social capital' at the end of their degrees or master's, and hence, by the time they start their PhDs (Fig.1, p255). This supports this PhD's findings in that the participants in this study had often acquired and accrued considerable 'educational capital', confidence in their academic abilities, and a related sense of 'habitus' at the beginning of their doctoral journeys (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, Fig. 1, p255). However, it was important to take the intersectionality of participants' diverse backgrounds into account in this context, and that their accrual of 'capital' may be unequal for different individuals, as found by Gopaul (2014).

Bourdieu explains 'habitus' as follows:

> "First and foremost, habitus has the function of overcoming the alternative between consciousness and unconsciousness…. Social reality exists, so to speak, twice in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself 'as if a fish in water', it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted." (Bourdieu, 1989, p43)

'Habitus' is also built up through individuals' experiences over time that enable a person to act correctly in a particular context or 'field', for instance, in higher and doctoral education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) discuss how an important aspect of 'habitus' is formed by a person's family, social inheritance and early education. In turn, Bourdieu discusses how these aspects are related to an individual's 'disposition' or habit (1977, p72). As Robbins argues (1998, p14) with reference to Bourdieu (1977) structure is an important

factor in an individual's 'habitus', which affects a person's subjective conscious and unconscious choices, actions and behaviours in relation to the objective nature of the field. In this context, Jenkins (1992) explains that the term 'disposition' is sometimes used by Bourdieu with reference to unconscious habit or action and sometimes conscious action, implying choice.

With reference to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) Robbins explains 'field' as a "structured system of social relations at a micro and macro level" (1998, p16). In relation to this study exploring part-time doctoral students' journeys, 'field' relates at the macro level to the HE sector, at a meso level to specific universities, and at a micro level to a PhD student's immediate doctoral education context comprising relationships with supervisors and peers. Robbins argues that the overarching 'field', such as the UK HE sector, and its sub-fields, such as a particular university and doctoral discipline have their own characteristics: "…for example, the shifting aims and objectives of different phases of education, the ways they are organised and who is involved" (1998, p20). As Robbins continues to point out, each field and sub-field has its own culture, customs and expected ways of doing things (1998). In this context, individuals are expected to "play the game" to fit in (Bourdieu, 1977, p6). However, knowing how to 'play the game' may not be easy because the rules may not be explicit and understood equally by all individuals depending on their "feel for the game" linked to their 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977, p164). In doctoral education 'fields', for instance, some students who have a background in a traditional research-intensive university may have already developed a 'habitus' that enables them to fit in easily and without struggle since they are unconsciously aware of the "rules of the game" having already learnt them throughout their upbringing and previous education (Thomas, 2002; Bourdieu, 1977, p164). Other students may consciously need to develop doctoral 'habitus' and learn the rules to 'play the game' to fit in. Gopaul (2014) adopted Bourdieu's construct of 'field' to conceptualise Canadian doctoral students' experiences of regulation and power in doctoral education. However, his arguments are also relevant to UK doctoral education. Gopaul constructs doctoral education as a 'field' incorporating different layers or contexts that relate to the university as institution, professional or career development, and disciplines (2014). In UK doctoral education, while these layers may be replicated, other layers may be added, for instance, the doctoral college or graduate school and varied research communities. Gopaul argues that doctoral students experience challenges in "understanding the rules within these contexts", but that understanding the rules within each context is crucial to their success (2014, p85). He further suggests that "different students understand and interpret these rules differently" and that "inequality can permeate the experiences of doctoral students" (Gopaul, 2014, p83). In this context, Thomas (2002, p431) refers to Bourdieu (1989) in discussing how 'habitus' is not equal for all

students during the first-year transition into university, and how some students from less privileged backgrounds can feel "like a fish out of water".

Hence, doctoral students' acquisition of different types of 'capital', associated 'habitus' and knowing how to 'play the game' are crucial to their belonging, learning development, engagement and success (Gopaul; 2014; Bourdieu, 1977, p6) With reference to Bourdieu (1991), Robbins explained that there are "three main forms of capital: Economic, Social and Cultural…. Economic capital is literally money wealth…Social Capital exists as a 'network of lasting social relations'…Cultural Capital is the product of education" (1998, p21). In doctoral educational contexts, as previously mentioned 'cultural capital' may also be defined as 'educational capital' and 'social capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977); and 'academic capital' relates to transfer or upgrade, the achievement of the doctorate, and the beginning of the post-doctoral journey, which may lead to an academic career (or position of authority in another professional realm) (Bourdieu, 1988).

According to Gopaul, important types of 'educational' and 'social (cultural) capital' that are valued in the field of doctoral education that enable doctoral students to 'play the game' to their advantage better enabling their success include for instance: "publications, scholarships/external funding, conferences" (2014, p82). According to Bourdieu (1988) 'academic capital' also relates to being well known in one's field through publications. In addition, 'social capital' that includes memberships of academic groups or communities both within and outside the university can help develop students' 'habitus', sense of belonging and academic confidence (Thomas, 2002; Bourdieu, 1988). In this context, as Gopaul also argues, support from academic staff in students' disciplines, who may include for instance, supervisors, colleagues and peers play a crucial role in enabling doctoral students to understand the 'rules', 'play' effectively and acquire 'social capital', and 'educational capital' to succeed (2014, p86). However, as Gopaul also argues, students' support from academics, peers, colleagues and supervisors may not be experienced equally by all doctoral students, for instance, full and part-time students (2014). In the context of this research such inequality of experience among part-time PhD students also relates to a range of factors, which may also intersect (McCulloch and Thomas, 2013). For instance, these may include ethnicity, gender, age-group, disability status, socio- economic background and discipline.

Bourdieu's conceptual arguments have sometimes been considered controversial in that they suggest that 'capital' and 'habitus' are determined by HE institutions, described as 'fields' (Green, 2013, p144.). This implies the notion that individuals are largely controlled by institutions, such as universities: "Bourdieu pays little attention to the capacity of individuals to act in the world; this is

referred to in philosophy and sociology as agency" (Green, 2013, p144). However, this is not the case, since in fact, as Robbins points out with reference to Bourdieu (1977) in education, students "have choice about what they do, how they act and think in response to the pedagogic opportunities that are offered" (1998, p21). In this sense, Bourdieu's ideology conveys an interplay between structure and agency where "structures have autonomous, but transient life. They exist to be deployed and adapted by agents seeking to establish their social position within the possibilities offered to them" (Robbins, 1998, p31). This point is also made by Anderson and Williams in their discussion of 'Identity and Difference' in HE where they argue that "Identities are most fruitfully understood within a framework which places them within this series of capital forms, and where individual change necessitates negotiation and challenge to such forms" (2001, p7).

An important facet of Bourdieu's arguments that is often discussed in educational and sociological research, and which is also important in this study, is the way in which Bourdieu's concepts relate to individuals' such as doctoral students' development of academic confidence. As with the experiences of undergraduates described above, Bourdieu's constructs of 'capital' and 'habitus' are appropriate in this PhD study to conceptualise part-time PhD students' learning journeys over time, in which doctoral students encounter periods of transition where they acquire 'educational' and 'social capital' and evolving 'habitus' linked to belonging, doctoral learning development, academic confidence and achievement (Thomas, 2002; Thomas, 2012, Gopaul, 2014).

As explained above in relation to Bourdieu's conceptualisation of 'habitus' and 'disposition', individuals including students can make choices about their decisions and actions, and act with agency (Archer, 1982). This can impact their confidence and achievement. For instance, Hodkinson (1998) describes how the dual aspects of structure and agency in relation to Bourdieu's concepts can be demonstrated through the findings of his research into young people's career decision making. In this context, Hodkinson argues that "the career decision making of young people can only be understood in terms of their own life histories, wherein what Bourdieu calls *habitus* had developed and evolved through interaction with significant others, and with the culture in which the individual has lived and is living" (1998, p97). This relates to the way in which both structure and agency can affect doctoral students' choices and decisions, affecting their confidence and success. Anderson and Williams also refer to Bourdieu in explaining how students can develop their sense of 'habitus', belonging and confidence when studying in HE:

> "…hyphenated identities, those of 'mature student' or 'black professor', for example, convey the nature of higher education as largely for the young, white middle classes. These

> hyphenated identities allow us to explore the nature of academia as a place where individuals try to make sense of, reconcile and/or resist the socially imposed labels that disrupt their sense of self" (2001, p10).

In this context, 'hyphenated identities' are associated with individuals who on one hand perceive that they fit in with a privileged group, such as middle-class white student, and on the other hand, who experience marginalisation because they may not perceive that they belong to the privileged group, for instance as a mature student, or part-time PhD student. This point is also echoed by Thomas (2002) relating to undergraduate student transition into HE. As Anderson and Williams argue, by studying at university and engaging in doctoral study, individuals can develop agency that enables them to come to terms with conflicting aspects of self as described above, and hence feel a sense of belonging, and become more confident (2001). Following these arguments, when exploring part-time PhD student journeys, this research has adopted a life story narrative inquiry interviewing approach (McAdams, 1993; 1995), where turning points in students' doctoral journeys relate to students' developing belonging, doctoral learning, academic confidence and achievement over time.

In addition to Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'capital' and 'habitus', this research has adopted Wenger's 'Social Theory of Learning', and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (2015), as an additional conceptual lens that illuminates part-time PhD students' developing agency in this research context. According to Wenger-Trayner (2016), 'Social Theory of Learning' and Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'capital' and 'habitus' are compatible although they have a distinct purpose (Farnsworth, Kleanthous and Wenger-Trayner, 2016). Wenger-Trayner explains: "Central to my theorisation of identity is the negotiation of identification across multiple communities of practice. The way I see it even when something has power over me, how much that determines me depends on how much I identify with it...It provides for a degree of agency in the learning theory" (Wenger-Trayner, p153, cited in Farnsworth et al. 2016). Wenger's 'Social Theory of Learning' and 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' will now be discussed in greater depth in relation to this research.

Doctoral 'learning in a landscape of practice'

Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (2009) conceived the idea of 'communities of practice' associated with a 'Social Theory of Learning' where they argue that individuals learn most effectively, deeply, and developmentally in the context of discussion, active collaboration, and

interaction with a peer 'community of practice'. Wenger-Trayner discusses three main aspects of this theory, "its purpose, its stance and its technical terms" (2016, p141, cited in Farnsworth et al., 2016). He defines 'Social Theory of Learning' as follows: "its purpose is to give an account of learning as a socially constituted experience of meaning making. The stance is to locate this experience in relation between the person and the social world as they constitute each other. The technical terms of the theory include negotiation of meaning, practice, community, identity and competence, among others" (Wenger-Trayner, p141-2, cited in Farnsworth et al., 2016). Wenger's 'Social Theory of Learning' model (2009) describes the four main elements of learning development in this context as active learning through "practice", "learning as belonging" to a community, "learning as becoming" through identity transformation and "learning as experience" through meaning making (Wenger, 2009, p 211).

More recently, Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner developed this theory, to encompass the framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (2015). In relation to this theory, they discuss how "professional occupations and even most non-professional endeavours, are constituted by a complex landscape of different communities of practice", and that "landscapes of practice are coming into focus as globalisation, travel, and new technologies expand our horizons and open up potential connections to various locations in the landscape" (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner, 2015, p15). This framework is relevant in the context of this research, since the fragmented lives of students in changing times, including PhD students, often encompass belonging to several different communities. For instance, doctoral students operate within research, academic and university communities; immediate and wider professional communities; and varied social communities that may include family, partners, friends and acquaintances. Within each 'community of practice' in a 'landscape of practice', the Wenger-Trayners explain that there are distinct practices and that 'boundaries' between different communities can result in conflict: "Because of the lack of shared history, boundaries are places of potential misunderstanding and confusion polarising from different regimes of competence, commitments, values, repertoires and perspectives" (2015, p17). For instance, Fenton-O'Creevy et al. (2015 a, p38) discuss how individuals' experiences of changing identities relating to different communities within a landscape can be laden with emotion and stress, and instances of failure. Fenton-O'Creevy et al. (2015 b, p53) describe practice-based HE students' experiences of negotiating different communities of practice within a landscape on a weekly basis and hence experiencing continual identity shifts. This argument is also relevant for PhD students, and particularly part-time PhD students, who negotiate doctoral study, professional roles, and family life and the relationships and responsibilities relating to each role on a weekly basis. In this context,

they experience the accompanying emotion, stress and resilience described by Fenton-O'Creevy et al. (2015 b). However, the Wenger-Trayners explain that moving from one 'Community of Practice' to another becomes a process and journey of learning and self-development over time (2015). This is relevant for PhD students' learning journeys and the way they are influenced by different relationships and life events over time:

> "As a trajectory through a social landscape, learning is not merely the acquisition of knowledge. It is the becoming of a person who inhabits the landscape with an identity whose dynamic construction reflects our trajectory through that landscape. This journey within and across practices shapes who we are."
> (Wenger Trayner and Wenger Trayner, 2015, p19)

The Wenger-Trayners explain that there are three key aspects of individuals' self-development in relation to learning in this context. These comprise: 'engagement' which relates to active participation in a community, 'imagination' which relates to seeing oneself within a landscape, reflecting, questioning, and interpreting… and 'alignment' which relates to adhering to rules and customs inherent within a community (2015, p21). It is argued that learners should combine these three "modes of identification" so that they may learn and operate successfully within a 'landscape of practice', since "Alignment without engagement or imagination often leads to unthinking compliance" (Wenger Trayner and Wenger Trayner, 2015, p22). When learners do manage to combine these three aspects of "identification" successfully over time within a 'landscape of practice', then this translates into what the Wenger Trayners define as "knowledgeability" (2015, p23), which in the context of the PhD journey, may relate to students achieving a 'doctoral' level.

> "We will use the term knowledgeability to refer to the complex relationships people establish with respect to a landscape of practice, which make them recognizable as reliable sources of information or legitimate providers of services."

Drawing on Wenger (1998), as Fenton-O'Creevy et al. discuss the notion of 'peripheral participation in an academic community of practice' is also relevant for part-time PhD students' doctoral journeys (2015 b). In this context, Teeuwsen, Ratkovie and Tilley (2012, p690) refer to Lave and Wenger (1991) in discussing how the "peripheral participation" of part-time doctoral students distances part-time doctoral students from core doctoral "communities of practice". Fenton-O'Creevy et al. (2015 b, p46) discuss the different levels of participation in an academic community by different students.

For instance, some students, such as part-time doctoral students may "engage superficially"; and other students, such as full-time doctoral students, have "a deeper commitment" to engaging in the academic community, which may affect students' learning development and sense of belonging to the community (Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2015 b, op. cit.). This is not through any fault of part-time doctoral students, but because they have too many competing roles and priorities outside doctoral study to engage as much as full-time students in such academic communities.

In summary, the reasons why this research has adopted the following conceptual lenses are as follows. Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'capital', 'disposition' and 'habitus' (1982, 1988) highlight ways in which part-time PhD students develop doctoral learning, academic confidence, and achievement. By adapting to their doctoral HE environment, structure or 'field', by acquiring the necessary 'educational' and 'social capital' in order to fit in, and by "playing the game", part-time PhD students can become successful (Bourdieu, 1977, p6). Wenger's 'Social Theory of Learning' (1998) and Etienne and Beverley Wenger Trayner's framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (2015) illuminate ways in which part-time PhD students develop agency, social and relational 'learning', 'meaning' making, academic 'competence' and 'knowledgeability', by engaging in varied relationships and communities throughout their doctoral journeys. Combining these conceptual lenses has helped to highlight elements of structure and agency relating to participants' experiences in the analysis stage of this research. However, to reiterate, the analysis has been inductive rather than deductive and it has not been based upon these conceptual lenses. Moreover, these conceptual lenses are suitable in that they are not overly specific in terms of doctoral students' stages of learning and development over time. Hence, they have illuminated unique aspects of individual participants' experiences.

This chapter has discussed literature in relation to variations in PhD students' experiences, particularly focusing on the variations between part-time and full-time students' experiences. It has also explored how Bourdieu's concepts of 'capital'. 'habitus', 'disposition' and 'field' (1982, 1988); Wenger's 'Social Theory of Learning' (1998); and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (2015) help inform analysis of part-time PhD students' experiences and journeys. The next chapter will focus on literature that discusses ways in which HE and doctoral education changed since the 1960s, and related discourses and ideologies that frame part-time PhD student experiences in changing times.

Chapter Two: Doctoral education in UK universities in changing times

This chapter focuses on literature relating to ways in which UK higher education has changed and was changing at the time of this research, looking back at the history of UK HE since the Robbins Committee in the 1960s, and how changes that have taken place contextualise the experiences of PhD students. In this context, themes identified as significant in relation to doctoral students' experiences include a discussion of the purpose of HE and how this has been debated since the post war period across UK HE. Political driving forces, factors and discourses driving change in HE related to neoliberalism (Rudd and Goodson, 2017) are discussed in this context and include: the rise in student fees in 2008, the notion of students as consumers, the employability agenda, the Higher Education and Research Act (Office for Students (OFS), 2017), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Ways in which these factors and discourses affect doctoral students are also discussed. In this context, this section begins by discussing Goodson and Rudd's concept of 'refraction' (2017, p191) and how this helps to contextualise part-time doctoral students' experiences in changing times. Rudd explains 'refraction' as follows:

> "Change in direction arising from individuals' and groups' own beliefs, practice and trajectories that are at odds with the dominant waves of reform and intended policy directions."
>
> (2017, p75)

As Goodson and Rudd argue, their 'Model of Refraction' (2017, p75) is "an attempt to represent the 'axes of refraction' in relation to UK waves of reform. The potential for (vertical) refraction occurs at any point in the interactions between structure and agency at the supra, macro, meso and micro and individual levels and may result in unintended consequences arising from reform (2017, p190)" An adapted version of this model is presented in the Discussion Chapter (Chapter Eight, p228) that presents doctoral education changes in universities as the 'meso level' and presents the individual experiences of staff and students as the 'micro level'. The model is completed in relation to what can be ascertained from literature reviewed in this section regarding UK HE and doctoral education changes since the 1960s until the present (at the time of this research); and according to findings from doctoral student and staff experiences. In this literature review and in the discussion chapter, this model, as Goodson and Rudd argue can "help generate deeper/contextualised insights

into the nature and trajectory of change" and where "a lack of historical memory can result in historical facts being ignored or distorted" (2017, p191).

(Please see Table 2 in Discussion Chapter, pp 221-222).

Changes in UK HE since the 1960s and how they relate to recent changes since the 1990s

Changes that have recently taken place in UK HE are an important contextual dimension of this research. In addition, looking back at the history of UK HE since the 1960s, it is useful to consider ways in which trends repeat themselves. The 1960s were a key period of change in modern UK HE, and which remain an important basis of change happening now. This was due to the Robbins Committee set up in 1961 and the following Robbins Report (1963), which heralded the growth of mass higher education. This report was an unprecedented step forward for HE in terms of a move away from elitism and towards providing a HE system that aimed to provide equal opportunities for all young people. While universities were not fully autonomous since the Universities Test Act (Legislation.gov.uk, 1871), the Robbins Report (1963) marked the beginning of an era when UK HE became less autonomous and more rigidly controlled by the state both in terms of funding provision and how it should be run. Following the recommendations of the Robbins Report (1963) that "courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and wish to do so (p.8)" there was a considerable growth in HE institutions and student numbers.

While seen positively by the public at the time, the large increase in UK HE provision and student numbers was unforeseen by the Robbins Committee and by the 1980s there was a funding crisis leading to a period of funding cuts, an interesting common feature in contemporary HE: "The nadir of government support for higher education was probably reached in the early 1980s…when a new government took over in 1979 with a determination to cut public expenditure, higher education was in a particularly vulnerable position (Tight, 2009, p75: Fulton, 1990, pp151-2)". Tight discusses how the 1981 White Paper (Department of Employment, 1981) refers to "efficiency savings, increased entrepreneurial activities, stronger institutional management and adoption of private sector practices (Tight, 2009, p76)". Interesting parallels may be drawn between these changes that took place in the 1980s and similar recent changes in HE. Throughout the 1980s this introduction of a more managerial approach to running UK HE and universities developed further linked to numerous reports and government legislation. For instance, in 1985 the Research Assessment

Exercise (RAE) was set up by the Universities General Council (UGC) to rationalise more selective research funding allocated to universities. Currently, government and institutional research funding has also become even more selective, for instance, through the 'Higher Education Research Act' (2017) and introduction of the 'Research and Enterprise' agenda. The 'Jarrett Report' (Jarrett, 1985) encouraged universities to adopt private-sector practices such as strategic planning and cost effectiveness. More recently, because of the recent rise in student fees, universities have acquired a dichotomous public and private identity. While they are now partially private-sector organisations, they still retain their status as charities and are still part of the public-sector, since they are regulated by the government and funded by government-backed loans, in contrast to most private-sector organisations. The 'Green Paper' (Department of Education and Skills, 1985), and 'White Paper' (Department of Education and Science, 1987) also pushed universities to form closer links with industry; and in 1987 the 'Enterprise in HE Initiative' encouraged universities to professionalise staff and students (Tight, 2009). One can see similarities to the employability agenda and the 'Research and Enterprise' agenda happening now in UK HE. In 1997, the Dearing Report, while reaffirming the widening participation values of Robbins, led even further towards the financialisation of HE by recommending the raising of student fees. Critics suggested that in the 1980s or 90s government measures did not work, so their current and future effectiveness is debatable.

> "A more critical evaluation would describe a system, mass in size but still elite in its values, crowded and underfunded, largely traditional in its pedagogy, with staff untrained in effective learning, senior management unskilled in introducing change and with too many of the pre-1992 universities espousing a culture unsympathetic to non-traditional groups."
>
> (Tight, 2009, p. 86: Coffield and Vignoles, 1997:5)

Influences of neoliberalist agendas on doctoral student experiences

Saad-Filho and Johnston (2005, p1) argue that "we live in the age of neoliberalism". The term 'neoliberalism' has often been used in relation to the changing landscape of HE since the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher's government (Hall, 2017); but it is important to define what neoliberalism means in that context. Thorsen and Lie critique an overuse of this term, which they argue is often ill defined and has different meanings (2006). Thorsen and Lie go on to define neoliberalism as follows:

> "Neoliberalism is, as we see it, a loosely demarcated set of political beliefs which most prominently and prototypically include the conviction that the only legitimate purpose of the state is to safeguard individual, especially commercial, liberty, as well as strong private property rights." (2006, p14)

Thorsen and Lie go on to argue that "Neoliberalism resembles the parallel phenomenon of 'neo-conservatism', which is not, either, a new form or recent revival of traditional conservatism, but rather a new and unique, and decidedly more uncompromising, set of political ideas" (2006, p16). With reference to the growth of neoliberalism in HE policies and agendas, many researchers have referred to recent changes in UK HE as a move away from the university ideal of the pursuit of knowledge described by Newman in 'The Idea of the University' (1852); and towards the marketised, financialised and managerialised university, which will be both financially worthwhile and useful for the UK economy and society (Hall, 2017). For instance, Hall (2017) argues that recent changes in twenty-first century UK HE are driven by contemporary worldwide capitalist agendas and policies related to neoliberalism, and 'Human Capital Theory'.

> "Those who work within the sector are faced down by global networks of policy makers, finance capital, the purveyors of educational services, alongside those working inside the sector who believe that there is no alternative." (Hall, 2017, p38)

The most significant recent change that has taken place in terms of the financialisation of universities and neoliberalism in the twenty-first century was the rise in student tuition fees and the introduction of student loans in 2012 following the 'Browne Review' (2010). The high nine-thousand-pound annual tuition fees that students started to pay meant that they saw themselves as consumers of the HE product, and that universities were becoming increasingly like businesses. Hall (2017, p29) argues that in current HE, "academics and students are subjected to increasing levels of intensity of labour, framed as excellence or entrepreneurialism, across their working lives". Major government driven HE changes that recently took place at the time of this literature review including the introduction of the 'Teaching Excellence Framework' first proposed in the recent Green Paper, 'Higher education: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice' (Gov.UK, 2015) were symptomatic of what Hall (2017, p30) describes as "the financialisation of both teaching and research" where the focus is on value for money for student consumers. For instance, the recent Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) has become increasingly important in ensuring that universities compete to attract new students and provide a high-quality teaching and learning experience for students and good value for money. However, as Rudd argues (2017), TEF may be

considered as a symbolic feature of HE neoliberalist values, discourse and culture in universities, which may fail to achieve the teaching excellence that it aspires to. In relation to the arguments around the determining forces of structure and the freedom of agency to make choices and resist such forces, as Rudd argues (2017), some universities, such as Oxford, do not need to enter the TEF, because they already have a high enough degree of prestige as an HE institution. Theoretically, as Rudd suggests, Oxford may be seen as an HE institution where "higher levels of ownership of symbolic capital may enable greater autonomy of choice and independence from other external pressures and coercive influences – such as those being introduced by the Higher Education and Research Act and TEF" (2017, p80). In contrast, many universities may not have achieved such high levels of symbolic capital. In this case, as Rudd points out, such universities may not have foreseen the danger that "their strategic decisions in responding to the new conditions may result in a loss of credibility and/or 'unique selling point', through neglect of their true assets, values and real capitals" (2017, p81).

The role of an employability agenda in contemporary doctoral education

Another aspect of recent HE change (at the time of this literature review) that is often cited as an example of neoliberal policy and practice is the growing importance of employability to students, universities, employers and the government (Edmond, 2017). Collini (2012) wrote about the growth and accessibility of higher education since the 1990s to a wider variety and greater number of students who are increasingly taking vocational degrees that will prepare them for a particular job. Because of the rise in student fees and the introduction of loans, that may be paid back throughout a student's lifetime, the urgency of looking for and finding employment after graduating has become of utmost importance to students (Edmond, 2017). This is also important for universities because of their aim to cater for students' needs and to provide value for money, and for the government because it wants the student loans to be repaid. This trend has led to what Edmond (2017, p78) describes as "discourses and practices associated with the employability agenda …aspects of what has been termed 'new vocationalism' in HE, including: the introduction of new types of work-based and work-related provision ranging from foundation degrees and work-based-learning degree programmes to professional doctorates which emphasize experiential learning."

While it is important for students to find employment after leaving university and they may aim towards this as an outcome of their degree, the more sinister side of the employability agenda should also be considered. As Edmond suggested (2017, p79), aspects of this are the trend for students to

gain work experience by working part-time alongside their degree and to work in unpaid internships. This is also true for PhD students as a recent ESRC call for funded Doctoral Training Programmes argues that three-month research employment in placements should become the expectation for all research students (United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI), 2022). As Edmond argues, the downside of part-time work alongside study is "the negative impact on study and study outcomes" (2017, p79) and "the commodification of experience as students pay twice for their higher education, firstly through fees and secondly through the voluntary contribution of their labour with payment in both cases justified as the future 'employable' self."

What do these HE and doctoral education changes mean for doctoral students?

In relation to doctoral education, the HE changes described above have also had a significant impact on doctoral education policy, regulation of research degree programmes, teaching and learning practices and doctoral students' experiences moving in the direction of "economic development" (Boud and Lee, 2009, p18). It is evident that, as Boud and Lee (2009, p11) describe, "Often change is driven by intensifying accountability requirements as governments increase scrutiny on matters such as time to completion, the distribution of candidature across key fields, the need to skill graduates in terms of employability indicators and so on." However, it is important to critique the values behind increased accountability in doctoral education since accountability is not necessarily what PhD students want. For instance, Leonard and Becker (2009, p78) found that part-time PhD students may not always want to focus on the extra training demands of the contemporary PhD that are not related to their specific PhD subject.

So far in this chapter the overarching context of change in HE, including doctoral education, and how this has been affected by discourses and ideologies, such as neoliberalism, marketisation and globalisation has been discussed. The following literature expands further on ways in which UK doctoral education has changed and is changing in recent times, which has helped to contextualise the findings of interviews with doctoral education directors presented in Chapter Seven. In this context, as outlined above, themes identified as significant in relation to doctoral students' experiences include a discussion of the purpose of HE, and how this has been debated since the post war period across UK HE. Political driving forces, factors and discourses driving change in HE related to neoliberalism have been discussed in this context and include: the rise in student fees in 2008, the notion of students as consumers, the employability agenda, the Higher Education and

Research Act (2017), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Ways in which these factors and discourses may affect doctoral students will now be discussed.

Research Councils United Kingdom (RCUK) (2015, p2) recently stated a requirement for universities to ensure that research students "benefit from the advantages of being developed as part of a broader peer group". The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2014, p11) suggested "an appropriate environment in which to do and learn about research may include…opportunities for research students to develop peer support networks where issues or problems can be discussed informally." Metcalfe (2006, p81) suggests that such skills should include: "the ability to build relationships and interact with colleagues, communication skills, and cultural and strategic thinking." It is argued that all these skills may be developed by doctoral students participating in a peer 'community of practice' (Shacham and Od-Cohen, 2009). However, for PhD students, employability and participating in 'communities of practice' may not always be their agenda.

Due to government objectives that aim for higher doctoral student completion rates in UK universities (Economic and Social Research Council, ESRC, 2009) students are now obliged to engage in formal doctoral training. Students often belong to a doctoral college or graduate school and are obliged to attend and complete research training modules, to attend regular progress meetings, and present work at events and conferences on a regular basis. They often have a team of supervisors, keep a record of supervision meetings and agreed action plans. This is reflected by what Boud and Lee refer to as the tension between the traditional academic role of the PhD to inquire deeply into a phenomenon and produce new knowledge; and government agendas pushing universities, doctoral education and PhD students in the direction of accountability, performativity and 'work ready' citizens (2009, p18). In relation to doctoral students, as Boud and Lee argue (2009, p11), "the pressure is on to produce not just a successful doctoral thesis as evidence of the achievement of an original contribution to knowledge in a field, but also graduates who are work-ready and knowledgeable about research policy, including such matters as intellectual property and commercialisation."

The changing nature of doctoral supervision

Much previous research has found that the supervisory relationship is crucial to PhD students' successful doctoral experience and completion (Pyhältö et al., 2009; Shacham and Od-Cohen, 2009;

Kiley, 2009; Gardner, 2010; Parker, 2009; Kiley and Wisker, 2009). However, traditional supervisory relationships with doctoral students have also changed and are changing. In contrast to the traditional master-apprentice model that previously existed, in most universities current practice means that students have a team of supervisors. Boud and Lee (2009, p22) cite Green (2005) in defining contemporary doctoral education as "eco-social". Similarly, Trowler discusses how supervision is moving from "individualistic" towards a more "social practice" (2022, p. 1743). In this context, they describe a current paradigm shift that is moving away from this traditional partnership between supervisors and students, where "the iconic student-supervisor relationship is subsumed into a diverse matrix of opportunities, resources, monitoring processes and expectations" (Boud and Lee, 2009, p22: Green, 2005). In this context, for instance, Boud and Lee (2007) suggest a more holistic approach to doctoral pedagogy that includes both supervision and the research environment, encompassing the concept of 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Pyhalto and Lonka (2009) also maintain that doctoral student engagement with peer learning communities convened by supervisors promotes reflective and deep rather than surface learning; and suggests that universities should develop strategies to encourage these practices to positively influence student retention. These ideas were put into practice by Stracke (2010) who set up a peer learning community for her supervisees each fortnight, but which was largely led by the students. Stracke's own reflections and research into her students' experiences (2010, p7) showed that the peer group helped to establish a more "equal power relationship" between supervisors and students; helped supervisors and students to gain "a deeper understanding of the PhD process" and reduce students' sense of "isolation". In this context, Brew and Peseta proposed, a "student-focused' approach to supervision that takes account of students" diverse and individual needs, and which comprises "a view of supervision as negotiation' where supervision becomes a co-constructed relationship and process that enables the student voice to be heard" (2009, p135). Other forms of PhD student involvement with peer learning communities may be less formal. Gregoric and Wilson (2012) found that informal peer mentoring of PhD students both face-to-face and online at regular points throughout the PhD journey provided key emotional and career support for mentees. Communicating online with peers is an alternative way of engaging in learning communities, which can be beneficial. For instance, Wisker, Robinson and Shacham (2007) set up an online web resource and 'community of practice' for international distance-learning PhD students. Supportive PhD student participation in learning communities may also be contextualised within one disciplinary field or several disciplines. Shacham and Od-Cohen (2009) found that an interdisciplinary 'community of practice', comprising both face-to-face and online components, was effective in supporting PhD students in coping with transition, developing professional interpersonal skills;

counteracting isolation; increasing motivation and confidence; and developing critical thinking skills.

PhD student diversity and its perceived implications for changes in doctoral policy and practice

Worldwide and in the UK, the doctoral student population has been changing over the past few decades. For instance, in 2009 according to Tennant (2009) the proportion of international, women, mature and part-time doctoral students had increased worldwide. Recent Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) statistics showed that in 2017 across the UK there were 113,175 research students, of whom 25 percent were part-time (HESA, 2017). Moreover, between 2006/7 and 2015/16 the number of part-time students studying for postgraduate degrees increased by 5.3% (Universities UK, 2017). The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2016) suggested that a substantial increase in part-time research postgraduate students in UK HE may have been due to the downturn in the economic climate and students' need to become better qualified and hence employable. This increasing diversity in the population of doctoral students was originally welcomed by the HE sector both in the UK and worldwide in order to widen participation and attract more PhD students and hence more income for universities (Tennant, 2009; Thomas, 2013). However, Tennant (2009) refers to Douglas (1992) in suggesting that a more diverse PhD population became associated with increased risk in the eyes of the global HE sector, and that governments and universities then created strategies and policies to mitigate against these risks.

In this context, Lunt, McAlpine and Mills refer to ESRC (1996) in discussing how a key risk that developed in the eyes of universities and governments over recent decades was the danger of doctoral student non-completion (2014). This relates to ways in which some PhD student groups are perceived, including part-time PhD students. For instance, McWilliam (2009) discussed how "Categories like mature-aged, part-time, international, …are examples of aggregates that are applied to doctoral candidacy and that do a particular kind of work in framing students as more or less problematic" (p190). In Europe, this type of risk assessment led to the need for the governments and universities to manage and monitor doctoral students' progress more closely, for instance through the growth of doctoral training centres, graduate schools or doctoral colleges (Bitusikova, 2009; Lunt et al., 2014).

However, it is important to critique the values behind increased accountability in doctoral education since accountability is not necessarily what PhD students want. For instance, Leonard and Becker

(2009, p78) found that part-time PhD students may not always want to focus on the extra training demands of the contemporary PhD that are not related to their specific PhD subject. In relation to part-time PhD students' experiences in UK universities in changing times and how ideologies, such as neoliberalism, may contextualise their experiences, some answers to research questions outlined at the end of this chapter emerge from the following findings chapters from interviews with students and doctoral education directors (Chapters Four - Seven).

This chapter has discussed literature relating to ways in which UK higher education has changed and is changing in recent times, and how such changes contextualise the experiences of contemporary PhD students. I have discussed how political driving forces, factors and discourses driving change in HE and doctoral education that influence PhD and part-time PhD students relate to neoliberalism. These include the rise in student fees, the introduction of student loans, the notion of students as consumers, the employability agenda, the Higher Education and Research Act (2017), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), and the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Informed by the literature I have explored how discourses of managerialism, financialisation and consumerism have changed HE since the 1960s, and doctoral education, with some adverse, and some more beneficial consequences for doctoral students, including part-time PhD students. Chapters One and Two have informed the following research questions, and the methodology for this research, which is presented in Chapter Three.

Research Questions

Main question

1. What are the influences of academic, professional and personal relationships and life events on the learning experiences and journeys of part-time PhD students in UK universities in changing times?

Sub questions

2. What are part-time PhD students' perceptions and experiences of ways in which life events and academic, professional and personal relationships influence:

    a) their learning development?
    b) their learning engagement?
    c) their academic confidence?

d) belonging to academic communities and environments within and outside their university?
e) their achievement?

3. What are doctoral education directors' perceptions and experiences of: doctoral education changes in UK universities, and ways in which these changes influence PhD students' experiences?

4. What are the contextual ideologies and factors that frame part-time PhD students' experiences in UK universities in changing times?

Chapter Three: A narrative inquiry methodology to explore part-time PhD student journeys

This chapter describes and explains this study's narrative methodological approach; ontological and epistemological positions; research methods; and necessary ethical considerations. The following sections will now be discussed: 1. A broad narrative methodological approach; 2. How Deweyian Pragmatism relates to this PhD study; 3. The relationship between Dewey's Theory of Experience and Social Construction in this study; 4. Narrative Inquiry; 5. Methods; 6. Ethics; and 7; Conclusion.

A broad narrative methodological approach

This research has adopted a Deweyian Pragmatic ontology (Dewey, 1938), a Social Constructionist epistemology (Gergen, 2009; Burr, 2006) and a qualitative Narrative Inquiry methodology (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). Reasons for choosing these philosophical and methodological approaches and ways in which they relate to each other will be explained in greater depth in the following sections of this chapter. However, in summary, Narrative Inquiry was suitable to provide rich insights into the complex and sensitive factors that are associated with the unique experiences of individual PhD students (Legard et al., 2003; Lewis, 2003). Moreover, this methodology was relevant to explore the relationship between life and learning development of PhD students, which is an important focus of this study (McAdams and Logan, 2006). As part of this overarching narrative inquiry, a variety of semi-structured narrative interviews with students, semi-structured in-depth interviews with doctoral college directors, and self-reflective methods were adopted. Each method was suitable for different purposes in this research and to address different research questions. This will be discussed at greater length below in relation to data collection and analysis. As Gergen argues while empirical quantitative research strives to statistically measure, it cannot reflect "the cultural traditions of which they (research participants) are a part" (2009, p58). Gergen also comments on statistics that "while useful in certain respects, this translation device (quantitative research) also throws out most of what we hold to be valuable or significant about people (2009, p60)" and in this research what is significant about people is what is important.

How Deweyian Pragmatism relates to this PhD study

This research has adopted John Dewey's 'Theory of Experience' (1938) as a Pragmatic ontological position and in so doing has followed the example of other narrative research studies, which will be discussed in greater depth below. Pragmatism, first founded by Charles Pierce (1905), argues that human beings are in a continuing state of inquiry based on experience, that experience is influenced by subjective perceptions and objective structures, and that people may be perceived as active participants in their lives and realities who may bring about change (Misak, 2007; Bacon, 2012). In this context, Pragmatism rejects Positivist notions of reality as external to the individual and purely based on facts that are objectively deduced; and it rejects Relativist notions that reality is wholly subjective and only exists within the mind of individuals (Bacon, 2012). In terms of research, Pragmatists are defined as "creative beings employing language and using knowledge to open up possibilities, some of which could be realised (Delanty and Strydom, 2003, p278)". John Dewey (1859-1952), a key twentieth century Pragmatist, argues that theory and practice should be combined in social science research and that research should have an objective that may be acted upon (Dewey, 1938; Bacon, 2012). Pragmatism has often been adopted in Social Science research studies that combine methods, and that have a relationship with practice (Snape and Spencer, 2003; Greene, 1994). This PhD research is related to practice in the following ways. Firstly, a key objective of this study exploring the learning journeys of part-time PhD students is that the research should contribute to universities' understanding of the experiences of part-time PhD students. This will inform university policies and practices in working with and supporting part-time PhD students. Secondly, this research relates to PhD students' learning journeys, doctoral researchers' development as practitioners, and it is also informed by the framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015), which is discussed in the literature review. Thirdly, reflecting on my own journey as a PhD student, I have found that engaging in PhD study enhances my research practice. In terms of combining methods, while this PhD has taken a broad narrative inquiry approach, it has combined three types of qualitative data collection methods including narrative life-story interviews with students, in-depth interviews with doctoral education directors and self-reflection on my own journey.

Dewey's Pragmatic ontology, based on his 'Theory of Experience' (1938), was considered appropriate for the narrative methodology adopted in this PhD study for the following additional

reasons. Firstly, Dewey proposes that learning and education are based on human experience and that each person's experiences build on their earlier experiences influencing their learning and knowledge development over time (1938). In this context, Dewey (1938) proposes three key criteria for learning based on experience to take place. These include: 1. "the experiential continuum", the notion that each new experience is influenced by earlier experiences as described above; 2. "interaction" meaning the relationship between "objective and internal conditions" in influencing human experience and, hence, the importance of social and cultural factors; 3. "situation", or the "environment" which is produced because of the interaction between "objective and internal conditions" (Dewey, 1938, pp33-50). This PhD is about part-time doctoral students' learning journeys over several years and the influences of relationships and life events on their learning journeys in HE in changing times. Hence, Dewey's criteria of building up knowledge and learning based on experience over time, the interaction of self and others during that process, and the influence of environment on their learning is argued to be a relevant philosophical position for this study.

Furthermore, because this research adopted narrative inquiry as a methodological approach, it was appropriate to follow the example of other narrative researchers who adopted a Deweyian ontological position based on Dewey's 'Theory of Experience' (1938). Clandenin and Rosiek (2007) offer a useful interpretation of how Dewey's criteria of experience in relation to narrative research, that this PhD research has drawn on. They translate Dewey's criteria as: 1. "temporality" relating to the aspect of continuing time from past to future in narrative research; 2. "continuity", which relates to the continuous nature of experience in narrative; and 3. The "social dimension of our inquiries" and how these affect research participants' lives and environment (2007, pp 39-41). Other narrative researchers also adopted a Deweyian 'Theory of Experience' as their ontological position. For instance, Silko (1997) suggests that Narrative researchers influence and are influenced by the landscape that they are researching and are not outside it as mere observers. Hutchinson (2015) adopted a Deweyian lens (1938) to help conceptualise his own autoethnographic experiences as a teacher. Chan (2013) discusses how she adopted Dewey's 'Criteria of Experience' (1938) in theorising her research into the narratives of nursing practitioners and the role of relationships between herself and the participants in the research process. These examples have helped to inform the narrative interviews in this PhD study.

The relationship between Dewey's 'Theory of Experience' and Social Construction in this study

It is now important to explain why this narrative research study adopted a Social Constructionist epistemological position; and how Social Construction relates to a Deweyian 'Theory of Experience' in relation to this study. One of the criteria in Dewey's 'Theory of Experience' relates to ways in which social interaction frames human experience (Dewey, 1938; Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). This social interaction aspect of Dewey's 'Theory of Experience' is also relevant to the relationship between the researcher and participant that is characteristic of Social Construction, as described above, in relation to Chan's narrative study (2013). Narrative research is described as a socially constructed process between researcher and research participant, where the power to construct narrative both in the interview, analysis and interpretation is shared and negotiated between the researcher and participant (Burr, 2006; Gergen, 2009). Hence, it was appropriate for this PhD research to adopt a Deweyian ontology and a broadly Social Constuctionist epistemological position where truth could be discovered through meaning making and language which was socially constructed through human interaction (Burr, 2006; Gergen, 2009). In this context, this research also followed Gergen's argument concerning the importance of the tradition of sense making in relation to linguistic and cultural concepts that contribute towards human beings' socially constructed realities (2009). This research has taken a broadly socially constructed epistemological approach, where analysis and themes have emerged from and were based on the data. However, Bourdieu's concepts of 'capital', 'habitus', 'disposition' and 'field' (1982, 1988); Wenger's 'Social Theory of Learning' (1998); and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' have helped to inform the later stages of analysis. In this study, the freedom and agency of the research participants in constructing their own narratives were important and this argument is supported by Burr in relation to Social Construction.

> "Narrative and relational views of the person seem relatively easy to align with personal agency. Although our own narratives may be to some degree moulded by cultural narrative form and content, we are nevertheless the authors of our own stories."
> (Burr, 2006, p169)

Narrative inquiry as a methodology for this study

Rationale for adopting narrative inquiry.

As discussed above, narrative inquiry has provided deep insights into part-time PhD students' unique experiences (Legard et al., 2003; Lewis, 2003). In relation to Deweyian Pragmatism and Social Construction of knowledge, narrative research has also provided research participants with a voice and a sense of agency, with which they could be empowered (Burr, 2006). This is supported by Gergen's argument that narrative research "often attempts to give voice to the unheard or marginalized in society" and allows research participants to reflect on their life histories "in their own terms" (2009, p66). Empowering participants' unique voices was important in this study since this research focused on PhD research participants who were from diverse and minority backgrounds in terms of age group, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic background and disability status (Thomas, 2013). This is discussed in greater depth in the Literature Review.

Another justification for choosing a narrative inquiry approach was because it has also been adopted to explore the experiences of PhD students in other studies. For instance, Cumming (2007) adopted an overarching mixed-methods approach, which included two stage narrative interviews with 62 doctoral students as the primary method in his PhD: 'Representing the complexity, diversity and particularity of the doctoral enterprise in Australia.' This enabled him to develop ten case narratives across disciplines in one institution that convey "the doctoral enterprise from multiple perspectives (2007, p32)". Although Cumming adopted narrative interviewing methods, he took a structured approach to interviews that comprised specific thematic questions based on a pre-conceived theoretical framework (Lewis, 2003; Miles and Huberman, 1994). This PhD research on the other hand has adopted a more open-ended and inductive approach in narrative interviews, and questions were not based on a theoretical framework (Snape and Spencer, 2003). It is argued that an open-ended and inductive approach to interviewing was appropriate in this PhD because it allowed the individual voices of the participants to be heard and expressed, it empowered the participants rather than me as interviewer, and it enabled participants to determine what they thought was important in the interviews. This point links back to the importance of enabling participants' agency in research, which is supported by the Deweyian ontological and Social Constructionist epistemological positions of this study (Dewey, 1938; Burr, 2006; Gergen, 2009). Interview methods will be discussed at greater length in the data collection section in this chapter.

Another study where narrative interviews were adopted to explore doctoral student experiences is 'Doctoral Learning Journeys' (Wisker et al., 2010). This study took a mixed-methods approach including a survey and three stage narrative interviews and student journals with students and supervisors over a period of two and a half years to explore doctoral students' learning experiences over time across institutions and disciplines underpinned by the theory of 'Conceptual Thresholds' (Wisker et al., 2010). While the longitudinal narrative approach taken in this study is one way of tracing the development of doctoral student journeys, this PhD study adopted a more retrospective life-story narrative interviewing approach explained at further length below (McAdams, 1990; Atkinson, 1998). While 'Doctoral Learning Journeys' (Wisker et al., 2010) included interviews with supervisors in addition to students to gain an understanding of doctoral learning journeys, this research did not include interviews with supervisors in this PhD study for the following reasons. Firstly, this is because of the Social-Constructionist epistemological and Deweyian Pragmatic ontological positions of this PhD, where the student participants were understood as free agents. Therefore, their doctoral student voices were empowered, rather than overwhelmed by the voice of the supervisors. Secondly, this research partly related to ways in which a variety of academic, professional, and personal relationships influence part-time PhD students' learning journeys. Hence, interviewing supervisors, and thereby assuming supervisory relationships were of primary importance in influencing the doctoral journey, may have biased the research findings.

The role of exploring the HE context in framing part-time PhD students' experiences

This research has explored part-time PhD students' learning journeys in changing times in UK HE (see Literature Review); and one of the research questions in this study specifically relates to the role of the HE context in framing students' experiences (please see Research Question 4). The importance of gaining insights into the context of participants' experiences in research is supported by the Social Constructionist and Deweyian ontological positions taken in this study, where history, society and culture are argued to be important elements in framing and influencing people's experiences and realities (Dewey, 1938; Gergen, 2009; Burr, 2006). For instance, King and Horrocks describe how the language expressed through narrative relates to overarching socio-historical discourses (2010, p215). Exploring individual students' narratives in their historical and societal context is also supported by Stephens and Trahar (2012, p61). Goodson (1992) also discusses the importance of exploring historical context in narrative research, in order that narrative

research should be credible and meaningful. Hence, the historical context for participants' experiences was explored in this PhD research providing a wider narrative that linked each student story together. This wider narrative was explored in three different ways, firstly, through in-depth interviews with doctoral college directors in different institutional and disciplinary contexts; secondly, through narrative interviews with PhD students in different institutional and disciplinary contexts and thirdly, through self-reflection on my own experiences. Data-collection methods will be explained at greater length below.

How students' development of belonging and academic confidence relates to this narrative inquiry

This narrative inquiry into part-time PhD students' experiences over time and how their learning, belonging and academic confidence developed in this context, was informed by Anderson and Williams' argument (2001) that the exploration of changing sense of self entails inquiring into a research participant's socio-political context. This enables researchers to gain insights into ways in which participants perceive this context and how it influences them (Anderson and Williams, 2001). In researching part-time PhD students' changing experiences and journeys over time, as Anderson and Williams argue, it was also important to consider that students' sense of self, belonging and confidence were subject to breakdown and change (2001). When exploring the experiences of PhD students in universities in this study it was important to consider the notion of university discourses and how these influenced changing doctoral students' belonging and academic confidence. In support of this point, Anderson and Williams refer to Foucault (1980) in their argument that "discourses are the justifications used to perpetuate particular ways of organizing activities, visible in language forms but also perpetuated through social practices and embedded in institutional structures" (2001, p7). In researching PhD students' learning journeys adopting a narrative inquiry approach, this study followed Bruner (1986) and McAdams (1985, 1993) in adopting a life-story interview method that was appropriate to help illuminate the interaction of learning and life, and aspects of participants' developing learning, belonging, confidence and achievement over time.

Methods

Data Collection

This narrative inquiry consisted of two strands and incorporated the following data collection methods including:

1. Interviews:
    a. Open ended semi-structured long narrative interviews (up to two hours) with part-time PhD students who were interviewed once in 2018 followed up with further interviews, communication, and discussion as part of the socially constructed process. I conducted the first interviews with fifteen participants in 2018 and interviewed six of those participants a second time between 2019-2021.
    b. Open ended semi-structured interviews (of approximately one hour) with doctoral college or school directors who were interviewed once in 2017/2018 and followed up with second interviews with two participants in 2018/2019, as part of the socially constructed interview process
2. A self-reflective overview of my own experiences as a part-time PhD student, that informs Chapter Five in my thesis.

Interviews

Up to fifteen part-time PhD students and three doctoral college directors were interviewed across two different universities, which included one vocational (post-1992) and one research intensive (pre-1992) university (Universities of A and B). Permission was granted to conduct interviews with staff and students at Universities A and B. There are a large variety of other types of university that exist in contemporary UK HE (please see Literature Review), but the aim of interviewing in two different HE contexts was to enhance variety in data collection, not to represent all UK university types. Most interviews were recorded and conducted face-to-face, except two students who were interviewed by SKYPE during the first stage of interviews, and three second stage interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams during 2021. All in-person interviews took place on university premises, and all interviews took place in a private and quiet location at a time and date, which was most convenient for each participant. Refreshments were provided during face-to-face interviews.

Ethical procedures were carefully considered and followed (Please see the section below on ethics). Interviewing methods will now be discussed at greater length.

Narrative interviews to explore part-time PhD students' learning journeys

As this research relates specifically to part-time students' PhD learning journeys over several years and within the context of recent changes in HE, a narrative interviewing approach was adopted during student interviews and analysis. In this context, it was important to consider in these interviews the wider narrative of HE changes in recent decades and how these have influenced part-time PhD students' experiences (See Research Question 4). Reasons why this was important were discussed in an earlier section of this chapter. Taking a narrative approach in interviews also allowed the voices of individual participants to be heard in this study, which was established in the Literature Review and in earlier studies as crucial in relation to the experiences of marginalised and minority PhD students (Gergen, 2009; Stephens, 2009). Some of the additional epistemological and methodological reasons for taking a narrative approach have been explained above in greater depth. Students were interviewed at different stages of their PhDs to gain an understanding of their diverse experiences in the context of different stages. Six student participants were interviewed twice to gain a particularly rich and detailed picture of a group of such students' unfolding narratives over time and these narratives have contributed to a chapter comprising case studies relating to the influences of life events and relationships on part-time PhD student journeys (Chapter Four). In all narrative interviews, participants retrospectively told the stories of their PhD journeys over time. This was appropriate to answer all research questions that relate to exploring part-time PhD students' learning journeys (Questions 1-4).

There are different ways of conducting narrative interviews. In this context, King and Horrocks refer to various narrative interviewing methods. These include 1., Biographic-Narrative-Interpretative Method (Wengraf and Chamberlayne, 2001), 2., Free Association Narrative Interviewing (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008) and 3., McAdams' Life Story Interview (1993). Among these approaches, McAdams' life story interview approach was adopted for this research as it was both flexible and practical (McAdams, 1993, 1995). Following McAdams' life story approach, I conducted long interviews of up to 2 hours with each participant, with a gap between two parts of the interview. Taking this approach, during the first part of the interview I posed one initial question. In this context, King and Horrocks (2010, p225) refer to McAdams (1993) in explaining that "Interviewees

are asked to structure their life story as if it were a book, with distinct chapters, identified at the start of the interview, thus providing a general outline." This part of the interview was structured by the interviewees, who were in control of what was said. Hence, the interviewees told their stories focusing on chapters of their choice. As McAdams (1993) suggests, in the interviews I conducted, the first part of the interview was no more than one hour in length. During the second part of the interview, which took place on the same day, I asked the participants to tell me about … "key events (nuclear episodes) … invaluable in understanding what motivates people, giving insight into personality and identity" (McAdams, 1993, cited by King and Horrocks, 2010, p225; McAdams, 1995). (Please see Appendix 1.) In addition, this research adopted aspects of the BNIM (Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method) approach that were helpful in relation to the six narrative case studies presented in Chapter Four. In these cases, the first long narrative interviews in two parts were followed up with a second interview at least one year later to cover additional aspects relating to the research not covered in the initial interviews, and to explore what changes and life events had taken place in participants' doctoral journeys over time.

In relation to this interview approach, it is important to point out that the questions in this research were open-ended to allow "the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than to explain (Fontana and Fray, 1994, p366)." The interviews were interactive in that the researcher (myself) naturally responded to the participants and adopted probing questions to find out more about participants' experiences. In this context, it was important to ensure that the interviews were a collaborative and socially constructed process (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p111). In this context, the interviewer (myself) interrupted as little as possible, and only interrupted to encourage the participants to tell me more about their own stories and episodes if necessary. In this context of the narrative interview, Atkinson explains that the researcher is the "guide for the journey the two of you are embarking on" and that "to be the best listener possible is your primary objective as a life story interviewer "(1998, p33). This is important in demonstrating the compatibility of this approach with the ideas of Social Construction, where the power was distributed between myself as researcher and the participants (Burr, 2006; Gergen,2009).

In-depth interviews with doctoral college directors

Individual in-depth semi-structured interviews of approximately one hour in length with three doctoral college directors in 2017/18 were suitable to explore staff perspectives on doctoral

education in their own university contexts, how this has changed, and how this has influenced part-time PhD students' doctoral learning experiences (Ritchie, 2003). Two staff participants in the two universities were interviewed a second time in 2018/19. As previously explained, these interviews were helpful to generate insights into the changing context of doctoral education that has informed the wider narrative that is part of this research. For instance, as Ritchie argues, individual in-depth interviews are appropriate to gain deep insights into "the personal context within which the research phenomena are located, and for very detailed subject coverage…well suited to research that requires an understanding of deeply rooted or delicate phenomena." (2003, p36). As a pedagogic researcher in the field of HE, I previously found in-depth interviews effective to explore student and academic staff experiences relating to HE learning, teaching and assessment. For instance, I adopted individual in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of international PhD students and supervisors in cross-cultural supervision (Wisker, Robinson and Jones, 2011), and hence this helped to inform my decision to conduct in-depth interviews with doctoral college directors in this PhD study.

As with the narrative interviews with PhD students, described above, in-depth interviewing techniques with doctoral college or school directors encouraged a discursive and flowing conversation, appropriate during socially constructed individual interviews, as this helped to elicit open and natural responses from participants (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). Although an interview topic guide was adopted that drew on the Literature Review regarding the changing doctoral education context, questions were worded so that they were as general as possible. This was important to ensure that participants' responses were not overly biased by a pre-conceived thematic framework (Ritchie, 2003). This way of interviewing was also appropriate according to the Social-Constructionist epistemological position of this study, where participants' voices were empowered rather than over-powered by me as researcher during the interview process (Burr, 2006; Gergen, 2009). Hence, based on an interview topic guide (Appendix 2), the interviews incorporated a limited number of general open-ended questions to encourage open and rich responses from participants regarding their perceptions and experiences focusing on doctoral education in their university contexts. Following up these initial open-ended questions, the interviews also included probing questions to elicit more detailed responses and additional information, clarification, and explanation from participants when necessary (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003).

Interview Sampling

The sample population included academic staff and PhD students at Universities of A and B. These universities are two varied Higher Education contexts, but they are not meant to represent different university types (please see section on Data Collection). A profile of the two universities is provided below.

University A

University A focuses on delivering practice-based, creative, and professional courses (The Complete University Guide, 2018). Several local colleges and a polytechnic merged during the 1970s and University A was granted university status in 1992 through the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). Following this the University now has a medical school, works in partnership with local Further Education colleges, and hosts an International College. There are more than 20,000 students, and of the postgraduates a large proportion are part-time students. In 2016/17, approximately one third were full-time and two thirds were part-time (Complete University Guide, 2018). At the time of the research, the University had a doctoral college/graduate school (Times Higher Education, 2018) with centres based on each campus. It is also a member of a Doctoral Training Partnership. According to the REF 2014, at the time of this research the University was increasing its research profile in terms of ranking, impact and output in relation to other UK universities.

University B

University B is a pre-1992 research-intensive UK University granted university status in 1950s and is a member of the Russell Group (Times Higher Education, 2018). It is considered a new civic university (Tight, 2009; Collini, 2012). Its status as a research focused university is long established and it receives a high income from research grants (University B, 2018). In a recent Research Excellence Framework (REF, 2014) the university was ranked highly for research intensity, volume, and quality of research in the UK. It was also ranked highly for research output and research impact (REF, 2014). It has more than 25,000 students of whom 70% are undergraduate and 30% postgraduate (Complete University Guide, 2018). It has a graduate school and is a member of a doctoral training partnership with other local universities. In 2016/17 among the postgraduate students studying at the university approximately 80% were full-time and 20% part-time (Complete

University Guide, 2018).

Non-probability opportunistic sampling was adopted for interviews with students in this research which may be explained as follows:

> "Taking advantage of unforeseen opportunities as they arise during the course of fieldwork, adopting a flexible approach to meld the sample around the fieldwork context as it unfolds." (Ritchie et al., 2003, p81),

Squire (2013) describes how this opportunistic approach is usually taken in narrative inquiry adopting life-story interviewing. However, a purposive sampling approach (Ritchie et al., 2003) that involves inviting specific staff members to participate was taken in relation to in-depth interviews with doctoral college directors because they are a small group of people. The research sample itself only included doctoral college or school directors and part-time PhD students. Hence, participants "reflect particular features of groups within the sampled population" (Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam, 2003, p78), but were self-selecting. This means that I as researcher invited all appropriate participants to take part by email invitation and participants were free to respond to email invitations to take part in the research if they wished. In this context, while the sample was "criterion based" (Ritchie et al., 2003, p78), the sample was also "heterogenous" (Ritchie et al., 2003, p79) reflecting the wide variety of individual participants' backgrounds and unique experiences that are characteristic of Narrative Inquiry. Nevertheless, as Ritchie et al. suggest, the research sample enabled the exploration of key themes that related to the experiences of all participants to answer the research questions (2003, p79).

Interview participants

In-depth interviews:

Three participants included key academic staff at Universities A and B. Such participants included Doctoral College or School Directors, who were able to provide an overview of doctoral education at each university and how it has changed in recent decades, and how this related to the experiences of part-time PhD students. Although my aim was to interview one member of staff in each institution, I interviewed one additional staff participant in University A, to add to the diversity of staff perspectives. Although I originally aimed to conduct one phase of staff interviews, I decided

to conduct a second phase of staff interviews with participants in universities A and B to gain an understanding of changes, which took place between 2017/18 and 2018/19 in both institutions from a staff perspective. This helped add to the contextual narrative of changing times in the two UK universities, and fitted well with the Narrative Inquiry methodological approach I took. This was helpful because many changes took place in doctoral education prior to the interviews, which were discussed in Chapter Two.

Narrative interviews

Fifteen part-time PhD students participated in narrative interviews across two universities (seven in University A and six in University B). In relation to the sample size for narrative interviews, Clandennin and Connelly (2000) suggest a small sample of one or more participants to gain rich and in-depth narrative accounts. Although, I conducted narrative interviews with fifteen student participants altogether, I interviewed six of these participants twice to gain a narrative account of their journeys over time (two to three years), which formed the basis of the six case studies presented in Chapter Four. For the purposes of narrative research, a sample of six participants has often been adopted by educational researchers including Subedi (2021), Endo et al. (2010), Leitch (2006), Johnson (2002), Bahrami (2019) and Kelly (2007). I interviewed students from different broad disciplinary fields including Arts, Science, Applied Science and Social Science. While these fields were based on Gardner's work (2009, 2010) and her combination of Biglan's (1973) and Becher's (1994) conceptual framework in relation to disciplinary differences and research cultures, this study has not aimed to represent such disciplines or students belonging to these disciplines as groups, but rather to reflect the diversity of student experiences in different disciplines.

Recruitment

In 2018 invitation emails were circulated to doctoral education directors (at University A and at University B) across disciplines to take part in interviews. Three staff participants were interviewed. Please see the section on interviews for a further explanation. As a parallel process, emails were circulated to up to all part-time PhD students across the two universities in particular schools and faculties and across a range of disciplines including Applied Social Science, Arts/Humanities, and Science to ask them to participate in Narrative interviews. I also posted a blog on the University website at one institution about my own experiences to help me recruit participants. Fifteen students were interviewed across disciplines and universities. I approached participants as a PhD student,

rather than a staff member, to establish trust and that participants should not feel that I was conducting the research from a position of power. Invitation emails explained the possible benefits of taking part in the research. Information sheets were sent with these invitation emails and participants were advised that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time. If participants wished to know more about the research, I offered to phone them if they wished or meet them (before interviews) to answer any questions, which was helpful in establishing trust. During interviews, I asked participants if they would be interested in taking part in a second interview, and most agreed to this. Hence, I approached six participants following the first interviews to participate in the second interviews after one year. For the second stage of interviews, three participants were interviewed in University A in 2019 and three participants were interviewed in University B in 2021. These included three women and three men, of varied age groups three of whom were under 45 and three were over 45, three of whom were studying in University A, and three of whom were studying in university B. The participants were at different stages of their journeys, some in the early stages and some were at the point of completing their PhDs. This ensured that the sample for the six case studies was heterogenous and included a range of students from different backgrounds, experiences, and voices across the two universities.

A self-reflective chapter to consider my own position and experiences.

This self-reflective chapter focuses on:

- A retrospective overview of my own part-time PhD journey
- Varied self-reflective analysis of data that included self-reflective writing, supervision notes, logs, and recorded interviews about my own PhD journey that other colleagues conducted.

The reasons for including a self-reflective element in this study were as follows. Epistemologically, this research has adopted a Social Constructionist perspective. In this context, I argue that my own experience and background as a mature white female part-time PhD student who was part of the community that I was researching should be acknowledged within this study (Gergen, 2009). This has helped to compensate for what Fine describes as “othering” in qualitative research where the researcher’s objectification of research participants can lead to not truly representing the participants’ voice, but also not honestly representing the co-construction of the research dialogue that occurs between the research participants and the researcher (1994, p75). This has been described

as particularly important in narrative research where the voices of the participants are as truly represented as possible. With reference to narrative research Sikes (2012) for instance describes how it was ethically important for her to include an autobiographical (self-reflective) element in her narrative research so that "if we make any sort of truth claims there is a responsibility to be honest about the routes we have taken to arrive at them" (Sikes, 2012, p127). Dwyer and Buckle (2009) also discuss how, to represent participants' voices as accurately as possible, reflexivity is particularly important when the research is an insider researcher within their own community, which it was, since I was a part-time PhD student. Sikes (2012) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also describe how auto-ethnography or reflexivity can be a good starting point for narrative research, which was also true in my experience, since reflecting on my own experience has helped inform themes within this study.

I will now explain what I understand by self-reflection. Self-reflection may be described as a form of autobiographical research that links past with present, and places the researcher's own autobiographical data, or self-narrative, constructed from his or her memories, within the socio-cultural context of the contemporary world and in relation to the community of which the researcher is a part (Allen-Collinson, 2013, p283). In this context, I followed the suggestion of Chang that autobiographical data is varied and can be collected through different methods: "recalling, collecting artefacts and documents, interviewing others, analyzing self, observing self, and reflecting on issues pertaining to the research topic." (2013, p113). Following Chang's suggestion, I used data such as ongoing self-reflective writing, supervision notes, logs and interviews that colleagues conducted regarding my doctoral experiences to engage with memories and relate past to present; and "self-analysis…and reflection" to express "present thinking, attitudes, perceptions, habits and emotions" (2013, p114). This self-reflection informed Chapter Five.

Data Analysis

Narrative interviews

For narrative analysis of student interviews, firstly, a non-cross-sectional analysis approach was adopted, analysing each interview separately. This comprised structural analysis that was informed by Patterson's adapted 'experiential' version (2013, p42) of Labov's (1972) categorisation of participant narratives. In this context, Labov originally categorised narratives according to the

following categories "orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution" (Reissman, 1993, p41: Labov, 1972). In this PhD narrative analysis, I adopted an 'experiential' rather than 'event-focused' approach explained by Patterson who adapted Labov's approach as follows:

> "Texts which bring stories of personal experience into being by means of the first-person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience."
> (Labov, 1972, cited by Patterson, 2013, p 28)

Hence, I coded the interview transcripts as C (which encompassed people, events and experiences) and E (which encompassed self-reflection on the experiences that took place). In this context, the structural analysis for this study was also informed by Bell's analysis of life story interviews (1988), referred to by Reissman (1993, p40). To answer my research questions, I adapted Bell's approach to focus on the:

1. plot to understand the core narrative and sequence of events and experiences, and where turning points occurred.
2. the Labovian element of 'evaluation' (reflection on the events recounted) in the context of the narrative to understand how the participants' doctoral learning development, engagement, belonging, academic confidence and achievement developed over time.

In this context, Patterson (2013, p32) describes how "Reissman (1993, 21) refers to evaluation as 'the soul of the narrative', expressing both the point of the story and, crucially, how the narrator wants to be understood." In Chapter Four narrative analysis of the six participants who took part in two interviews is presented to gain an understanding of how their journeys developed over a period of years. In Chapter Five, a cross-sectional thematic content analysis of narrative interviews with all fifteen participants helped to identify themes across cases; and this particularly relates to the ways in which participants' engagement in academic and peer 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998) influenced their doctoral learning experiences and journeys (Spencer et al., 2003, p203). NVivo was used to assist with the thematic coding process and data management. As explained below, participants were invited to comment on the analysis and interpretation of the data as part of the socially constructed approach.

In-depth interviews with doctoral education directors

Initially a non-cross-sectional content analysis approach was adopted, analysing each interview separately, and applying an open coding approach for each interview. This was an appropriate approach to adopt for in-depth and narrative interviews to "gain a sense of the distinctiveness of particular sections of the material; to understand complex narratives or processes; to organise the data around themes which do not appear in all parts of the data; and to identify overall structures within each case or interview (Spencer et al., 2003, p203)". As with the narrative interviews, NVivo data management was used to facilitate this coding process. Following this, cases were examined cross-sectionally in content analysis, employing "cross-referencing systems which do not segment text, but enable the analyst to browse and create pathways through the data. (Spencer et al., 2003, p203)". To assist in this process hypertext links available in NVivo were used.

Ethics

Potential ethical issues

Being a Research Fellow in Learning and Teaching Development in HE, I was aware that I may have been perceived by potential student and staff research participants as a staff member in a position of power. Hence students and staff were informed that I was a Research Fellow to be honest about my position. However, when inviting participants to take part in this research and during interviews, I approached and communicated with potential student research participants as a fellow doctoral student; and with staff as a PhD student, so that the participants would feel at greater ease with me as a peer or student in this context. However, there would still be potential biases from staff and students in this context. This potential bias is acknowledged in this research.

Although participants may not be adversely affected by taking part in narrative interviews, it is possible that they may have been upset by reflecting on troubling events, particularly because the research related to the emotive subject matter of relationships. Interviews were conducted as sensitively as possible to ensure that participants felt at ease. To establish trust, I explained at the beginning of interviews that I was a member of the part-time PhD student community and was reflecting on my own experiences in addition to theirs' in this context. Following transcription and analysis of their narrative interviews, I sent participants analysis so that they could verify, comment

on it or add suggestions, which was appropriate for the socially constructed approach that was taken in this research. It was possible that participants would be reticent in revealing life experiences, which were a necessary component of this research study. In this context, I followed Renzetti and Lee's suggestion (1993, p178) in that the participants were aware that I as the researcher had a common experience to their own and this helped to build rapport and trust. Therefore, some self-disclosure of my own background as a part-time PhD student and life events and relationships at the beginning of the interview was helpful. When participants appeared to be distressed during an interview, I offered to stop or pause the recording. When necessary, I suggested that participants could talk to appropriate staff that could provide them with comfort or support. In the context of this research, listening to participants experiences of recent life events was sometimes stressful. I therefore ensured that I knew the details of a counsellor who I could talk to or alternatively ensured that I arranged a debriefing session with a colleague where my experiences could be confidentially shared.

Confidentiality

My supervisors and examiners may know which institutions are participating and may be aware of some staff identities who were interviewed. This is acknowledged in the research and supervisors and examiners have been asked to protect confidentiality of data and anonymity of participants. In research dissemination within and outside University A, institutions' and participants' names and potentially identifying details have been anonymised. Names have been anonymised in interview transcripts. Potentially identifying details in transcripts have been changed. As suggested by Macfarlane (2009, p65) I invited participants to "verify and amend if necessary, their own transcript to help safe-guard participants' anonymity". In addition to anonymising names and other obvious identifying details, such as subjects of PhDs, protecting participants' anonymity in written and spoken dissemination meant changing any specific contextual details that might reveal their identities. When I disseminate this research, I have sent and will send a copy of any written or spoken dissemination to participants, so that they can agree what should be included or not included in dissemination to protect their anonymity. Moreover, when findings relating to any participant has been included as a narrative case-study in my thesis or will be included in subsequent articles and conference papers this has been or will be agreed with that participant in advance.

I have taken all necessary measures to protect participants' anonymity in this research, but there may always be a small chance that the identity of participants and third parties in any qualitative research may be discovered where they work or study. To help avoid concerns regarding anonymity, I did not interview any member of staff or student at the campus where I was working at the time of data collection, and only interviewed participants at other campuses. In addition, I did not interview any students who were supervised by colleagues at my campus at the time of data collection. Raw data has remained confidential and has only been seen by me and independent transcribers (not affiliated to either University and bound by strict rules of confidentiality). Interviews were either recorded on a digital recorder, or on Skype or Microsoft Teams. Digital recordings were transferred in a locked briefcase and upon return to my office at the University A, uploaded onto the University's OneDrive via my PC, which is secured in a locked room and password protected. Once uploaded the recordings were deleted from my recorder. Recordings on Microsoft Teams or Skype were stored securely on my University's OneDrive and recordings were deleted once transcribed. All personnel working on research interviews: signed a confidentiality statement. Transcripts were uploaded to the University's One Drive and password protected. Later they were uploaded to NVivo and were password protected. Data will be kept for a period of ten years in compliance with the University of A research ethics rules (University of A, 2016). Verbatim quotations from the data were used to illustrate research findings and will be published in my thesis, in conference proceedings and subsequently in peer reviewed journal articles. All quotations have been anonymised to protect participants' identities. Participating institutions have been anonymised. Research findings will be seen by my supervisors and examiners, and once published will be seen by researchers and academics who are interested in doctoral education both online and in printed journals.

Summary

This chapter has focused on explaining how and why this research has adopted a Deweyian Pragmatic ontology (Dewey, 1938), a Social Constructionist epistemology (Gergen,2009; Burr, 2006) and a qualitative narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). Narrative inquiry was a suitable methodology to explore the relationship between life and the learning development of PhD students, which is an important focus of this study (McAdams and Logan, 2006). Dewey's Pragmatic 'Theory of Experience' (1938) was a relevant ontological position for this PhD study that explored part-time doctoral students' learning journeys over several years and the influences of relationships and life events on their learning journeys within HE contexts. This

relates to Dewey's criteria of building up knowledge and learning based on experience over time, the interaction of self and others during that process, and the influence of environment on their learning. The social interaction aspect of Dewey's 'Theory of Experience' (1938) was also relevant to the relationship between myself as the researcher and the participants that is characteristic of Social Construction and this was relevant in the context of this PhD because narrative research is described as a socially constructed process between researcher and research participant, where the power to construct narrative both in the interview, analysis and interpretation is shared and negotiated between the researcher and participant (Burr, 2006; Gergen, 2009). My adoption of a Social Constructionist approach was supported by Dewey's Pragmatic ontology, where human agency and freedom to bring about change within research and Narrative Inquiry were important elements (Dewey, 1938; Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). In relation to Deweyian Pragmatism and Social Construction of Knowledge, Narrative Research has provided research participants with a voice and a sense of agency, with which they could be empowered (Burr, 2006). Empowering participants' unique voices was important in this study since this research has focused on PhD research participants who were from a range of diverse backgrounds and minorities. This chapter has also emphasised the importance of gaining insights into the context of participants' experiences in research to make them meaningful, and this was supported by the Social Constructionist and Deweyian ontological positions taken in this study, where history, society and culture were important elements in framing and influencing people's experiences and realities (Dewey, 1938; Gergen, 2009; Burr, 2006). In terms of data collection methods, McAdams' life-story narrative interview approach was appropriate for part-time PhD student interviews as it encouraged participants to talk about key chapters and events in their PhD journeys and enabled "rich descriptive accounts that are invaluable in understanding what motivates people, giving insight into personality and identity" (King and Horrocks, 2010: McAdams 1993). In terms of analysis, structural analysis of students' narratives that is informed by Labov's (1972) categorisation of elements of students' interviews was adapted, taking an 'experiential' approach, that particularly focused on participants' evaluation or reflection on different aspects of their journey (Patterson, 2013; Squire, 2013; Reissman, 1993, p41: Labov, 1972). This has helped to interpret aspects of students' learning development and academic confidence over time. Secondly, a cross-sectional thematic content analysis of student and staff interviews were conducted to identify patterns that emerged in student and staff experiences, and this has contributed to the contextual wider narrative that framed the part-time PhD students' experiences in changing times. The next chapter will focus on findings of the six narrative part-time PhD student case-studies relating to participants' experiences of life events, personal relationships and turning points and how these influenced their doctoral journeys over time.

Chapter Four

Six case studies: life events, relationships and turning points in part-time PhD student journeys over time

Introduction

The findings presented in this chapter focus on two stages of narrative interviews with six part-time PhD students including three women and three men, of varied age groups three of whom were under 45 and three were over 45, three of whom were studying in University A, and three of whom were studying in university B. The participants were also at different stages of their journeys, some in the early stages and some were at the point of completing their PhDs. This ensured that the sample for the narrative case-studies was heterogenous and included a range of students from different backgrounds, experiences, and voices across the two universities. As mentioned in the Introduction, this chapter focuses on the unique aspects of participants' individual doctoral journeys and key turning points over time. As also discussed in the Introduction, additional chapters focus on a self-reflective chapter relating to my own perspectives and experiences as a part-time PhD student (Chapter Five); a cross-sectional thematic analysis of student interviews (Chapter Six); and a cross-sectional thematic analysis of staff interviews (Chapter Seven). Starting with narrative and structural non-cross-sectional analysis of students' narratives in this chapter enables the empowerment of individual participants' voices, which was described in the Methodology Chapter.

In the following findings, the selected quotes from participants' narrative interviews relate to Patterson's adaptation of Labovian narrative analysis as follows: firstly, a series of events and/or experiences, which may then be identified as turning points linked to change; and, secondly, 'evaluation' identifying what the participant's own thoughts and reflections on unfolding experiences were, showing ways in which their learning, confidence, belonging and achievement developed or changed (Patterson, 2013: Labov, 1972; Squire, 2013).

In accordance with the principles of Social Construction (Gergen, 2009; Burr, 2006) findings relating to each participant that are presented in this chapter have been sent to the participants concerned, so that they may comment on these, and so that these findings are a negotiated and socially constructed process, and where the participants are empowered to engage in the research process. (Please see the Introduction section of the thesis for a summary of thesis chapters and what

they contain.)

Findings

Participant Two: Stage One interview

Overview

Participant Two was in the first year of his part-time PhD journey (2017/18) in an applied Social Science discipline in a pre-1992 university. Because he was in his first year, I asked him if it would be possible to conduct a second interview in 2019 to gain an understanding of further developments in his doctoral journey over a longer time-period. He saw the findings and agreed that these reflected his experiences and perceptions. He was studying alongside his role as director of his own business in the education sector and had recently moved in with his partner and become a father. His parents are described as working-class. Hence, this student combines several different roles and responsibilities being a company director, a father, a partner, a doctoral student and being from a working-class background. This can be linked back to the literature review and previous studies that found part-time PhD students balanced roles, responsibilities and identities (Watts, 2008; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; and Teeuwsen et al. 2014).

The participant's professional background and how this led to starting his PhD and early meetings with supervisors

In the first part of the interview the participant started talking about his professional background and this being the basis of the reason why he started his PhD. He discussed the series of events and experiences leading up to a meeting with academics at the university to discuss his PhD idea, which was well received and encouraging. This meeting was a turning point linked to the beginning of his doctoral journey.

> *"And in 20.. I launched an assessment that could be used with children aged 2 up until 18…and it's being used in schools...And it got to the point where actually I wanted, and I approached the university to find out if they had a student who would be interested in …evaluating the measure to scientifically evaluate it. …it would involve my company sponsoring that student…And so it became very clear during that conversation that*

actually there was no reason why that student being sponsored couldn't be me….and that's how it came about really.

At that point I felt quite proud, and I was just like, yeah this is amazing, this is going to be absolutely amazing, I can just imagine how this is going to happen, although it's nothing like how I imagined it at all. You know, I can just see this being fantastic, especially if I can get a grant for the university to cover my fees and things, wow. I felt completely elated."

(Participant 2)

The participant described positive emotions linked to his early doctoral experience and this evidently marked the exciting new beginning of the participant's doctoral journey. The grant was also important here in terms of being a form of 'academic capital' and prestige (Bourdieu, 1988; Grenfell and James, 1998). In this part of the interview the participant saw himself as a successful professional entrepreneur in the education sector. In this context, it is evident that he felt confident and successful associated with his professional status and achievement. During the meeting with the academic staff where the PhD idea was discussed he also felt engaged and confident about starting his doctoral journey.

The first month as a doctoral student: induction

However, when he started his PhD, the participant described feeling uncertain during the first stage of his transition to doctoral study. At this point he lacked contact with peers, supervisors or a doctoral community. Theoretically, this may be explained as him being situated within the university structure or 'field', but not yet developing a sense of belonging and related 'habitus' in this context (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Thomas, 2002).

"So, induction would be the big one. So, I didn't meet with my supervisory team for almost a month after I started. I had all these inductions…so all these inductions were very useful telling you little snippets…but I kind of spent a month just kicking around and going well, what am I supposed to be doing? I'll just read some books."

One may draw parallels between the participant's experiences in this context and the experiences of undergraduates feeling uncertain and insecure, like a "fish out of water" during transition that is

described in earlier literature (Thomas, 2002, p431). For instance, Scanlon et al. (2007) describe how undergraduates who experience the transition from college to university need to develop a different identity associated with their new learning environment, which can be difficult. As Scanlon et al. (2007, p228) suggest such challenges in transition may be related to social and environmental factors. In this interview, the narrative suggests that the participant's lack of a sense of belonging was accentuated by being told that as a part-time student he was not entitled to a desk. In this sense, he felt different from other students because he was part-time. Although he was eventually given a desk, he was separated from his disciplinary community – marginalising him and making it more difficult to develop a sense of belonging.

> "*And, you know, little things like as a part time student technically, they made sure they pointed it out to me, I'm not entitled to a desk. And so originally, they did give me a desk, but they gave me a desk in a separate building from every other psychology postgraduate researcher. Now thankfully one of my supervisors actually did address that, and eventually I got moved into the office that I am in now, although again, I got moved in there and then got told, "No, there's a full-time student that needs that desk, …." Having been given my key in the morning I then had to give them my key back by the afternoon, and then by the time I got home they then emailed me to say, "No, it's all right, you can have that desk. Please come back and collect your key." Because I was a part time student. All these sorts of things."*

Here the participant felt like an outsider as a part-time student. He felt a sense of frustration and did not feel that he had the necessary agency to change this situation at this stage. In terms of this PhD student's experiences, one can also see that social (lack of contact with supervisors and peers) and environmental aspects (not having a desk) of their experience are important in their developing a sense of belonging in their new doctoral learning environment.

While it may be argued that part-time PhD students face similar challenges to full-time students, the desk situation foregrounds a sense in which this participant was clearly treated differently from the outset. His part-time status was clearly given as a reason for his spatial exclusion. Eventually, the participant's supervisor stepped in to address the issue of the participant not having a desk. This shows that the staff and institution had the power to effect change in this context, rather than the participant. This reflects what Bourdieu refers to as 'symbolic violence' (1991, p168), which Grenfell and James define as:

> "One way of knowledge, one way of doing things, has to be imposed and accepted, mostly with the tacit and conscious acceptance of those imposed upon…Because one group's legitimacy rules another, a violence has been and continues to be done."
>
> (1998, p24)

It may be argued that this experience can be seen to relate to Bourdieu's notion of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1991, p168) in that that individuals are largely controlled by structural forces, such as universities, but may act with conscious choice and agency within those structures to acquire 'educational capital' and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1988).

Period 2: From induction till Christmas: 'finding my feet'.

In relation to the second period of this participant's doctoral journey, he expressed his frustration regarding the university's lack of understanding of his part-time doctoral student experience and how his doctoral student priorities and other life priorities clashed.

> *"The second part of the journey I would say was kind of then until Christmas, which was very much about getting the university to understand that I am part-time and so therefore I cannot arrange my whole diary around whenever they want me to do various bits and pieces and the rest of it… All these things are supposed to be compulsory, but actually that can only actually work if you're full-time. So, there's a complete lack of understanding with the fact that I was part-time. And so that period was quite interesting and so that was about finding my feet."*

By talking about "all these things", the participant was referring to the doctoral training modules that he was supposed to attend, but which he did not really have time to attend as he was part-time. At this stage the participant felt partly that he was being controlled by the university as an institutional structure. This reflects the earlier point made in the Literature Review in relation to Bourdieu's notion that individuals are largely controlled by institutions and are required to fit in (1988). However, reflecting on this period, the language of 'finding my feet' used here by the participant suggests that he was beginning to be empowered in this situation and develop his own voice and sense of agency or control (Archer, 1982; Robbins, 1998). It may be argued that this marks a turning point where the participant realised that he needed to develop greater agency in this

HE field, making a conscious choice to resist the structure, by saying "it was about getting the university to understand". This may be understood as the participant's transition into starting doctoral study.

In relation to this narrative, the participant's developing voice and agency is implied. In the context of this participant's experience, the university provided expectations of what the student should be doing during his first year of doctoral study. On the other hand, the participant empowered their own voice here and ensured that the university, as institutional structure, understood what it was like for them as a part-time doctoral student with multiple roles and responsibilities outside doctoral study. Hence, while the participant was learning about becoming part of the doctoral community within the university and what was required, he was also ensuring that this was a negotiated process, from which the university and staff were also learning. As Bourdieu argues, 'disposition' can be conscious implying making choices within the confines of the 'rules of the game' (Gopaul, 2014; Grenfell and James, 1998; Bourdieu, 1977, p6).

Early transition challenges

However, despite beginning to find his feet, the participant's narrative suggests that the period of the first year leading up to Christmas was challenging for him. For example, in this interview extract the participant described his professional role and previous professional background in Education, and ways in which this clashed with beginning doctoral study in a different Social Science discipline and his new role as PhD student.

> *"Because I come from an educational background, there's a lot of stigma attached to the fact. I'm almost looked down upon because I can't explain things using the correct scientific terms. I can explain things, but I can't use the right vocabulary and things like that.*
>
> *…As in I've got to prove extra, I'm not seen as a peer, It almost feels like, and it's my words, not theirs, but it almost feels like this is the… education student that we've let on the programme, we won't be doing this again, is kind of how it feels. Now, that's not their words at all, they're far too professional for that, but I will do things, I will ask for help, and I'll get a response along the lines of, "You should be able to do this without our help," and things like that."*

(Participant 2)

This experience may be understood in Bourdieu's terms as the student's "disrupted habitus" in a new disciplinary and doctoral learning 'field' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988, Anderson, p141). The participant's experiences in this context also reflect Becher and Trowler's arguments concerning disciplinary identities and ways in which there are language barriers related to different disciplines (2001). By using the words 'stigma' and 'looked down upon' in the narrative, the participant's lack of confidence becomes evident, and the 'field' and structure of doctoral education in a Social Science discipline may be seen as powerful and controlling.

Early challenges in supervisory relationships

This 'disrupted habitus' (Anderson, 2001, p141), and the participant's sense of feeling uncertain is also reflected in the participant's description of the early stages of his supervisory relationship, in which he feels misunderstood as a part-time student with multiple responsibilities outside doctoral study.

> *"She makes me so stressed that I feel sick, I'm going to be honest with you, at times. I know that if I'm not doing university stuff and it's during the working week then I've got a business to run, I've got people to look after and so on and so forth. And then I will get emails that basically accuse me of not devoting enough time to my studies, even though actually I can clearly prove that I'm doing way more than the two and a half days a week that I'm supposed to be doing my studies. And so, at times it feels very intimidating and very offensive."*
>
> *(Participant 2)*

In relation to Bourdieu's theory that individuals are controlled by educational structures, the supervisor's voice may be seen as powerful here, while the student perceives that they have little agency in terms of communication in this supervisory relationship. This again may be reflected by Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic violence" (1991, p51).

Aspiration to be a successful doctoral student

The quote below shows that the participant wants to become a successful doctoral student and acquire the prestige, and what Bourdieu describes as 'academic capital' related to becoming a Doctor of Philosophy (1988, p84).

> *"I'm challenging myself because I've never been a strong academic person. ...I've always joked about being called a doctor and using it as a nom de plume and going to solve murders with it and all the rest of it, but, certainly within my family, no one's been as educated. My family are a very working-class family and no one in my family has really got beyond MPhil, and so for me it was a little bit of a personal challenge, I'd no idea what in, and certainly when I started this journey, when all this happened with The … Group …., it wasn't something that made me think, oh, that's what I'm going to do my doctorate in, but actually it was the beginning of the sequence of events that then caused me to do my doctorate."*

Although he jokes about it, from this interview extract, it is evident that he was serious in his intention to become doctoral. Though he sees himself as 'not a strong academic person' he is ambitious personally, for business and to learn scientific things, i.e., to gain 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988).

Developing determination and confidence as a doctoral student

In the following quote, it is evident that the participant is developing determination and confidence although he still does not feel wholly in control. In this context, creating a Gant chart of the PhD journey enabled the participant to feel a greater sense of agency, and hold himself to account, rather than being held to account by his supervisors or the university (Archer, 1982; Grenfell and James, 1998, p25). In this context, this is a turning point where the participant understood that he needed to be in control in the supervisory relationship – rather than the supervisor being in control.

> *"I have now done a Gant chart showing or mapping out the stages that I'm going to go through for the next six years – because obviously I'm doing it part-time. And so, I've found that incredibly useful because I can now start holding myself more to account of where I should be and things. So, in myself I feel like oh, I've got the bit between my teeth,*

I feel like I'm making progress and I can feel that shift, but at the same time still having to deal with the same issues that I was dealing with in terms of having to sell it always to my supervisory team."

The participant evidently developed greater determination having experienced challenges in the first semester, which contributed to his taking control and developing agency and greater confidence within his doctoral journey and supervisory relationships. This finding resonates with previous studies into undergraduate student transition that are underpinned by Bourdieu's theory that developing 'habitus', linked to belonging, confidence and achievement is also related to individuals' increasing determination in facing challenges over time (Thomas, 2002; Leese, 2010; Pitman and Vidovitch, 2013).

Beginning to develop doctoral student voice

In the context of this narrative, the participant continued to reflect on and learn from his experiences and ways in which he took decisions to develop greater agency and enhance his practice as doctoral student, for instance, by creating a Gantt Chart and developing a stronger voice during doctoral supervision. In this participant's narrative, he follows the 'rules of the game' and meets the expectations of doctoral study, but he is beginning to do this on his own terms (Gopaul, 2014; Bourdieu, 1977, p6). In Bourdieu's terms, this may also be linked to making positive choices, developing doctoral 'educational capital', linked to success (Gopaul 2014; Bourdieu, 1988).

"I mentally decided that no, I'm going to take charge of the supervision session. I went in and I said, "Right, this is what I'm working on, this is what I'm proposing working on next. Go." That's the biggest thing and the only time in this course that I really felt empowered…at the time it was just like I can feel it.

I just think I've just got better at putting my feet on the ground and saying, "Well that's fine but I can't do it until next week." I've changed the words that I use so … "I'll do that when I'm in university on Friday."

Developing engagement and academic confidence

At the point just before the interview took place and after Christmas, the participant had developed greater confidence, and was feeling more engaged and successful as a doctoral student. In relation to Bourdieu's concepts (1988), it may be argued that by receiving positive feedback on his systematic review this participant had developed doctoral 'educational capital' related to early success and achievement in his PhD.

> *"So, I would say the biggest thing was I did a draft protocol for a systematic review that I emailed through to my supervisory team, and I got an email back saying, "Looking good," … And to get that email, bearing in mind my previous experiences… I just felt absolutely on top of the world at that moment in time, just because I realise that was the closest I'm going to get to a compliment. So, I was like, right, I'm going to own that, fantastic. Oh, it spurred me on, and again it's made me more independent, because it's told me that I'm doing the right thing."*

By reflecting on this experience and saying 'this has spurred me on, and again it's made me more independent' suggests a clear turning point, related to the participant's developing agency (Archer, 1982). In this context, he perceives himself as a doctoral student. This is not the final stage in the participant's doctoral journey but is a stage in acquiring doctoral 'educational capital', and a stronger sense of doctoral student 'habitus' and greater agency within the field of doctoral education in this university.

Stage Two Interview

Challenge of rewriting the systematic review following critical feedback

At the beginning of the second interview (a year later), Participant Two reflected on how he was struggling again with the systematic literature review. He was undergoing a challenge but remaining positive and trying to progress on to the next stage. When he first did the systematic review before the first interview, he felt confident, that he would complete his PhD in three years part-time and felt elated. Then during supervision sessions after this, he described how he began to feel uncertain again because the supervisory team changed the goalposts regarding his literature review, which was demotivating.

> *"So I wouldn't necessarily say it's a supportive supervisory team…It's very hard, because actually my personality is, 'Right, now I know this time what I have to do', so I just kind of crack on with it, and then get floored afterwards when they say, "No, this isn't want we want you to do at all, we've changed our minds again". It's interesting because I don't kind of feel that I own my research sometimes, because the things that I think are interesting that I think should be spoken about I'm steered away from.*"

Again, this may be linked to students feeling "like a fish out of water" (Thomas, 2002, p431). At this stage he felt lacking in control and agency again, and felt he was being steered away from certain directions in his PhD in this situation where the supervisors were too much in control of his journey. However, he reflected how this challenge also increased his determination to succeed, and he was beginning to understand how to, as Bourdieu describes it, 'play the game' (Gopaul, 2014; Bourdieu, 1977, p6) by accepting that the supervisors were moving the goalposts, even joking about it.

> *"I just accept it nowadays. I don't even battle against it. I sit there and make a joke out of it because there's no point. I've learned that there's no point at all in having any kind of I'm going to say preciousness or any kind of protectiveness or emotions around it, because actually that's just what I expect."*

This may be conceived as part of learning to be doctoral and another stage in acquiring doctoral 'educational capital'.

Reflections on making progress after rewriting the literature review

Because of rewriting the literature review Participant Two described how he felt he was six months behind where he should be, although he realised this was to do with his own expectations versus expectations of others. In comparison to his cohort, he reflected that he was ahead of 'the game' in Bourdieu's terms and in this sense felt confident again (Gopaul, 2014; Bourdieu, 1977, p6).

> *"Well, it's interesting, because I think I'm six months behind where I should be. Although interestingly, I'm actually at the same point where full-time students who started with me are at. In fact, I'm a little bit ahead of them."*

Another example of 'playing the game' (Gopaul, 2014; Bourdieu, 1977, p6) at this stage in the participant's journey is reflected by Participant Two's decision to become a Postgraduate (PG)

research rep for his school – building his 'social capital', developing his belonging and strengthening his doctoral 'habitus'. He compared himself to previous reps and felt confident because he had helped them acquire a common room.

> *"Along the way I've also decided to become the postgraduate research rep for our school. …and suddenly, I've got them like a common room, I've got them access to the staff room and they get free coffee every day. I've got them all sorts. … In terms of that I've achieved loads. I think it all started because I just wanted to give something back, and yeah, it's kind of where it sits…. So, I feel that I've made my own sense of belonging by doing the rep stuff, because then almost I'm forced to engage with others, and they're forced to engage with me because that's what I must do as part of that role."*

This is a clear example of how part-time doctoral students can build 'social capital' and strengthen their evolving doctoral habitus by 'playing the game' (Gopaul, 2014; Bourdieu, 1977, p6). Participant Two described how he achieved prestige and recognition within the school by doing this, becoming well respected like a staff member, and hence he was building 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1991; Gopaul, 2014). He said that by doing these things he created his own sense of belonging and felt much more confident as a doctoral student. However, it should be stressed that he achieved this by 'playing the game' and acting through his own agency (Gopaul, 2014; Archer, 1982, Bourdieu, 1977, p6).

Parent and PhD student: conflicting roles and responsibilities

Participant Two recounted that he had another child before the second interview, which affected his journey in that his whole working life now revolved around when to be at home to look after the children. When he felt that he was getting into studying, it was then interrupted by having to go to look after the children. This again reflects the juggling act of part-time PhD students leading to frustration and demotivation (Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Teeuwsen et al., 2014).

> "*Really the most significant thing, I'm going to be honest with you, is obviously the birth of my second child… Now actually there are frequent times when I'm at home trying to do something and basically just have a child thrust into my arms and, "Just get her to sleep". …So that's slowed me down quite a lot, and it does lead to a lot of frustration and some resentment I think as well. Because part of that is about, I'm doing this for myself, my PhD*

is my challenge, I don't need it professionally. But I'm not being able to challenge myself. My PhD is about me, and I've lost me, if that makes sense."

In relation to support for Participant Two under these challenging circumstances, the same lack of empathy from supervisors that was described at the beginning of Participant Two's journey continued regarding his life responsibilities, being a part-time student and the struggle of juggling everything. There was still an expectation from his supervisors that he would be at university three days per week for his PhD.

"*Obviously as a part-time student there continues to be the same lack of insight in that I'm a part-time student so I should be doing about two and a half days of university stuff a week. Now actually in reality that's mostly evenings, so therefore I should only really be here one day a week because I should also be earning a living. I've got family to support, I've got a mortgage to pay and all these things. But there's a massive expectation that I'm here three or four days a week attending all these different things, not just in terms of my rep role, but in terms of my PhD and things …"*

Feeling confident about the future, having achieved doctoral milestones

At the end of the second interview, however, Participant Two said he was feeling positive about his PhD overall. He had a challenging meta-analysis, data crunching and write up in the next few weeks, which was the next stage he would be facing, but he felt confident again that he knew his direction and position. He felt proud to be at this stage. He had overcome the hurdle of systematic review rewrite and his supervisors' criticism and had turned it round. He had faced and overcome challenges and achieved some doctoral milestones. He was in his second year at the time of the interview but wanted to have his first paper written to enable him to progress. He perceived himself as organised, in control and knew where he was going. Hence, he had a strong sense of agency and 'habitus', knew how to 'play the game' to become successful in the doctoral education 'field' (Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Gopaul, 2014). After that he would design the next part of his research. He felt excited and engaged to continue with the next phase but felt held up by life events and conflicting responsibilities. He felt that while doing the next phase he would try to overcome his life issues.

"*But in terms of where I am, provided my supervisory team don't get me to change direction again, then actually I kind of think I've got a grasp on where I am and where I'm going. So, it feels good. … Quite excited to get on with it. But the issue is that I'm being*

held up by some factors external to the university, it's slowing that down. So, the fact that I've got to do this write up and I've got to do the first-year progression and all the rest of it, is buying me a bit of extra time to deal with some of the external factors and to overcome those. Once I've overcome those then I'll be raring to go. But now I can't get going. I can't even think about what it's going to look like because there's just these barriers that I've got to deal with first."

Reflections on the second stage of the doctoral journey

Participant Two reflected how a major life event and key turning point linked to feeling low, and academically demotivated, was having another child, since he found juggling childcare and doctoral study difficult. Participant Two reflected on the importance of counteracting this becoming a doctoral student representative, a form of 'social capital' that gave him an understanding of the university system, enabling him to understand better 'the rules of the game'. In this sense, he took his journey into his own hands, developing agency and strengthening his 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Gopaul, 2014).

. "*I mean the big thing is obviously having a child. As I say, at the time that I was having the most difficult mental health issues, I don't think it had much of an impact. The other thing was obviously becoming the student rep, it gives me a little bit more of the systemic working of the department and the university. It doesn't necessarily have a direct impact on my research itself, but it helps me to understand the system that it sits within. … I like to understand how a system works, because then that's how you can change it."*

However, Participant Two recognised that the central theme of his PhD is cycles, in that he thought he was making academic progress, what Bourdieu and Passeron describe as 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and then he was held back by life events and his supervisors' critical feedback, and it took him a long time to make progress.

"I keep thinking I'm moving forward and then getting thrown a curve ball. Well not thrown a curve ball but told to take two steps back. And so actually you take three steps forward two steps back, three steps forward two steps back, and reality is it takes you three times as long to do anything. I think I would say that certainly for the last year that's kind of the story. If actually, I don't want to say if supervisors cared more because they do care, but if supervisors were more conscious of where we were, as opposed to I should not have to

start every supervision session by repeating the last one, 'It was the right way in the first place'."

This shows the interplay of structure and agency in Participant Two's journey (Archer, 1982; Robbins, 1998). He made conscious choices to make progress and social connections in his PhD. Hence, he developed belonging associated with doctoral 'habitus' and 'social capital'; and achievement associated with doctoral 'educational capital', but his doctoral journey was continually disrupted by academic relationships with supervisors and life events. This disruption demotivated him, slowed him down and held him back from being what he wanted to be and from being able to achieve the 'academic capital' of the PhD that he aimed for. I have recently contacted Participant Two and he has confirmed that this case-study reflects his experiences. He is currently writing up his thesis.

Participant Four

Stage One Interview

Overview

At the time of the first interview, Participant Four was in the process of retiring from his political career and had already given up part of this to focus on his PhD. He was in the early stages of his part-time doctoral journey. He was passionate about his PhD topic, which explores ways in which older people use mobile technologies. He was experiencing a strong shift away from political activities to focusing on being a PhD student in his field. He was committed to this new role although his 'politician' role was still very much part of him. He was becoming fully involved with university academic communities and wider academic communities related to his field of research and undertaking associated voluntary work. He was 'playing the game' as Bourdieu would describe it, by building networks and 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Grenfell and James, 1998, pp24-25; Gopaul, 2014).

Decision to start his PhD following retirement

Seven years prior to our interview, retirement was a turning point and major life change for Participant Four. At the time, he was financially independent through his pension, and was able to

remain voluntarily involved in local politics, but also decided to start a master's in a social science discipline. He appeared confident in himself. He enjoyed the master's for three years, which went well and was useful for his political interest too. A turning point was when he finished the master's, and when he considered starting a PhD. The MSc was described as a stepping-stone towards PhD study. The PhD was not related to his political career at the time, but to learn research skills and get to know his topic.

> *"Yes, I got into politics in a fairly big way and decided to do a master's in a Social Science discipline. So, I did that part-time over a period of about three years. That went okay, I quite enjoyed that. It was useful in terms of the politics I was into. Then the sort of more recent past, I finished the master's, and thought it would be nice to do a PhD. I had no career ambitions as far as that's concerned, I simply want to gain skills in researching and get to know the topic area a lot."*

An early PhD challenge followed by a positive turning point

At the beginning of his journey Participant Four didn't get as high a mark on his MSc dissertation as he expected, which he described as demotivating, but it was enough to be accepted on a PhD and gain a scholarship. This made him question whether he could do the PhD. He described a lack of confidence at this stage, which was a challenge. A scholarship, however, may be conceived as an important form of 'cultural' or 'educational capital' that then encouraged him (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988). As Grenfell and James point out, "we do not know we have capital until we enter a field where it is valued" (1998, p25). In this context Participant Four described how receiving the scholarship was a very positive turning point, which motivated and engaged him at the beginning of the journey. This was perceived as confidence building after the initial disappointment of the dissertation mark. Participant Four said that the scholarship wasn't important to him in terms of money, but it was important in terms of 'credibility'. He felt very engaged afterwards and felt that the university had faith in him, which also helped enhance his sense of belonging as doctoral student.

> *"Yes, I was absolutely delighted to be told I'd be receiving a scholarship. Now the scholarship wasn't important financially, well it was useful, what was important was the feeling that I was given some academic credibility. That made me feel that I really did want to receive it, and so I did. …Well, it just meant that I could start it feeling quite confident that the university had faith in me as a student."*

Shifting roles: giving up his career to do a PhD

Participant Four used to work in social care, which was very demanding as a job, but he knew he had to stop doing that to do a PhD. He felt that being in local government and doing a PhD were a conflict of interest, and not compatible. He realised that he had to let go of being a politician to focus on his PhD. He made it known that he was going to give up his political role when he started his PhD and somebody else took on this role. This may be seen as a turning point, where he gave up the old part of his life to start a new academic journey. The local press interviewed him about doing the PhD and how it was a wonderful thing to do when you retire, so the two aspects of his old and new life came together in this context. He was happy that this would help encourage others to do the same.

> *"I knew I needed to stop doing that to be able to do a PhD. I couldn't be in local government or politics and do a PhD, it's just not humanly possible…so I made it known that I was going to give that up… and I gave up that role just before starting the PhD. The local paper phoned me up, interviewed me about it and I said what a wonderful thing doing the PhD was, which was genuinely true, and talked a bit about the subject… So, it was lovely that I got that support, I got the kind of affirmation that it's okay to change course from having worked in politics to doing academic stuff. "*

Influences of family relationships on the PhD journey

Participant Four had three children who were grown up. His wife had also retired but remained involved in her own interests. Personal relationships were described as quietly supportive and not interfering with his journey. This may be conceived as another factor that was supporting Participant Four when starting his PhD. This reflects the importance of personal relationships in supporting part-time PhD students.

> "*I have three children all of whom are grown up and one lives locally but the other two live far away. And my daughter who's the one who lives locally is going to be moving to London very soon, so we're in touch quite a lot. But they're not an issue in terms of my educational aspirations. My wife has reached the stage where she has taken an occupational pension as well from working in mental health… My wife is very supportive. I think the fact that I'm doing something a bit out of the ordinary and*

challenging that I enjoy doing is probably good from her point-of-view. And the children are just slightly amazed and pleased. And I like to think that, you know, it encourages them to think they can think in terms of lifelong learning as well."

An engaging start to the PhD journey - developing an early sense of belonging

Participant Four started his PhD in September 2017, and he described the first stage as induction and short courses for skills and orientation, including digital skills, library, and Endnote. He also completed an academic needs analysis within four months, which he felt positive about. He said that he found this engaging and straightforward, and not too challenging. This may be perceived as an early turning point in his PhD journey in terms of building confidence as a doctoral student - going through the academic needs analysis and the reflective process involved in that, thinking about methods. He described how he knew where he was starting from having done this, which he described as an engaging learning process, and this may be perceived as acquiring early doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988).

"*Well completing the academic needs analysis, going through that and analysing where I was at and being reflective about all of that, particularly in relation to the method stuff but also in relation to the subject content …yeah it was nice to get that done. And it was a useful piece of work from my point-of-view not just in practical terms but in terms of assessing where I was at. … All of that just fitted together very neatly. I came out the other end completely happy and that there was a good way forward."*

In the early stages of his PhD Participant Four also enjoyed meeting and working with fellow students, and developing existing relationships with supervisors, whom he already knew from his MSc. This may be perceived as the start of building doctoral 'social capital', belonging to a peer community related to his evolving doctoral 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014).

"*I'm working with three other people doing the same PhD and the same sequence as I'm doing it, although they're all full-time rather than part-time. There is one person my age, obviously a lot older than most PhD students are, but I've got a fellow PhD student who's roughly the same age as I am, and we are a peer group I guess. That set of relationships is quite important.*

I already knew my supervisors because one of them had been my dissertation supervisor and the other, had been the person who'd advised me about ethics, but I knew both very well and so that was just pleasant. But meeting my fellow students was fascinating, it was nice to meet somebody of my own age and it was nice to meet younger people as well…, and we form a nice unit in the context of the wider PhD community."

Participant Four reflected on his PhD journey so far and that it was very engaging, although he expected challenges later in the journey. He also described how he expected that facing challenges and overcoming them would be part of the PhD process that he would go through. His supervisors also warned him about the challenges to come, but they hadn't happened yet. Support from supervisors early on in terms of clarifying what students should expect from a PhD, and how the supervisory team may be seen as part of his support network.

"*I mean it's expected you will have huge challenges. I mean … It may happen at some point, presumably it's some kind of process you need to go through to sort of think, 'Oh my God, what's going on?' Yeah, so that may happen. If that does that's all well and good. I think there's an expectation by the supervisors that that will happen at some stage, you're kind of warned about it. Hasn't happened yet, but I'm only part-time so it'll probably happen later rather than sooner."*

Working relationships with supervisors – enhancing belonging and encouraging agency

Participant Four described his working relationship with his supervisors in positive terms, and he felt they were appropriately challenging, supportive and responsive. He mentioned that he was engaged by his supervisory relationships and felt a sense of encouragement. These were already established working relationships, which was helpful because they knew his academic needs and what to do in terms of supporting him and project planning.

"*Oh, it's encouraging. Appropriately challenging. I'm pretty organised really so I suspect that a lot of PhD students aren't very organised. But they sort of reinforce that and say look you seem to be doing fine. Yes. I mean they were very effective and very supportive, very helpful in terms of me working out my academic needs assessment and in terms of helping, well reinforcing what I was doing in terms of project planning."*

Participant Four felt very much in control at this point in this journey and organised, and he did not describe much struggle. However, he described how there was a potential conflict of interest between his political life and study, and he reflected on how politics was important in his life but had a negative impact on his MSc work in the past. He reflected that doing a PhD had been life affirming. In this context, he said that academic staff had influenced him only by helping him to know that he 'can' do it. He reflected that this became a central theme for him, 'If I choose to do something I can', showing his sense of confidence and agency in the early stages of his PhD journey (Archer, 1982).

> *"I think the only influence people have had is being affirming really. I don't think anybody's sort of inspired me particularly 'cos I'm doing something that is surprising. At one stage, I enquired, quite a while ago, about whether you could do a PhD or not and the professor and another senior academic said, "Yeah, you can if you want". So that was probably quite important. ...I guess just that if I choose to do something like that I can."*

From Bourdieu's perspective, Participant Four showed a strong sense of agency as a doctoral student at the beginning of his journey, who was making conscious choices. Participant Four expressed a strong sense of 'habitus' as a doctoral student at the beginning of his journey and felt more like what Bourdieu describes as a "fish in water" (Bourdieu, 1989, p43).

Getting to grips with the literature

Participant Four described how another important turning point in the early part of his journey when he experienced change was when he felt that he 'got to grips' with the literature. This shows his doctoral student development and academic confidence; and may be conceived as another stage in development of doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

> "*I guess there probably did come a point, I'd be hard put to say when it was, when I suddenly realised that I was getting to grips with the literature, which was nice. In the last few weeks I felt, 'Oh I'm grasping this and I'm starting to find there are, authors that are being mentioned in a paper that I've already read'. Yeah, it's good. I was expecting it to happen really, and it is."*

At the end of the first interview, I asked Participant Four if I could conduct a second interview in a year's time, which he agreed to.

Participant Four Stage Two interview - 2019

During the second interview, Participant Four reflected that starting the PhD was his greatest challenge as he felt uncertain about the future. However, at the time of the second interview he felt that he was gaining greater control of his PhD journey, which felt good, suggesting his greater academic confidence, agency and 'habitus' (Archer, 1982; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988). He had a successful annual review in 2018, which was another stage in acquiring doctoral 'educational capital', and academic confidence. He had now given up his local political role because he wanted to focus on his PhD journey, but he was still engaged in some aspects of political life on a voluntary basis. He reflected that it was time to move on from being fully involved in politics though this remained a strong part of his identity. Giving up his formal political role provided more time to focus on his PhD, and his supervisors reinforced this by saying that he should focus more fully on his PhD. This indicates an important turning point in his doctoral journey and his supervisors helped influence this shift.

> *"It's given me more time really. I think my supervisors and the professor see it as appropriate to have made time for the PhD, in fact in the annual review the other day the professor was saying that she thought it would be likely that the time required now would increase, which seems quite reasonable."*

In terms of making progress in his PhD journey, because he gave up some political responsibilities, he had more time to focus on his literature review in depth, was more fully involved in his PhD, and had reviewed his research questions and the main focus of study. Participant Four reflected that finishing writing the literature review and then receiving encouraging feedback during his progression review was a very positive and affirming experience, and this shows further acquisition of doctoral 'educational capital', as a part of his thesis (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

> *"I guess finishing off writing the literature review was pretty good, yes, even though the supervisors asked some very pertinent questions about it … That was a really nice feeling, so having a sort of system in the background that I can do bits of writing on particular sources and then collate into a larger document, that's working really nicely. And in fact, I've been updating it. I use a spreadsheet in addition to EndNote, so EndNote I use for sort of keeping a real track of everything, but I have a spreadsheet that I'm just linking up all the sources and all the bits of writing I've written into the*

particular cells in the spreadsheet. That's helpful in terms of really understanding what I'm doing. And it's making me realise, oh my gosh, I need to include this, this and this."

At the time of the interview, Participant Four was considering a qualitative methodology, had attended a training course on IPA (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis) and done some studying on this. He reflected that he felt confident that this was the right methodological approach. However, he was at a point where he felt challenged and didn't know whether he was going to carry on. This shows his disrupted 'habitus' during the transition towards becoming doctoral, which was demotivating (Thomas, 2002). He felt it was important to do participatory research, but his supervisors were unsure, and it looked like participatory research was going to be very difficult to achieve. This was a time of crisis in his journey. Participant Four was demoralised and considered whether he should continue as the challenges became overwhelming. However, Participant Four then acted with agency, and took charge by using a decision matrix to see the situation objectively. This was a turning point, where he overcame challenges and developed greater determination, taking control of his journey towards becoming doctoral.

"Yeah. I mean there was a point where I wondered whether I would proceed, so it was really important to me to be doing participatory research, and my supervisors were kind of saying, "Well, you know, that's a bit much." So, I used a decision matrix which is a kind of a project management and management tool that I'd used in previous parts of my life to look at the issues that were important in deciding whether to give up or not. And I set out a series of things that were important of the factors, I weighted them in terms of stay or don't, and I came round with a definitive conclusion that I should give it up. Then I decided not to. … I thought well I can do this research in a non-participatory way, or not very participatory, but I can involve people more later on. And in fact, the participation I can achieve is going to be quite helpful and quite appropriate …."

Annual review: enhancing academic confidence and agency

Participant Four described his annual review, and advice from professors, as important in influencing his journey. He described his experience of the annual review as very positive, though he felt nervous. This may be perceived as another turning point where Participant Four experienced change and acquired doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). The professor

who conducted the review was described as probing and challenging, but Participant Four reflected that he was prepared and responded well. This shows Participant Four's confidence and his agency, in that he showed how he was in control of his journey. He received positive feedback from the professor regarding the literature review, methodological evaluation, description of ethics and timeline, and hence he felt confident. He also reflected that he was confident in engaging in debate with the professor and had developed this aspect of being doctoral and critical thinking.

> *"And she was quite probing and challenging but I think I was well enough prepared that I responded fine, and in fact in her writeup about it she said I had. So that was very good. I went through the various parts of the report that I'd written which was a literature review and an examination of different methodological approaches and some stuff about ethics and a timeline for the next five years. …Yes, my supervisors stayed sullen throughout, which I guess is what they're supposed to do, and the professor asked some quite challenging questions, one or two of which I answered in the way that she really wasn't expecting, and she went sort of, "Hmm," quite happily. "*

The challenge of the ethics application and anticipating the next stage

Participant Four reflected on the challenge of his ethics application, and how he had attended courses regarding ethical data gathering and gaining informed consent. He realised that he had to develop the ethics further for writing up his thesis. Participant Four reflected that it was essential to get the ethics right to receive approval, but it could take a few months, which he again found challenging. However, Participant Four reflected that he felt in control of the situation and felt prepared in that he was partly used to it from his MSc. This again shows Participant Four's doctoral 'educational capital' and 'habitus', developed since master's level (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988). Participant Four reflected that once he had the ethics approval in place then he could do the data gathering, and progress on to the next stage of his journey.

> *"I'm going to finish off ethical applications. I'm going to find some participants. I'm going to interview them and I'm going to spend a long time analysing results. I'm going to do the transcription myself. I'll hope to be talking to about twenty people, and half a dozen of them I will speak to three times rather than just once, and that's a lot of work, especially using an IPA approach, because the analysis process is even more in depth than it is with similar analysis."*

Towards the end of the interview, Participant Four talked about participants, that he had been doing some charity voluntary work and helping with events working in mental health and dementia. This may be perceived as building doctoral 'social capital', which helped him to find research participants (Gopaul, 2014).

> "*I'm involved with a range of voluntary organisations. I'm part of … Community Group. Quite a lot of that is in its early stages but that's now become quite mature, and the culmination's tomorrow. I'm meeting with the people from the assessment and research team and the Trust. So that's when I'll agree hopefully, fingers crossed, touch wood, that they can help me with finding some participants."*

He had now changed his thinking regarding participant involvement, and his supervisors were influential in his ethical considerations in this context. His supervisors supported him to attend a course on participant involvement in research, which he felt would be engaging. He also created a research poster for a local doctoral festival, which he was critically reflecting on. This may be conceived as a form of 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988), which contributed towards his doctoral student 'habitus'.

> *"I'll be going to a..... conference in my field in a few weeks' time which as well will be quite fun. I did a poster for our local doctoral festival which with hindsight I should have done quite differently really but it was quite fun doing it I have to say. Yes, that should do for that."*

Participant Four showed that he was beginning to think more critically and adopt greater doctoral academic confidence, and belonging, having acquired and built doctoral 'educational' and 'social capital' throughout his journey so far (Bourdieu and Passeron; Bourdieu, 1988). He was also beginning to acquire early 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988).

Participant Five

Stage One Interview

Overview

Participant Five is a recently retired professional in the field of adult education. Retirement marked an important shift in her identity from professional to doctoral student towards the beginning of her doctoral journey. She was studying for a PhD in a Social Science discipline. She considers herself to be middle class, although her parents were both working class. She was influenced in different ways by her parents. Her mother was against her going to study in HE. However, her father was a strong role model for her as he worked his way up the career ladder by studying in night school to become successful. There is a sense that the inspiration from her father's adult education influenced her growing passion for adult education, her decision to study for a social science degree and her determination to continue academic development in this field. This was the seed that grew into her PhD. She discovered her interest in older people doing her undergraduate dissertation. She had always been interested in adult education and how it helps people develop in later life. She called it her mission, which belies her passion for her PhD subject.

> *"I found my way back to uni and did Social Science...I discovered an interest in older people through my undergraduate dissertation and that has continued for the rest of my life. ...So, I realise looking back, I've always been interested in adult education and how it can help people develop in various circumstances such as in later life or in their health or whatever. So that seems to be my mission in life. I'm a believer in adult education."*

This participant was approaching the end of her part-time doctoral journey having started in 2012 and had successfully navigated the transfer/upgrade process, which again may be perceived as a key turning point and development of doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu 1988). In relation to her personal life and disruptive life events, this participant had been experiencing relationship difficulties and going through counselling with her husband. At the time of the interview, she was at the point of separating from her husband. Again, this marks a key turning point related to her changing sense of being a doctoral student. As with the first participant, this participant had combined multiple roles and responsibilities during her doctoral journey of

professional, retired-professional, wife, mother, and part-time mature doctoral student. Some of these roles and responsibilities were becoming less important throughout her doctoral journey; and at the time of the interview, she perceived that her main role was now as doctoral student. Within her role of doctoral student, she discussed belonging to a variety of different academic and peer communities that contributed to different developing aspects of her identity as a doctoral student.

Reasons and background for starting a PhD

> *"It's very much a personal project, part of my lifelong development. So, I started putting my toe into those waters informally, as it were, doing little conference papers from about 2006 onwards. So as my interest in my area, which is ageing and spirituality and how it relates to lifelong learning, grew and became more focussed, I was able to formulate the idea for a PhD. As I see it, coming out of the end of a career rather than to pursue a career. I'd always planned it that way. I always saw it as the bridge from working to retirement and that's indeed what it has been."*

This participant perceived that her PhD was part of her life education journey, and hence, becoming a doctoral student may be perceived as relating to her being a life-long learner. This is linked to the participant's explanation that she was interested in the subject of her PhD and had begun related academic study several years before starting her actual PhD. Hence, the participant already perceived herself as an academic. In Bourdieu's terms (1988), by presenting papers at conferences, this participant had already acquired some 'social' and 'academic capital' as academic in her field prior to starting her doctoral journey. The participant was passionate about her PhD subject area and hence she appeared to have developed a strong sense of belonging and 'habitus' related to her disciplinary field. She described her PhD as a bridge from working to retirement, and the participant could see that this symbolised a change in her sense of becoming a doctoral student. As Anderson and Williams argue higher education can enable students to develop 'habitus', belonging and confidence (2001).

First pre-doctoral presentation: developing academic confidence and belonging

> *"I was given the opportunity to present a paper at a research event in the Adult Learning Centre at x University where I had contacts, as it were, through the adult education world.*

That went well, I think, that's why I'm remembering it. It was a confirming, "Oh yes, this seems like a good thing to do" even though I didn't have the support of an academic library at that point. I was a bit reliant on just what I could find through other means, and ended up, to my horror, presenting to quite a prestigious audience, nobody below the rank of professor and several people from America who all knew a lot more about this than I did…but they were very kind and encouraged me. So, I did begin to find a bit of an academic home that wasn't exactly what I was into, but nearer than I had encountered before. So that was encouraging too."

Before starting her PhD, this participant described presenting her pre-doctoral research ideas at a conference to a prestigious international audience in her field, who encouraged her. The participant described this experience as challenging, but this may be perceived as a turning point, which contributed to the participant developing confidence and 'educational', 'academic' and 'social capital' within her field (Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014). This was both an encouraging, but challenging start to her doctoral journey.

Publication of her first paper and the decision to start a PhD

"In 2010 I had a much more targeted seminar paper published, and I thought, "Right, okay this is the time to really go for this now. So, I identified the supervisor that I wanted who I knew was at this university and there are very few people in this area in the UK. So, it had to be him really and luckily, I just caught him before he retired. …So, it was very much my initiative, I suppose, is what I'm saying. I knew of this centre here through membership of the x Society of my field. I knew the head of department and other folk here, so it felt an okay and a good place to be. "

A seminar paper that was published during the participant's pre-doctoral journey clearly marked a turning point and her decision to start her doctoral journey. By saying that she had "identified the supervisor that I wanted" and "it was very much my initiative", shows that this participant had developed confidence, independence and agency relating to her PhD before the start of her doctoral journey. In relation to Bourdieu (1988), by saying "I knew the head of department…and it felt a good place to be" suggests that the participant had already acquired a sense of 'social capital' and 'institutional habitus', linked to belonging before starting her doctoral journey (Thomas, 2002).

Like Participant Four in the early stages of doctoral study, Participant Five was like a "fish in water" (Bourdieu, 1989, p43).

First Year of the PhD journey

Starting the PhD

> *"So, I started in 2012. My major challenge was filling up all the online stuff, which I'd never encountered before. So that was a glimpse into the new world that I was joining… I could see immediately the challenges would be IT and time management.*
> *So, it's my project, it's my funding, it's my work and when the uni gets heavy about deadlines and so on, I just remind myself, "They're here to facilitate my work not the other way around".*
> *I'm enjoying being an older student. It doesn't seem to put up barriers. So yes, all round it's had its anxious points, which no doubt we'll come onto. But, overall, I would say it was a good decision and I've been happy with it. So, it has… as it turned out, you know, life has gone on alongside it and that has perhaps been more difficult, but yeah."*

When starting her PhD journey and during induction Participant Five described the transition challenges as mainly relating to "IT and time-management". While these challenges were real, retrospectively the participant described remaining confident and undaunted by these issues. By saying "They're here to facilitate my work, not the other way round" shows that this participant had a strong sense of agency from the beginning of her doctoral journey (Archer, 1982). In relation to Bourdieu (1988), she did not feel that she was being controlled by institutional structures and was making conscious choices. The participant also describes enjoying "being an older student", which again is another important aspect of her overall sense of self as doctoral student, which she felt comfortable with. As Anderson and Williams discuss, mature students' "subjectivities shift" as "they embrace new discourses concerning studenthood, learning, the meaning of university life…" (2001, p8).

A changing work environment linked to her decision to retire

> *"A less than positive work appraisal I had in the summer of '13, … made me think, "Right, I need to reconsider being at work here." I knew I would never agree with how she saw it*

so I decided I'd give it a year to see how far I could adjust towards what she seemed to want, without feeling too stressed or feeling that I wasn't doing the job that I wanted anymore. So - I gave it that year and decided that that was it. Well, it made me come to terms with thinking, "Well work has been my main thing in life up to now and now I'm transferring that into the doctoral thing. So, I'm going to cease to be an employee and become fully a student as my primary identity."

In this extract of the interview, the participant's description of her changing work environment and new boss is clearly linked to a turning point during the early stages of her doctoral journey influencing her decision to retire from her job. By saying "So I'm going to cease to be an employee and become fully a student as my primary identity" marks an important shift in how she saw herself, where letting go of an important aspect of her prior role as professional, was making more room for her doctoral student self to emerge.

Second year PhD transition

"I think I rather enjoyed the first two years too much. I rather revelled in the being a student thing and went on all sorts of modules, which on reflection I probably didn't need to. But they were fun and got me into the company of other students. I suppose I was just remaking my own connections. Well perhaps it slowed it down a bit. Not the intended outcome, I dare say. And in fact, it probably fed it in other ways that I'm not aware of. Made me feel part of a learning community, which is always a good thing. So, I've made one or two proper friends out of that process, I suppose, I'd consider. But probably not impacted the actual progress of my own research very much."

From this extract of the interview, it is evident that the participant found the first two years of her PhD engaging, enjoyed reading the literature, being a PhD student, and taking part in doctoral training and meeting peers. Although, the participant suggests that period slowed down her progress, it may be argued that this was an important stage in her journey in which the participant was acquiring 'social capital' and her 'habitus' of being a PhD student was evolving (Bourdieu, 1988, Gopaul, 2014). In this context, she made some good friends, who became important in the participant' developing her sense of belonging.

> *"The other supervisor that my first supervisor had found for me, went on maternity leave, which was surprising. So, he and I rather muddled along a bit, I think. But, again, I did end up going to an international conference and, again, receiving a lot of encouragement. So, I sort of seized the chance even though I was only early on. And, again, there were lots of Americans there who were very experienced, and it was a very good-hearted conference, very welcoming and inclusive. And I met other PhD students who were sort of in this area, but not from an educational point of view, who were like nurses into spiritual care and that kind of thing."*

During this period, the participant referred to a lack of direction from her supervisor, by saying that they "muddled along". However, the participant evidently compensated for this lack of direction by receiving support from an external academic 'community of practice'. Here, it is evident that she had acquired greater 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1988), agency and confidence as a research student through being encouraged by the conference delegates and meeting other doctoral students related to her field.

Year Three (2014/15)

Personal life challenges and ways in which supervisors were supportive

> *"Unfortunately, in 2015, my husband announced he was having relationship difficulties. We went into counselling, and that has accompanied me ever since then up to now and we're now on the point of separation. So that's been an ongoing difficulty which has intruded variously, … So that's been, again, an unexpected and unwelcome life event unfolding alongside. But I've had to work hard to keep myself afloat. And it does impinge on other things when you feel undermined like that. It does affect your confidence in other areas, including PhD work."*

In this extract, the participant described the ongoing life event of her personal relationship breaking down as a continuing burden and pressure on the participant throughout her PhD journey. She talked about her separation from her husband as unexpected and challenging both emotionally and financially. This was stressful throughout the PhD journey and affected the participant's academic confidence in her PhD, and other aspects of life. In this context, the participant also described how

her ability to deal with stress related to her PhD had been compromised. This experience reflects ways in which part-time PhD students' progress in their PhD journeys can be disrupted by relationships and life events (Watts, 2008; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Teeuwsen et al., 2014). Her separation from her husband marked a turning point in her journey, however, which she described as a 'resolution'. This is related to a future perceived change in her sense of now being on 'her own', which she described later in the interview and the PhD journey becoming the 'backbone' of purpose in her life.

Year Four

The challenge of upgrade/transfer leading to her growth in academic confidence

> *"Not initially getting through the transfer/upgrade process, which I fully expected to…well I was devastated on the day, yeah absolutely. And then berated myself for having been falsely confident…So we all had a little wobble together I think, yeah, but they were kind enough to take the view that it was …you know, a team thing. So, it was very much a learning experience for me, but it was a knock back, especially alongside this other business going on. You know, I did question, "Can I manage this?" I don't think I ever questioned that I would go on with it because I tend to plod on. I'm a determined sort of person and I kind of felt I would get there in the end, it just wasn't very comfortable, at the time. That was the lowest point in terms of emotions, I think. I can't think of another. I had to completely rethink that year and rethink the amount of work that needed to go into it. And then, on the basis of that, I was able to give a more coherent plan and share some findings, which again improved the methodology."*

Not getting through the transfer/upgrade process was another turning point leading to the evident transformation of the participant's development as doctoral student, but which was challenging at first. In this context, it was important that the supervisory team supported the student through the challenge of not initially getting through the upgrade/transfer and that the participant perceived that they were in it together. This may be seen to relate to what Wenger conceptualises as "mutual accountability" in a 'community of practice' (1998, p81). Not getting through the transfer and having to rework her thesis with personal issues burdening her was a challenge, and she questioned whether she could cope at the time, but she remained determined to carry on following this process.

Successfully navigating this challenge marked a key PhD turning point leading to the participant's learning and academic confidence development as doctoral student.

2017/18

Picking up threads and putting down other threads

> *"And now I'm coming into a new phase in my personal life on my own.*
>
> *So…it sounds a bit corny, but yes, it is very much the tapestry of life isn't it? Some things continue and some things break off, but you end up with a sort of pattern nonetheless, even if it's not quite what you expected and certainly not very neat on the back.*
>
> *Yeah so, it's been a real learning journey. So, I've enjoyed it, still enjoying it even though it's hard work. It's going to be, you know, an absolute backbone of purpose and structure in my life really."*

Towards the end of the first interview, the participant referred to the tapestry of life as a metaphor for her doctoral journey. She described ways in which some things end, and some things continue and start. As previously argued, this aspect of changing roles in her life and doctoral journey enabled her doctoral 'educational capital' and student 'habitus' to evolve associated with belonging, doctoral learning development, and academic confidence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Anderson and Williams, 2001; Thomas, 2002; Gopaul, 2014). As discussed, the challenges that the participant experienced increased her determination to succeed and agency (Archer, 1982). She described that she was entering a "new phase of personal life on my own" and this is related to ways in which the PhD and associated research had become her new life purpose linked to her current and future role as doctoral student and academic in her field. At the end of the interview, I asked Participant Five if I could interview her in a year's time, which she agreed to.

Stage Two Interview

Finishing data collection and developing greater academic confidence

At the beginning of the second interview Participant Five reflected on her previous year, that as she had achieved all data collection, she was more academically confident, though she was initially behind with meeting a deadline. Participant Five also reflected on the data collection process and how that was a challenging part of the journey, followed by the transcription, which took several months. This shows the challenging nature of progressing from one stage to the next in the PhD journey, and the difficulties inherent in different stages of doctoral transition and in managing time (Kiley and Wisker, 2009). However, despite uncertainties of transition, Participant Five's sense of overall confidence (and previous confidence at other stages, such as rewriting following transfer) shows that she was accruing doctoral 'educational capital' and academic confidence at the end of each stage (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

> *"This time last year, I had just finished my individual interviews…so that was pleasing. But I had bust the deadline a little bit according to our plan and so the interviews went on till February or very early March. They should have been done by December. You can't always get people when you want to. But that felt positive."*

In July that year she was challenged by supervisors regarding being behind with her timescale, which was a surprise as they hadn't mentioned it before and had been encouraging. Though she was taken aback at first, this influenced her decision to go into full-time mode with her PhD to fix the problem. She realised that her assumption that a part-time attitude to her PhD was not working for her. So, she had to sacrifice some other life activities and meetings with friends to go into full-time doctoral mode and progress faster. This suggests that Participant Five was playing the doctoral 'game' here, making choices and acting with agency (Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Gopaul, 2014).

> "*So, to find myself in June, I'd been labelled as "behind" was quite alarming. So, I sat on the train on the journey home and kind of thought, right, how do we fix this? Got into problem solving mode and very quickly came upon the solution; just go into full time work mode. Just changed my view of it entirely. Reframed it, which is usually my response to things. If something isn't working you have to go back and examine your assumptions, don't you? So, my assumption was that a part time attitude towards it, is fine but actually it wasn't."*

Acting with agency: making the PhD her priority in life

Because Participant Five was four months behind schedule she took charge, made conscious choices, acted with agency, and made a plan of activities for her PhD (Archer, 1982; Bourdieu, 1988). Completely focusing on her PhD at this stage in her journey was helpful and in retrospect was effective (letting go of other activities). This was another stage in the participant's shift towards becoming doctoral and shift from being part-time in her head to being full-time. This showed that being clear about her main role as doctoral student and acting with agency positively influenced her doctoral progress.

> **"***So, I made a very conscious choice between things that I needed to keep that would sustain me like singing and choir and seeing friends, perhaps not so frequently. So that was a very conscious decision process about how I was going to manage it. And that broadly speaking has worked I'd say, much to my relief."*

Starting and completing the first stage of analysis

Participant Five then reflected on the next stage of the PhD journey, which was analysis. She described thematic coding as a full-on process and this was challenging in that the analysis was time consuming and went on till December, but it was productive. She made progress and produced findings. She described a change of working style and pace where she focused on her PhD and put lots of energy into it. This shows how she responded to the challenge with determination and confidence, leading to producing findings chapters, which 'looked good', and receiving praise from her supervisors. This is another achievement associated with accruing doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

> *"So come August, I started on the analysis… So that was a very full-on period and that lasted August till December, but it was very productive, and I emerged from that with two findings chapters basically. And the supervisors were very positive at that point — said the material looked good."*

This was followed by a Year Six annual review with senior members of staff (who had initially conducted her upgrade/transfer). They were also positive about her PhD and reassured Participant Five that all previous issues had been addressed. This gave her even greater academic confidence, and they told her that she had contributed to knowledge, another rung in the ladder of doctoral

'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). This gave her a sense she could manage to overcome academic challenges in her doctoral journey.

> *"The Year Six review that I then had in September was then very positive because they could see I was really on track. The plans were going to work, so they thought at that point! So that gave me confidence to just keep steaming ahead really. And it made me feel like, okay, I can manage this. There may be things I hadn't realised had gone wrong, but I can still respond and change."*

The trauma of separation – its influence on her PhD

In terms of life events, Participant Five was still going through the after-effects of separation from her husband and getting used to being separated was traumatic. Her son, who had also been living at home, then moved out, which Participant Five described as appropriate. Participant Five struggled with a loss related to her family relationships at this stage. However, Participant Five reflected that she had to go through the painful process of letting go of these relationships in parallel to progressing to the final stages of her PhD journey and becoming doctoral. This happened while Participant Five was finishing transcripts and starting coding, which she described as requiring a lot of attention and focus. Participant Five reflected that it was a good distraction from emotional difficulties, where she focused on her PhD work, showing determination in the face of this challenge.

> "*Yeah, a good thing to be doing at that point; it took me out of the family thing. So, I wouldn't say the emotional thing…I wasn't aware of it impacting. I guess it must have done at some level, but I just felt right, I just need to get on with this and it gave me a particular thing to do."*

The letting go of one role of wife and mother in parallel to the greater focus on her PhD and development of her doctoral student self, linked to her evolving doctoral 'habitus', was another important turning point in her journey, showing her acting with agency and making positive choices in her life and PhD journey (Bourdieu, 1988; Archer, 1982). The fact that her son cleared everything out of his room, she described as cathartic. The way in which Participant Five turned his room into a study for her, which was more spacious, and redecorated it, is a symbolic turning point, in which

Participant Five was acting with agency to develop her sense of belonging and 'habitus' linked to a doctoral learning space.

> "*However, I decided one way to tackle it would be to take over his bedroom and make it into a better study in terms of cramped circumstances I had in my room at the time. And so that was quite cathartic. ... Over the summer I redecorated it to my own taste. That was very positive and productive."*

The conscious decision to shift further towards her doctoral student role was marked – like a rite of passage – by throwing a party for her friends. This may be seen as another symbol of doctoral transformation here, which Participant Five described as 'confirming'. As she was able to explain to her friends that she was going to fully focus on her PhD and may not be able to see them so often, helped her deal with not needing to explain why she couldn't meet people.

> *"And in August it was my birthday, so I threw a party for girlfriends and to open my new study. I put a ribbon up and cut it, invited people around for tea. So that was very jolly, and it was very confirming. It was also a chance for me to explain to my nearest friends that this year coming was going to be very different. I might not be able to see them. I'm just having to drop out of activity."*

She was acting with agency in this situation of consciously shifting from being a part-time student, juggling life priorities to focus more on her PhD as full-time activity. This conscious shift, alongside the support from her friends, helped her emotionally and to progress with her PhD journey. As Leonard and Becker argue, part-time PhD students may often rely on support from people outside their university (2009).

> *"So, I guess what I was doing was, establishing support outside of husband and child, to give myself a way of supporting myself. And again, that has largely worked. So, I had my full-time work policy continue throughout the autumn term.*"

The challenge of Christmas followed by January blues

Participant Five described the Christmas period as a complication, and family relationships were challenging at that time. Although she faced this episode in her life and PhD and coped with it, the

downside of this was that Participant Five was left emotionally drained and found it difficult to continue with her PhD in January.

> "*Christmas needed careful management because the family's coming together and what to do so that was managed okay. I think in the end, in January, I concluded it had been quite tiring and emotionally draining…And it really took me a lot longer to get going again in January, I think. So, my little schedule, which had been brilliantly on time was then beginning to feel a bit dodgier."*

She reflected how January was difficult and how it was draining especially being on her own. In this context, she mentioned how it was good to know that her friends were supportive in the background.

Moving on to the final stage of her PhD and discussion chapter

Participant Five recounted that her findings chapters were well received, and at the time of the second interview she was focusing on her discussion chapter. Participant Five reflected that moving on to this next stage of the discussion chapter was a challenge, which was not entirely expected, and she felt stuck. She described that she had a plan to finish and hand in her thesis but was now questioning her ability to do it. She reflected, that though she thought she knew what was involved in the discussion chapter, bringing everything together with literature was very difficult. This was another transition, which was challenging for Participant Five and where her 'habitus' and academic confidence appeared "disrupted" (Anderson, 2001, p141). However, overcoming the challenge and completing the discussion chapter may be perceived as another turning point and evolution in the journey to achieve the doctorate.

> *"I produced an outline quite early on of what I thought it should be, but the doing of it has been much harder, and just bringing stuff together from literature that, you know, I dealt with in the review, but that was like four years ago. Having to reread that account — well, what did it say in relation to the findings — it's been a real challenge. It kind of feels like this is where the real work has begun!"*

Participant Five perceived that the discussion was the real work of the thesis and everything else was preparation for that. During this final transition stage, she reflected that sometimes she felt confident about her thesis and at other times critical. Sometimes, she thought it was fine and 'good

enough' (Wisker, 2010). This criticality may be conceptualised as another aspect of becoming doctoral.

> *"And I lurch from day to day thinking, this is okay, this is a good thesis, this is fine, to, oh, this is rubbish. This isn't addressing even the questions I've asked myself let alone others. And then other days, I just think, well, it'll be good enough. I've read worse. I shall haul it over the line and that'll be just fine."*

Support from the supervisory team at the final hurdle

In this context, Participant Five reflected on how the supervisors were supportive and reassuring that her discussion chapter was good, so she remained confident and optimistic. Though Participant Five reflected that her supervisors had been constantly encouraging throughout her journey, she now perceived that doctoral challenges were her own to bear. Participant Five described how while she was relying on that support during the analysis stage, she was now moving beyond that reliance, becoming more independent as a doctoral scholar, and acting with greater agency. This may be conceived as a final stage of the doctoral 'educational capital' ladder, increasing her sense of being doctoral (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). However, Participant Five reflected that was another scary transition.

> "*Yeah, I feel a bit conflicted really. I'm a bit frightened of it, I think, because I've never been very good at saying what I think, with confidence. But if I can't do it now based on proper research, then now's the time, isn't it really? So that's quite scary."*

She reflected that she felt less confident in the past, but at the time of the interview she could draw conclusions with confidence based on her research. She described how it was frightening becoming a doctor - the final stage of her doctoral journey. This may be conceptualised at this stage as more than 'educational capital', a form of 'academic capital'. To clarify for Bourdieu qualifications and knowledge gained throughout education may be conceptualised as 'educational capital', while academic status, e.g., being a 'Doctor' or 'Professor' is conceived as 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988).

Reflection on struggle as a main theme in her journey

Participant Five concluded that struggle was the main theme in her journey. She reflected how the journey metaphor is strange, that there are lots of ups and downs and some wrong turns, and unexpected points. However, she managed the tumult by being determined, organised with time, and disciplined. In this context, her accrual of doctoral 'educational' and 'social capital', evolving 'habitus' and associated confidence and belonging helped her to manage the ups and downs of the journey and succeed.

> "*I suppose emotionally and through all the personal stuff, there's been a sense of just digging in and thinking right, I'm not going to let this prevent me from doing this, despite not being supported, and having various handicaps, I'm going to finish this, whatever. "*

Since the second interview Participant Five wrote to me and has successfully completed her PhD. She has also read this case-study narrative and confirmed that it reflects her experiences.

Participant Nine

Overview

Participant Nine has a senior teaching and managerial role in an Architecture discipline in HE and has several years teaching experience. He wanted to focus on his own creativity in his PhD, which he is passionate about, and to then use his own research to develop his teaching in the future. He has a partner and young child, who live with him some of the time. At the time of the second interview, Participant Nine was recovering from cancer treatment and had undergone the additional challenges of coping with this during the Covid-19 pandemic, which meant that he had to take a break from his PhD.

Stage One interview 2019

Rationale for starting a PhD

Participant Nine's rationale for doing a PhD was that he wanted to do his own creative work outside his university job and contribute something new. He reflected that it took him a few years to decide what he wanted to research. He described how he pulled together different threads that he was interested in including social justice, international development, architecture and fine art as the subject of his proposal. He reflected that he had wanted to do a PhD for some time. He looked at other PhD students and what they were doing and wanted to do that. Thinking about how to pull threads together and talking to friends and colleagues about it was like marking the start of his doctoral journey. Participant Nine reflected that following that stage, writing the initial proposal was an important turning point, and the first achievement in his PhD journey.

> *"So, I'm very keen on trying to get back into doing my own work and developing my own ideas. And, for a long time, I wasn't clear what I wanted to do, so that took quite a long time to coalesce. I had two or three things that I was very interested in, but none of them seemed...the other things seemed to pull, so I took a while until I found a way to sort of combine different threads into a research proposal."*

Challenges in balancing roles as a part-time student, lecturer and parent during early stages of the PhD journey

Participant Nine reflected that juggling his roles as a lecturer and PhD student was difficult in terms of balancing time and allowing space for his PhD. He reflected that because of this he took a long time to put his initial proposal together. However, he overcame this challenge, completed his proposal in 2017 and it was accepted. This may be conceived as going through an initial challenging transition, and then experiencing a turning point and a first stage in achieving doctoral 'educational capital' in his journey (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988; Thomas, 2002). However, Participant Nine also reflected that this early stage in his journey also coincided with the birth of his child. Looking back, he reflected that it was difficult to try to do a PhD, when working full-time and with a small child, but it was happening.

> *"I eventually got a proposal together a couple of years ago, and that proposal was accepted. But at the same time, the birth of my first child happened …, which seemed a*

> *little bit of utter madness to try and do a PhD when you're doing a full-time job and you've got a little boy increasingly running around. …And so, I've just had the research proposal accepted. I needed two goes at it, but that's been done and accepted, so I'm now moving into the next stages of it."*

Participant Nine described how he was now moving on to the next stage of his journey. Alongside study, Participant Nine said that academic work had been creating a lot of pressure for him. Hence, he withdrew from his senior academic role, deciding that managing people and attending meetings wasn't what he wanted to do. However, Participant Nine reflected that he still had quite a heavy teaching load at the time of the interview, and it was difficult balancing life, work and study and looking after a child. This may be conceived as a way in which coinciding life events alongside learning can make the PhD journey difficult for part-time PhD students (Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013; Teeuwsen et al., 2014).

> *"It's just trying to cope, because I've had quite a senior position in the academic world, I withdrew from that, I was a senior academic in my discipline, but managing people and attending all those meetings isn't something that I'm good at or really want to do. So I withdrew from that role and I've got quite a heavy teaching load ….It's difficult, because if I'm teaching all day and then I go home, and if the little one is there, you can't do anything else, as I'm sure you're aware, until he goes to sleep, but by that time it's getting a bit late."*

The practical challenges of doing an arts-based PhD and time constraints

Participant Nine reflected on the practical challenges of an arts-based PhD and how it was difficult to find the time and space for this. He reflected that he had to do practical PhD work at weekends or in the evenings and explained that the studio practice involved a lot of time setting up and should ideally continue for several days at a time, but it was difficult to get this going. This shows disciplinary differences here for PhD students, in that practice-based PhDs may be conceived as more challenging in terms of time and space than researching or writing on a laptop. This finding has implications for PhD students' appropriate learning space in relation to their discipline. Participant Nine reflected that, in the future, he was considering reducing his teaching load and becoming a part-time teacher rather than full-time academic, to help him focus more on his PhD.

> *"Drawing practice, being in a studio, trying to draw and do the other kind of quite big works that I'm trying to work on. It's just getting to it, because you must go into the studio and then think for a while, and you have to get the materials and everything organised, and then you can start working. So, it should last, it should be sustained over several days, but it's just difficult to get it going…. Perhaps for the future, I am seriously considering reducing my contract just to give myself a bit more time, so I'd be a part-time teacher rather than a full-time academic."*

This may be seen as another turning point in that Participant Nine was making a conscious choice (Bourdieu, 1988), and acting with agency to focus more on being a doctoral student and less on his professional teaching role (Archer, 1982).

Early feedback from his supervisors and starting to develop doctoral critical thinking

Participant Nine described how he felt exhilarated at first about getting the proposal done, but then he received constructive criticism from his supervisors. Despite the criticism, Participant Nine reflected that the feedback was very helpful; and it was worthwhile having to rethink, discuss and then rewrite his proposal. This was another turning point, and a stage of change and development in doctoral learning and doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Participant Nine described how he was a little doubtful and puzzled after the criticism, "like a fish out of water" (Thomas, 2002, p431). However, he then realised that finding out that he didn't know the answers at this stage was helpful. This may be conceived as a key early transition in accruing doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu, 1988).

> *"I wasn't quite sure what I should have done, but going back, instead of thinking that I knew what it was, literally finding that I didn't really know what it was, and so that helped me. And some advice from one of the supervisors to really look at what research meant and understanding research in this field, what it means, and going back to some of those sources and discovering that I didn't know what I thought I knew. Which I think is always the journey in any academic field; you don't know what you think you know."*

At the end of the first interview, I asked Participant Nine if I could interview him again. He agreed to this. However, because of Participant Nine's and my own ill health the second interview happened two years later.

Stage Two Interview 2021

How time taken as a part-time PhD student was beneficial in developing his ideas

At the beginning of the second interview Participant Nine reflected that the extra time taken as a part-time PhD student allowed greater time for his PhD to evolve and change, enabling an in-depth learning process to take place, which was beneficial. Participant Nine also discussed how his PhD ideas evolved since the previous interview. He relayed how the orientation of his PhD had changed and become more autoethnographic, linked to his own experiences of his upbringing and sense of belonging in another country. In this context, Participant Nine focused on issues of land and belonging relating to indigenous people and colonial settlers; and how this was not taught in history or in his school education as a child. This shift of focus in his PhD now related more to his own 'cultural', early 'educational capital' and 'habitus', which appeared to be 'disrupted' (Anderson, 2001, p141); and how researching this subject was a way of healing his 'disrupted habitus' and sense of self (Anderson, 2001, p141). His ideas were also a way to resist the structural forces that affected his country and education where he grew up – and to develop agency through his PhD (Archer, 1982; Bourdieu, 1988).

> *"So that the orientation of the PhD has changed. To incorporate my understanding of, or lack of understanding perhaps, of settlement and colonialism in this other country. I was always aware of it, but in my early education, you know, this tended to be avoided, I think in most of the curriculum. It's undoubtedly changed now in …., but at the time, we were just not aware of some of the events in the history of …. and I've become aware of that since then. And so somehow that has been able to be incorporated into my own studies. And it's changed the orientation of them. I still want to work with ideas of drawing, surveying, colonial occupation of land and so on. …. So that's one very positive thing that's happened over the time, and I'm not sure that would have happened if I hadn't had that little bit of extra time, from the treatment, so I guess there's swings and roundabouts."*

This was a significant time of change in his PhD journey, where he had evidently accrued doctoral 'educational capital' linked to his evolving 'doctoral habitus' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

The annual review: colleagues', supervisors' and internal examiners' positive influence on his PhD evolution

Since the first interview Participant Nine also reflected on how his colleagues and supervisors read his work for his annual review and provided helpful feedback, and as a result he shifted direction as described above. This shows how colleagues (or peers) and supervisors are important in PhD students' learning development, and developing agency to make choices and change course in their PhD journeys. This was another turning point, relating to Participant Nine developing 'social' and 'educational capital' (Bourdieu, 1988). Participant Nine then reflected that the annual review was very positive. Two examiners made different suggestions, but each were helpful about how his PhD direction would develop, and how different aspects of PhD would inform each other, suggesting a resource that was helpful and to draw on his own experiences – which made the work more interesting and reflective.

> *"Yes, there were two colleagues from within School of X and although they both made slightly different suggestions about it, we had a very good discussion and we generally agreed on some things, but the suggestions that each of them came with were very helpful about the way the direction would evolve, drawing on the practice work with the writing and how they would feed into each other. They suggested a resource that I hadn't been aware of, and that I hadn't really seen, and some resources that I was aware of but haven't investigated. And I think the suggestion that came was to draw on some of my own past experience in my own circumstances I think, to bring that into the work and that became more interesting."*

How serious illness was a turning point that negatively affected his PhD, work and family life

Participant Nine reflected that he became seriously ill with cancer since the first interview and had received chemotherapy treatment, which had affected his PhD and other areas of his life. Before the illness he was considering reducing his teaching load to focus on his PhD, which would have been a positive change. He was diagnosed with cancer in 2019 and he described how this meant that he had to take time off study and still wasn't ready to start studying again because of tiredness following his treatment.

"So, I had an appointment with my GP when I came back to England. And she then suggested I should go to have some specialist tests. She didn't think it was a particular problem, but she thought I should go and get and get a check-up, which I was able to do, and they diagnosed quite a serious problem after numerous tests. So that then really stopped the PhD in its tracks at that point, although I was able to carry on with teaching - I had, you know, teaching commitments on various modules."

This extract shows how life events, such as serious illness can interrupt PhD journeys, and particularly part-time PhD journeys (Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013). The situation was worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic happening in 2020, and the fact that communication with colleagues and supervisors was now online. As Donohue et al. (2021) found doctoral students' contact with their peer community was adversely affected by the pandemic. In this context, Participant Nine reflected that he didn't like online communication compared to face-to-face meetings, and this was less engaging.

"That's missing now because of the pandemic. I meet colleagues but we meet to discuss academic matters and student progress course matters. … So, it's missing that you could perhaps sit down and have a coffee with a colleague and discuss things that you are both interested in and particularly research issues. Although there are the various attempts that are made about research talks. Some of my colleagues are very diligent and working towards trying to open up research issues or research groups. But it's not easy when you don't have people there on a one-to-one basis to discuss things with. It's just not such a happy situation when you're talking to someone through a screen."

Low points were when the treatment effects kicked in

Participant Nine described his plans to do reading and other work towards his PhD before his illness, but he reflected that this didn't happen because of his treatment, which made him tired. He also recounted that the recovery period after treatment was much longer than expected, so this had a more significant effect on his life than he thought.

"At the time of the treatment, which was in autumn-winter 2019, I was able to carry out the teaching duties. And I also had a great plan for, you know, being able to catch up with reading and do other work towards the PhD, but it didn't happen because the effect of the treatment, of course makes you tired and unwell and not able to work in the way that you

want. And then after the treatment ended, I again thought, well, OK, now I'll have a month or a couple of months recovery and I'll be I'll be able to get back into it. But again, that didn't happen."

This shows the adverse and long-term impact of serious illness on his doctoral journey. Participant Nine reflected that the most difficult thing for him was not being able to do drawing since he became ill, and not being able to focus on that. Participant Nine expressed his frustration at this situation where a life event – cancer - disrupted his journey. Although he was able to continue with teaching, he couldn't do anything else.

Influences of the pandemic and lockdown on his study, family and work in 2020

In addition to having a serious illness and the impact this had on his PhD, Participant Nine also reflected how the lockdown and pandemic affected him and his family and made it more difficult to all live together in the house. He described how his toddler was boisterous and wanted to play. Participant Nine recounted how this situation made it difficult to do his academic job and PhD. Looking back, Participant Nine reflected that his family and little boy had a major influence on his journey, and adversely affected his time available for study.

"When we were in the first stage of the first lockdown, because of the pandemic, - that also affects things - it was quite difficult with the three of us being confined to the house. And you know, a boisterous toddler, as he was at that point, who always wanted to play. We were able to take him to the park after a while, but that became pretty difficult to do my normal academic duties, let alone, having time for the research."

In addition, Participant Nine described how he was frustrated during the lockdown because he was not able to talk to colleagues face-to-face or use the library. Participant Nine reflected that if he hadn't had the illness the pandemic would have made an ideal opportunity to lock himself away to do research; but he said that teaching in lockdown was demanding, more time consuming and difficult to communicate (Donohue et al., 2021). Participant Nine expressed how he felt frustrated and wanted to get on with his PhD during the pandemic, but the teaching took up a lot of time and was more intense because of lockdown. The cancer together with the pandemic was evidently a combination of life events that adversely affected this participant's PhD journey, made it difficult for him to engage with peers and supervisors, and disrupted his doctoral student 'habitus' (Anderson, 2001, p141; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012).

"It's frustrating not being able to talk to colleagues directly, you know, just wandering around an office and talking. It's frustrating, not really being able to use the library, although the online library I think is very good. I suppose that without the illness, if the pandemic had happened, and I'd been confined to the home, that would have sort of made more of an ideal, you know, place to lock myself away to research. But unfortunately, the academic concerns of teaching in the lockdown involves much, much more work, it's more difficult to get things done, and it's more time consuming. You can't again easily talk to colleagues. Well, you can't easily talk to groups of students you know. So, all those things make it much more difficult."

How his PhD changed over time and became more reflective

However, at the time of the second interview Participant Nine reflected his PhD had changed for the better, in that he was able to incorporate elements from his own past, and his PhD was more reflective and autoethnographic. Participant Nine confirmed that he felt engaged with his PhD and wanted to continue with it again. He described how his PhD journey was bubbling away in the background, he was thinking about it and had some books to read, so it was taking shape in his mind. He wanted to start again in Easter 2021. Participant Nine evidently felt engaged and motivated despite the challenges of serious illness and the pandemic that he faced. Though the thesis hadn't physically evolved, his ideas had evolved and hence this shows how doctoral thinking is an important process in the journey.

"The PhD journey you know is kind of bubbling away in the background. I'm still very much aware of it and I've managed to purchase a couple of books which I'm really looking forward to reading. So, it's still there and taking shape, I think in my mind, and I'm about to use the Easter break or part of it to really launch myself back into the work. So, I can get a good start on it before I come back again officially."

Interaction with research groups building social capital

Participant Nine also mentioned that he had been engaged in writing and editing a book with colleagues abroad, and this would be published soon, and that his colleagues were supportive. Participant Nine reflected that this indirectly related to his PhD and teaching work. He also said that

he was a member of some research groups and had attended some meetings, so he was also building 'social' and 'academic capital' in this way (Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014).

> *"I mean, I suppose this one thing which I haven't mentioned is that I have agreed to become co-editor for a book with a couple of colleagues of mine from Z, and that, I think had begun. And our last meeting with that took a lot of time and quite a lot of energy. I managed to write a chapter for that. I'm just finishing helping with the introduction of it, so hopefully it's going to go to the publisher. So, there's something like 8 chapters in this book, and I'm very fortunate that both of my colleagues in Z did quite a lot of the work. So that took up time as well."*

Developing confidence and resilience linked to challenges he faced

Looking back over his journey so far, Participant Nine confirmed that his confidence had increased in relation to his ability to teach and support student learning, which was associated with his PhD. He explained that through research he had become aware of tacit knowledge and was trying to allow that to come through in his teaching, showing how doctoral research positively informs teaching practice. This may be conceptualised as accrual of doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu, 1988).

> *"I think I've developed more confidence in the way that I can help. In the review, you know there's suggestions I can offer and one aspect of my research which I think I need to develop properly is the notion of what we might call tacit knowledge, that knowledge that you don't know that you have. And so, I've been thinking about that quite a lot and allowing some of that to come through into the teaching work that this reminds me of this or something you know. And having the confidence to run with that and that seems to have been quite well received."*

Participant Nine also said that he had become more resilient and learnt how to keep on top of things, use time effectively, and ticking off to do lists, which showed his developing agency in the face of challenges (Archer, 1982). These developed coping skills were positively affecting his journey, and he was feeling motivated by the idea of future reading and confident about his future doctoral journey.

"I've become more focused. I don't think I really realised what the doctorate entailed, and the concentrated reading that that one needs to do. So that certainly has changed. I've become more confident in what I know through more focused reading."

Since the second interview, I have been in contact with Participant Nine and he has recovered from his cancer-treatment and been given the 'all clear'. He is now at the point of resuming his PhD journey.

Participant Twelve

Overview

Participant Twelve is a young part-time overseas PhD student studying a tourism related subject. She was living overseas during both interviews. At the time of the first interview, she had moved in with her boyfriend and by the time of the second interview, in 2021, she had married her partner and she was considering having children. At the time of the second interview, she considered her PhD to be a hobby, more than the central focus in her life. Other aspects of life she felt were more important. She was working professionally throughout her PhD journey so far and was recently working in a university. She wanted to work in the university in the future because she likes academic life. She was drawn towards becoming an academic and belonging to the university academic community.

Stage One interview

Developing contact with research peers in her field

At the beginning of her journey, Participant Twelve said she met a PhD student friend at a conference. This was evidently a turning point leading her towards her current PhD, as her friend's topic was related to Participant Twelve's's research interests. Participant Twelve also said that her friend worked at a university in the UK and was from her country, which triggered positive feelings for Participant Twelve because she wanted to do that too. This experience shows how Participant Twelve was building early 'social capital' and belonging related to her PhD journey (Thomas, 2002; Gopaul, 2014).

> *"I would say a critical event would be meeting another student who is also doing her PhD on that campus. So, it was just like a good coincidence in my life to meet her, which led to something positive, like getting into contact with possible supervisors. Because before I also applied for various PhD programmes in the past, but it didn't always work out at other universities. But now it felt like I am in the right place this time, yeah."*

Starting point of her PhD in 2018

During an early stage of her PhD, Participant Twelve reflected on an important series of events - contacting the professor, then meeting her supervisors, and submitting her application. She enrolled on her PhD in December 2018. Participant Twelve felt that this was a very positive starting point for her journey, and she felt recognised, and so this suggests that she also felt a sense of belonging. Being 'recognised as a potential candidate' may be seen as the beginning of Participant Twelve developing a sense of doctoral 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988).

> *"It was positive I think at the beginning. I contacted my supervisor, who wasn't then my supervisor and then she arranged to have a phone call, which was for me very positive to be recognised as a potential candidate. Because in other universities it was not always the case, I think. They have so many applications and then to be recognised maybe as a possible candidate is quite nice. To be taken seriously, which is good."*

Meeting her supervisors was evidently a turning point for Participant Twelve where she developed her first awareness that she was now starting her PhD, and she had to push herself. She reflected that in the journey there are lots of steps involved and each one is a challenge, which also reflects the experiences of other participants in this research study. For instance, she mentioned that having to defend her thesis wasn't easy. However, having gone through the process of having to defend her thesis, she felt relief afterwards. Participant Twelve also described how the supervisory team at her interview were very professional and made her feel welcome and at ease. This key event helped to increase her confidence.

> *"What I know up to now is not enough, I have to push myself more because it's a different level now, I think. What you said was a… challenging event is also like this whole application process, there are lots of steps involved, which I didn't really realise, like an interview and all that, which I didn't know before so that was quite a*

challenge….I thought maybe what I wrote in my proposal would have been enough to get me into the university, but actually then defending my work, that was quite hard for me …

And having gone through that process how did you feel afterwards?

Relieved I think because I thought it could have been worse, but it was okay. I thought they were very professional how they handled the whole interview and made me feel comfortable and that made it easier for me."

A challenging period relating to the research plan in 2019 coinciding with life events

In 2019, Participant Twelve reflected how during the early stages of the PhD and doing the research plan was stressful. This was also because lots of other things were going on in her life, as they were for all participants in this research. An important life event that happened at this time was moving into a flat with her boyfriend. Participant Twelve reflected how the coincidence of moving to a new apartment and starting her PhD was difficult, as she had a deadline coming up to hand in her research plan while also moving flat. This meant there was extra pressure on her to balance both aspects of her life and PhD journey. Participant Twelve recounted how before the PhD she could focus just on herself, but now she had to balance life and study. Participant Twelve said she wanted to see her PhD as a hobby, so it didn't take over her whole life. She perceived that, juggling different aspects of her life was a theme that was important in her journey so far (as it was for the other participants). She also mentioned that she needed to study part-time because she wanted to keep her job and enjoy her personal life. This reflects the difficulties that part-time PhD students face balancing life events, relationships, and PhD study (Watts, 2008; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013; Teeuwsen et al., 2014).

"When I visited the UK in February last year then it was the same time when I met my boyfriend, who I am together with still now and we moved into a flat. That's what happened at the time but there were other life events during that time, just like maybe some stress with applying, or finding an apartment, maybe this kind of thing.

I think it's like a balancing act. Before I was only concerned with myself and I could choose when I wanted to study for my PhD, but now I have to find a balance between both. And I try to view the PhD more like a hobby, so it doesn't take over my whole life, otherwise I don't think it will work."

Disappointing experience of enrolment that disrupted her sense of belonging

Participant Twelve reflected how the physical enrolment at university to start her PhD was not straightforward and could have been better organised. Hence, this was not perceived as a good start after the positive interview, and didn't help her to feel welcome, so her 'habitus' was 'disrupted' at this important transition into starting her PhD (Anderson, 2001, p141). She also described how she was disappointed at enrolment because she felt she was not being taken seriously. Hence, this counteracted her previous sense of belonging. Participant Twelve reflected that there should have been better instructions and communication about enrolment as she was paying lots of money.

> *"Yes, well now I am coming up to like December when I went for my second visit, and I did my enrolment. There I was a bit disappointed because the enrolment didn't work like I wanted it to. I thought it could have been a bit more organised. When I was in the UK somebody told me you have to enrol online first to trigger the actual application, but nobody told me so, maybe if you see it from a service perspective I was a bit disappointed because it is also involving a lot of money doing a PhD and then I thought that could have been a bit better organised but in the end it was okay, it all worked out."*

First face-to-face meeting with her supervisor and going to the university - developing belonging and engagement

Overall, however, Participant Twelve described how physically going to the university and meeting her supervisors and other PhD students face-to-face was positive, and it felt as though she was in the right place to do her PhD. Participant Twelve also mentioned that her supervisors were specialised in her field. Despite the enrolment not feeling welcoming, her supervisor was very welcoming and made her feel at home.

> *"Well, what was good, the professor, or my supervisor, she went round the university with me and showed me everything, which was very good because I am not very often in the city where the university is but if I am there I know where to go and where I can work and so on."*

Hence, Participant Twelve was acquiring an early sense of belonging associated with 'habitus' (Thomas, 2002).

Challenging second supervision meeting regarding her research plan

Then Participant Twelve had a challenging supervision meeting regarding the research plan. She reflected that she found her supervisors' criticism surprising and a bit of a challenge. She realised she had to be specific in everything she was writing. Participant Twelve recounted that this didn't make her feel good at first, because she was a perfectionist, but then she tried to see it positively and learn from it. This may be conceived as another turning point leading to a sense of working at doctoral level, thinking more critically, and accepting a new level of doctoral academic work. Hence, she had accrued more doctoral 'educational capital' at this stage (Bourdieu, 1988).

> *"It felt like I did everything wrong in the first place, but they calmed me down and said, you don't have to delete everything but just change the structure. So don't delete, just change it a bit and then it should be okay. But at the beginning you are totally confused what to do. But for me it is always like I have to think about it a few days and let it settle and then it will become clearer, I think. It showed me how much professors look at details at this level. You have to really think about every sentence you write, if it makes sense or is it nonsense what you are writing or, yeah, lots of pressure just because it's quite different now."*

Participant Twelve recounted that after her supervisors' criticism, she felt overwhelmed because she didn't know where to start. This uncertainty may be perceived again as Participant Twelve feeling a "disrupted habitus" during this academic transition (Anderson, 2001, p 141), and what Kiley and Wisker (2009, p433) describe as "a liminal state". Participant Twelve reflected that the critical feedback on her research plan was a low point, and the outlook was that she would have to work hard.

Developing belonging to a peer community

Participant Twelve reflected that around this time she met some other PhD students, and they were helpful in giving her tips and moral support. Participant Twelve reflected that it was good to hear about other PhD students' struggles and to realise that she was in the same boat as them, so she felt less worried. In this context, Participant Twelve's feeling part of a peer community and her building

of ‘social capital’ (Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014) was an important supportive aspect to her doctoral journey.

> **“***The first contact was also via Skype with a student from overseas, but she was in the UK at the time, in the city where my university is and she was very helpful, she could give me some tips as well on her PhD. And twice I met the student from my country, who I already met in October the first time, so we spent some time together in the UK, and another overseas student I met, and somebody else. But yeah, I did meet some. Yeah, just to talk about their PhD journey as well and see what difficulties they had, or they could give me some tips, which might be helpful for my own PhD and seeing others’ struggle makes me also feel a bit less worried because I just see that it’s normal.”*

Future plans

Participant Twelve reflected that the next phase of her journey in 2019 would be handing in findings, and meeting deadlines. Participant Twelve reflected that she preferred to have deadlines to work towards. She said she was not worried about the isolation (of being a distance learning student) and she just needed her desk and her laptop. Looking forward, however, Participant Twelve said she was worried about the future and having a family, and as a result needing to take time off her PhD. She questioned how she would handle everything and perceived that some people stop their PhDs when they have children. Again, this shows the potential disruption and uncertainty that part-time doctoral students in particular face juggling different aspects of life alongside PhD study (Watts, 2008; Gardner and Gopaul, 2014; Teeuwsen et al., 2014).

> *“That’s like a point where I do worry a bit because they told me I had seven years maximum for the part-time PhD, and now I’m 33 next week and of course I am also thinking about family so that does make me worry a bit how to handle everything. Yeah, if you have children or something, that does worry me a bit, Because most people always tell me, you cannot do everything at once or some people have stopped doing their PhD when they have children.”*

Participant Twelve agreed to participate in a second interview, which took place in 2021.

Stage Two interview

The early pressure of deadlines and difficulty in balancing study with personal life

During 2019 following her research plan, Participant Twelve reflected that she focused on and finished her methodology, which she found challenging, and then she went on to develop her literature review. Participant Twelve said that it was positive that she was making progress, and in this sense developing doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). However, there was a phase when she felt very under pressure with lots of deadlines constantly. This is because she had to juggle her PhD with her private life, and all the other things she was doing. She reflected that she said she didn't work all the time on her PhD and was not that kind of person. She critically reflected that she only worked on her PhD when a deadline was coming near, so wanted to try to manage her time better and do more reading. This shows how she was starting to develop agency, making conscious choices, and 'playing the game' (Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Gopaul, 2014), by making positive difference in her PhD study routine.

> *"And then you have lots of stuff which you can do alternatively to sitting down and doing your PhD. I think that's the main problem. And I'm not the kind of person who is always working on the PhD, so I just work when the deadline draws close, which is not good. But I tried to work on this issue to start earlier and get some reading done. At least then I have the feeling I'm doing something."*

Getting married in 2019 followed by other life events: difficulty in finding time for her PhD

Participant Twelve said she went on holiday to Thailand in 2020 just before the pandemic started and recounted that she was lucky to be able to come back. This was followed by other life events including moving to a new town, moving flat, and changing jobs. This shows that Participant Twelve was juggling lots of different important changing aspects of her life and going through some major transitions. This is another example of the challenges faced by part-time doctoral students, and how life events and personal relationships can sometimes be overwhelming and interrupt the PhD journey (Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013).

> *"We went on a honeymoon to Thailand in 2020 just before Corona started, so we were lucky to go there and come back. And another life event … last October I changed jobs. So*

that was quite significant and another one in December, we decided to move to a different town. And now in February we moved to a new flat. So quite a lot happening…I mean sometimes. I really feel it is a problem getting everything done. I mean to have time for everything with a full-time job and then working on the PhD."

The disruptive influence of the pandemic and working from home on her wellbeing and motivation

Another problem that Participant Twelve encountered was working from home during the pandemic, while also trying to study from home. This was influencing her well-being in that she described that she felt that she needed a break from work before starting to study. This situation had been going on for one year. This shows the difficulty that Participant Twelve was experiencing related to not having a suitable learning space for her work or PhD study, which detrimentally affected her motivation for PhD study.

"I'm working a lot in there like most of the people in the home office. So, I think that's quite important also to manage because I feel like I work 8.5 hours at home and then I just can't sit down again and continue with the PhD straight away. That's influencing me quite a lot, yeah, so I just feel always I need a break. I need to get out of the house. Yeah, I've been working in the home office for one year now so it's quite long."

Participant Twelve also described how this situation was isolating, and how there was a lack of variety and lack of contact with colleagues. This showed that Participant Twelve felt less of a sense of belonging to a university community when working from home. This is reflected by Gardner and Gopaul (2012) and Watts (2008) who found that part-time PhD students' sense of isolation can negatively influence their wellbeing and engagement; and by Donohue et al., who also found that doctoral students' mental health and motivation were adversely affected during the Covid-19 pandemic (2021). This feeling is also echoed by other participants' (Nine and Fifteen) experiences of studying and working from home during the pandemic.

"… you would translate it as 'the ceiling is crashing on my head'. It's just too much to stay indoors for 8.5 hours and then continue with a PhD. So, this is not so great. Normally you would go to work, then come home, do something different in between and then you have a change of places - you know this is the problem. Yes, and you don't have so much

contact with your colleagues. There's also big issue, I think. You can't socialise really that much anymore."

Experiences of annual reviews in 2019 and 2020 as supportive and motivating

Despite these challenges, Participant Twelve described how her annual review was less stressful than she imagined in 2019 and she found this engaging and motivating. At the time she mentioned that she lacked confidence regarding her progress as she didn't feel she was progressing enough compared to her peers, but she was pleasantly surprised that the internal examiners didn't question her about this, and they were encouraging. This was a positive turning point in Participant Twelve's doctoral journey.

"In September 2019, I had my first annual review. So, my annual review that was quite exciting for me, because it was the first one, so I didn't really know what to expect, but it was less stressful than I imagined,"

In 2020 Participant Twelve had another annual review and described a similar feeling of being encouraged. In the more recent annual review in 2020, the professors asked her to review some aspects of her work, but it was also positive and encouraging in that she felt she wasn't doing everything wrong. This shows how the annual review process and examiners were supportive over time, helping Participant Twelve to build academic confidence as a doctoral student.

Development of her literature review and preparation for her first conference presentation

During 2020 Participant Twelve described how she developed her reading, literature review and writing tasks particularly relating to a theorist relevant to her PhD. In 2021 she described how she prepared for a conference and prepared an abstract about emotional labour for the first part of her literature review. This development of the literature review may be perceived as contributing to Participant Twelve's doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

"In my PhD they gave me different kinds of tasks, writing tasks. So, in 2020 I did a writing task on methodology mainly. And also, I had to read one of G's books. I'm doing a study on looking at G. That was the main thing in 2020 to do a book review. And in 2020, again in September I had this annual review, which was less work this time and I had a similar

feeling before and after. And then in 2021 I had to prepare for a conference for the first time and prepare an abstract for a conference and hand it in at the end of January - something on emotional labour for one of the first parts of the literature review."

The evolving supervisory relationship

However, Participant Twelve described writing a book review (as part of her literature review) as a challenging aspect of her journey and a low point so far. Participant Twelve reflected that this was mainly difficult in terms of understanding and communication between her supervisors and herself in terms of expectations and what her supervisors wanted. She had extensive discussions with her supervisors to understand what they really wanted. This highlights the importance of good and clear communication between students and supervisors in the supervisory relationship, especially when students are part-time and distance learning or international students (Wisker, 2005; Wisker, Robinson, and Jones, 2011).

"…and then to understand what they really want was quite a challenge, so I had to talk quite a long time to them, and they had to tell me exactly what they wanted. I think this is a big issue, especially when you're part time and abroad. Good communication - so really understanding what they want you to do."

In this context, criticality from her supervisors continued throughout her journey and she grew used to this. In this context, she talked about developing her own critical thinking in relation to her supervisors and what they said, which is an aspect of becoming doctoral. It may be argued that she was developing greater agency and control in her supervisory relationship by saying, e.g. 'I'm not happy with this or sure about your idea', showing development of her doctoral and critical thought processes, which are a form of doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

"… OK they are my supervisors, but they're not always right. This is, I think, a challenge to have your own thoughts about ideas and maybe trying to talk to my supervisors and saying, 'I'm not quite happy with this - I'm not sure about your idea'. Yeah, that's something I learned in the last year."

Participant Twelve reflected that developing critical thought processes was about learning to think independently. Despite any challenges and difficulties in her supervisory relationship, Participant

Twelve reflected that her supervisors were the most influential relationships for her PhD because they understood her topic. They tried to motivate her and support her through PhD difficulties, providing emotional and academic support and helping her to feel a sense of belonging and confidence.

> *"But my supervisors. I mean they are more into the topic and everything so they can understand me easily. I think what most PhD students say is at a certain point, you can't talk about your topic to anyone anymore, so it's really like that sometimes. But the most influential, I think are the supervisors, because they really try and motivate me to keep on going even when it is difficult sometimes."*

Participant Twelve reflected that encouragement from her supervisors was a crucial aspect of keeping her going throughout her journey, so that she remained motivated through difficult times.

Belonging to a peer community

Participant Twelve described how she developed contact with another PhD student from her country and they had regular online meetings to talk about their PhD topics and concerns. Also, Participant Twelve took part in some online doctoral student workshops. She found the online workshops supportive in that she felt in the same boat as others, which helped her to feel more relaxed. She attended a workshop on motivation, and it was good to talk to other students about that. This shows how Participant Twelve was developing 'social capital' (Bourdieu, 1988), and her sense of belonging to a peer community, which was beneficial.

> *"It shows me that they also have those problems, so it just makes me feel a bit more relaxed and… the lecturer he asked OK from one to ten how motivated are you at the moment? And some of them they just said one. I said six, but I don't know if that was correct. I think it was lower than that, but that was quite good to talk about."*

Difficulty in engaging with her peer community because of timings of online workshops.

However, Participant Twelve said that she was unhappy with the general timings of the online doctoral student workshops at the university because they were in the day, and it would be better if they were later in the afternoon or in the evening especially in the Covid-19 pandemic. Participant

Twelve reflected that these workshops were organised to cater for full-time, but not part-time students. This shows the inequality that part-time, or distance learning students can experience in comparison to full-time students, affecting their ability to build 'social' and 'educational capital' (Gopaul, 2014). In this context, part-time and, as in this case, international students may be adversely affected by structural forces such as university administration processes, e.g., timetabling, that can influence their sense of belonging to a peer community or academic community, and hence 'habitus,' like being "a fish out of water" (Thomas, 2002, p431).

> *"But what I really don't like is when the doctoral college offer workshops. Especially now during COVID they could offer these a bit later in the day, so I would be able to take part as a part-time PhD student as well, but normally they just consider the full-time students. So, this would be really great if they could just push it back to 3:00 PM UK time or something, so I would be able to take part because I'm missing quite a lot, and this is quite frustrating I think.*

This feeling of not being included or sufficiently supported as a part-time and international student was also compounded by not receiving a response from the Information Technology department regarding a query she had. Also, as a part-time student she felt she did not have enough time to look at emails. As a result, she felt that she was behind and not engaging like a full-time student. This reflects the frustration that other part-time PhD participants described when they could not engage as much as they would like with their PhD and the conflict they felt between being part-time and wanting to be like a full-time student. Such experiences may be conceptualised according to Wenger (1998) as the 'peripheral participation' of part-time doctoral students in their doctoral 'community of practice', in comparison to the fuller and stronger 'participation' of full-time students, which may affect part-time students' doctoral learning development (Wenger, 1998; Teeuwsen et al., 2014; Fenton O' Creevey et al. 2015).

"My inner feeling is I'm missing so much. Like normally when you do your masters - I did mine full-time - you're on the campus and so on, and then you get all the information and so on, So it's always about missing stuff. This is how I always feel. I also have this email outlook for the University course, but I don't always manage to look into this, and I just have the feeling that those who are doing it full-time can have a look at this every day, but for me it's just too much. So, I can't always look at this and then I feel I'm behind."

Participant Twelve's job involved her working long hours, making it more difficult to focus on her PhD workshops, but she was planning to do some more workshops in the future.

Moving onto the data collection stage of her PhD

At the time of the second interview Participant Twelve was at a turning point as she was finishing her literature review and about to move on to the interviewing stage. She reflected that finishing the literature review was difficult, and this shows how transitions from one stage of the PhD to the next are challenging for doctoral students (Wisker and Kiley, 2009). However, at the same time, Participant Twelve had been accruing doctoral 'educational capital' by completing this important stage and her academic confidence as a doctoral student had developed. Her forthcoming annual review in September, and a future conference presentation that she discussed, may also be argued to contribute to her 'educational' and 'social capital' as a doctoral student in the future (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Gopaul, 2014).

"I'm currently working on part of the literature review, which is quite interesting, I think because I'm back to the topic I think I told you about it. I'm preparing or redoing one of the sections and that's quite difficult, I think. …I must hand in this document and after that they told me I should focus on starting to look at interviews, … that's the next stage."

Current lack of motivation related to her struggle balancing life and study

Despite these positive developments in her journey, and her accrual of doctoral 'educational capital' and confidence, Participant Twelve was at the time of the interview worrying about other aspects of her life and future beyond her PhD. These worries related to life events such as having children, her work contract coming to an end, and a sense of uncertainty about her career and lack of job

security. She reflected that this was challenging and annoying. She felt she couldn't relax with her PhD and as a result lacked motivation. This again implies the difficulty that part-time PhD students face in juggling life and study (Watts, 2008; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Teeuwsen et al., 2014).

> *"Yeah, now I'm just feeling not that motivated. I don't know. It's also because I'm in my thirties. And yeah, the topic of children is coming into the discussion, I would say this is demotivating me quite a bit. Maybe another point is my contract with my company is ending in December already. So, this is another thing to worry about, everything is parallel to the PhD. Now that's quite a challenge for me. So thinking about maybe starting a family with my job, which is not secure - this is quite annoying and I can't really relax as I would want to with the PhD."*

Participant Fifteen

Stage One interview

Overview

Participant Fifteen is a young student in the middle stages of her part-time PhD in a Science discipline. She is generally engaged with her PhD and has a strong drive to succeed. She has a successful educational background and hence, academic confidence. She has a very good working relationship with one supervisor, but she has experienced challenges in her personal life, which have affected her motivation levels and wellbeing. Peers, friends, family, research participants, the university doctoral community and the external academic and research community in her field have also been supportive and have provided a network that have helped her to persist and continue. She has an academic job, and enjoys working with people in her research, and being in the academic environment. At the time of the first interview, she had a strong sense of belonging to her peer community and to the university community. However, during Covid-19, and because of lockdown she has struggled to maintain her sense of belonging, engagement and motivation.

Rationale for doing a PhD

At the beginning of the first interview, Participant Fifteen described how she loved learning, and wanted to do a PhD for a long time. She identified her current main supervisor as a key influence in going on to do a PhD following her master's. Participant Fifteen reflected how contributing to knowledge was important to her in that she wanted to do something practical to help cancer research. She also mentioned that she wanted to make her father proud because he paid for her education. This shows how family can have a strong influence on motivation to study and contribute towards 'cultural' and 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

> *"I think I did the PhD because I wanted – I do everything to make my dad proud, pretty much, because he's paid for my education, and I think I feel obliged to keep impressing him in whatever."*

Demotivating influences of life events at the beginning of her PhD journey

Prior to her PhD however, Participant Fifteen reflected that difficult life events had coincided with her MSc and these triggered mental health difficulties, an awareness of changing sexual identity, and a new way of looking at things. At this time, Participant Fifteen reflected that an unhappy personal relationship adversely influenced her mental health, requiring counselling and therapy. Family illnesses also had a negative impact on her PhD journey.

> *"So, it's just been a bit of a mess, really. Then I went back to the doctor again. They then suggested I go for counselling about deeper past things which impact me still now and have been brought up because of the abuse from the relationship. So, I have been having counselling since January this year until I finished probably a month or two ago. And I finally ended the relationship with her about three weeks ago ... so, I finished counselling. I didn't think it really helped very much."*

However, Participant Fifteen pointed out that she had a good support network of family and friends. Participant Fifteen felt the need to be happy in the future and wanted to make her family and herself proud. At the time of the interview, she described her low self-esteem in terms of how she felt her family perceived her.

"I've got a very good family and friends' network, and then I've planned for the future to try and be happy in myself and make my family proud. Because I always feel like I'm not good enough or I don't do enough for them."

Early presentation of her PhD research at a national event - a positive turning point

Participant Fifteen recollected that presenting her research idea at a national event was a positive turning point that marked the start of her doctoral journey and described how her two supervisors were key influencers in enabling her to do this presentation, enabling her to build 'social' and early doctoral 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988, Gopaul, 2014). Participant Fifteen said it was challenging, but a very good starting point.

"So, when I first started the PhD, so it's in cancer research, my second supervisor, Doctor F, … got me and my other supervisor an opportunity to present at an important cancer research national event in the first six weeks of my PhD, so six weeks in I went up to this event and presented my PhD proposal, basically just telling them the rationale for my PhD and what I planned, and what I'd hoped to find, and basically I just had a chat to them, which was really good, probably the best way you could probably start a PhD. Daunting, but, yeah, a really good experience. So, I did that within six weeks, which was obviously a bit mind blowing."

Participant Fifteen reflected that the beginning of the PhD coincided with mental turbulence and a difficult relationship, but in contrast the presentation was a very positive achievement and turning point, which enhanced her academic confidence. This also shows how the wider research and academic community helped to contribute to her sense of belonging and her evolving doctoral student 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu 1988).

Early data collection and ethics challenges (2018/19)

Participant Fifteen reflected that she had finished the first stage of data collection in June 2018 running tests on 19 individuals for her first study. Then she worked on the ethics for her main study, which she had completed, and had been accepted at the time of the interview. Participant Fifteen mentioned that she found the ethics particularly challenging because the participants had serious illness and the ethics board was 'picky'. Also, she was submitting her second study for ethical

review via a new online system. Participant Fifteen described another challenge as submitting results of her first study for publication, which was then accepted. Participant Fifteen reflected that submitting the ethics was a good achievement stage, as this was a difficult thing to do in her field, and hence this may be perceived as another turning point and stage in developing doctoral 'educational capital'.

> *"Ethics took a long old time, because the participants have had cancer, so the ethics board were quite stubborn on that, which is a good process for me, because it was a new system as well, the online ethics application system had only just come into play…So I did all that. That took a couple of months back and forth with the ethics panel. And whilst I was doing the ethics, I also submitted my Study 1, …. for publication. So again, I was going back and forth with the reviewer comments on that. That then got accepted in January 2019. And my ethics got accepted in November."*

Participant Fifteen also reflected that she was engaged by the practical data gathering stage, and being around people and then collating the data, and record keeping.

A conference presentation in 2018

In 2018, Participant Fifteen presented her research at an international conference, which was very confidence building. Participant Fifteen said that people were very interested in her research at the conference. This showed recognition from the wider academic community in her field and so enhanced her 'social capital', 'academic capital', and doctoral 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014). Participant Fifteen affirmed that the conference presentation helped reinforce the value of her PhD and what she had achieved, and so helped to build her academic confidence. This also helped counteract any previous lack of confidence, and sense of not feeling good enough. She reflected that the positive feedback and encouragement from the conference participants was a stepping-stone onto the next stage of her doctoral journey.

> *"Last year, in October, I presented my Study 1 and Study 2 in poster format at a conference abroad, which was good. And for me, I was on the first day, with all these other people with their posters, and I had literally all the interest. Like no one was really looking at other posters. …. So that was good. and meeting some of the big, what I classed as like a big boy in like our area, actually you see their name in the*

literature all the time, …. And then they're literally standing in front of you, and you're like, "Oh, he's actually interested in my research", so that was really – that was probably one of my highlights as well, actually, just meeting these people that you classify with a lot of respect in terms of their research and things, and then having an interest in yours and giving you tips and future directions, things like that. So that was good. But, yeah, having most of the interest in the room at the time was quite a big ego boost, I think, for me. With a lot of people interested in what I was doing and how I'd done it and things."

The second stage of data collection - gaining achievement and developing a sense of belonging

Participant Fifteen reflected that the second study was significant with elderly people. This was another turning point as this was the first study with people who were not students, and she described how she enjoyed working with elderly people. However, she was working with two other PhD students, and not everyone was pulling their weight or enabling others to pull their weight. Participant Fifteen described how the working relationship with other students was a challenge for four months. However, she described how her first supervisor was supporting her through this period in the background. In this context, she reflected how she had developed people and team-skills despite the struggles, which was another achievement in her doctoral journey helping her to accrue doctoral 'social' and 'educational capital' (Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014).

"I felt happy that I'd recruited that many people and got that many people through the process, and I'd spent that many hours, and I'd organised these other students below me, and other people use it as work experience to help me do it, so I think that was really good – it was my biggest study, by far, but probably my most fulfilling as well. Because it was fully mine. Like I oversaw the whole thing. And, yeah, I think that was probably the best part so far. It would be good to analyse it and see if I've found anything. "

Membership of an external community related to her research

Participant Fifteen described how at the time of the interview she was part of a cancer support group and enjoyed it though she described it as overwhelming. Participant Fifteen said that she was very pleased that her PhD was helping people with cancer who have gone through so much. She reflected that this was fulfilling, kept her going and was another good achievement relating to 'educational'

and ‘social capital’ (Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014). Participant Fifteen also described how the group encouraged her and supported her emotionally, so they were an important influence on her journey, which increased her engagement and confidence. Participant Fifteen reflected that the cancer support group was important in that it made her see the real-life experience of those she was doing the research for. This was a turning point in that when she started her practical studies, she felt that her reason for doing her PhD had changed, which was engaging. She described how the practical aspect of her PhD kept her on track when she questioned why she was doing a PhD.

> *“Whenever I go to a support group, I’m like, “Oh, this is why I’m doing it”. “This is what I want to do, this is what motivates me, and makes me happy”, things like that. And I’m going to make a difference, I think, is the main thing out of this PhD, is that I know that even if it’s a little bit of knowledge increase it will make a practical difference in real life if I can ever get it into a policy or whatever, that would be a different thing.”*

Reflection on her current situation (2019): overcoming challenges - a sense of achievement

In overview, Participant Fifteen reflected that she had achieved a lot, although there were challenges along the way. She said she was currently trying to write up methods for her annual review that year (2019). She said she felt somewhat daunted by the amount of analysis and writing up to do and then another study in the future, but the interview process would be positive in helping her to reflect on how much she had achieved. Though she had made good progress and some positive achievements in relation to her doctoral research including a publication, she still did not feel completely motivated. She reflected that these positive achievements were overshadowed by an unhappy personal relationship, because she was feeling upset and had low self-esteem.

> *“But, yeah, that first year, I think, was most difficult for me. Especially with all the confusion with my life events …and things like that, I think it was a lot of confusion alongside maybe not feeling motivated, like burned out from my master’s, so I think just actually getting the motivation to complete that year was probably my biggest struggle.”*

However, she reflected on how those various supportive relationships, including with her parents, and the cancer support group, helped to stop her from quitting. Participant Fifteen identified how the support group helped motivate her and helped her to affirm why she was doing the PhD. Also, Participant Fifteen reflected that having a community of peers around her who were also struggling

was helpful, in that they gave each other moral support. This again reflects the importance of relationships inside and outside the university in supporting and motivating part-time PhD students (Leonard and Becker, 2009).

> *"Yeah, I think having that balance of family, friends, supervisors, lecturers, to just sort of have a chat with has all been integral to me keeping going, I think. Because without one or any of them it probably wouldn't have worked, really. You've got to have those people you can talk to about the science bit, but also the life bit as well, who don't understand the science bit. So, yeah, I've got a very good support network. Luckily. Because I think I wouldn't be where I am if not, which is good."*

Emotional support and encouragement from her supervisor during challenging times

Participant Fifteen described how her first supervisor was the main supportive influence, both academically and emotionally in her journey. In this context, Participant Fifteen mentioned that because of her first supervisor she was successful in grant and job applications, presented her research and won an award, all of which are forms of doctoral 'social' and 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014). Without him she reflected that she would not have achieved all those things. Apart from these aspects, Participant Fifteen also described how her supervisor was trying to emotionally support and encourage her. Her supervisor gave her little tasks to do like updating her CV, which made her realise what she had achieved so she felt better about herself, which was confidence building. Participant Fifteen reflected that her main supervisor was an important and constant support throughout her journey, helping to encourage her to continue along her journey bit by bit. He knew when to tell her to take time off and not do anything and knew when she needed to set goals.

> *"So, he's constantly helping me, giving me the confidence, because I wasn't even going to apply for the instructor job. And he was like, "Don't be silly. You'd be perfect for it". So, without him I wouldn't have got the job in the first place, which means I wouldn't have started the PhD. I started my PhD and presented my master's study, and won the award there, and I wasn't going to verbally present it, I was just going to do a poster, and he was like, "No. You need to up your skill set", and I ended up winning that prize as well. So, without him, I wouldn't have achieved half of – or hardly any of*

what I've achieved. Because he just knows how to push me and knows what I can achieve."

Her professional academic situation and developing sense of belonging linked to her research and job

Participant Fifteen also reflected that she liked her part-time job at university and the practical aspect of working with the students. She was also very involved with her course and disciplinary community at the university, and this was very motivating. Participant Fifteen described how she was also beginning some lecturing work, which was confidence building, and she was developing a sense of belonging and strengthened 'habitus' associated with this (Bourdieu, 1988). The lecturers she worked with were also encouraging her towards a teaching career, which was motivating. Participant Fifteen reflected that she liked the fact that she could develop professionally and academically alongside one another because her PhD was part-time, and that it was a good balance.

"So, yeah, it just gives me that bit of a break, really. Whilst also helping my CV. Because a lot of the technical instructors – there's only three of us, and the past ones – so, when I was a student, they've all now got good jobs and are lecturers at other universities. Because it just gives you that one step up. Being a part-time student with this teaching experience as well just gives you a lot more opportunity, I think, compared to other people that haven't had it. So, yeah, it's good. So, you're still having a bit of a working life experience whilst also studying alongside it. So, it's a good balance for me."

Stage Two interview

Overview

At the time of the second interview, Participant Fifteen reflected how the pandemic and lockdown had been challenging and disruptive, but in the end, helped her to focus on her PhD and that she was making very good progress with writing up. She had now finished all data collection. She was focusing on finishing and completing her PhD and moving on with her life. She also said that she felt supported by and was in a caring and positive relationship with a partner. However, Participant Fifteen said there had also been some life events, family illness and bereavements to cope with,

which had been emotionally challenging. Participant Fifteen also had a health scare herself, which was stressful. Participant Fifteen's plans had changed in that she did not see herself continuing with an academic career at university. Participation in groups and peer communities had now become less important and achieving and completing the PhD had become her primary concern. This she felt was partly related to the influence of the pandemic and partly to do with the stage of her PhD in that she had finished data collection, another stage in 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

How the pandemic stopped Participant Fifteen from doing her final study

Participant Fifteen recollected that she had started well in 2019 having recruited all participants for her final study, but then the Covid-19 pandemic started in 2020 and she couldn't do the study. Hence, her data collection was disrupted. Participant Fifteen said that with her supervisor, she made the decision to write up about the study in the discussion chapter instead. Otherwise, the PhD would be delayed too much. As Donohue et al. found Covid-19 was disruptive for doctoral students' journeys (2021).

> *"We were waiting to see what was going to happen in terms of the pandemic and then by the summer is it was not great, so my supervisor and I decided that we wouldn't be able to do the last testing because it would take too long because we'd have to wait until we could get back in the lab and we didn't know. We assumed it would be January, but obviously that wouldn't have happened anyway if we had waited so we were waiting and then my supervisor said look, I don't know how long you're going to be waiting and it's just going to delay your whole project by at least six months. So, let's just write it as a chapter in your general discussion instead*."

Participant Fifteen reflected that it was upsetting because she enjoyed the testing the most, and more than writing. She liked being around people, so she experienced an anti-climax and disappointment, which was disruptive and demotivating, as she felt the PhD wasn't complete. In this context, Participant Fifteen reflected on how her supervisors were supportive regarding how her PhD was affected by the pandemic. They reassured her that referring to the final study in the discussion was sufficient, but Participant Fifteen didn't feel like it was sufficient and reflected on her feelings of 'imposter syndrome', which she had been struggling with for a year.

"I think I have impostor syndrome quite badly anyway, so I've been struggling with that concept for well nearly a year now. So that's been hard, knowing that I finished testing without actually having done it."

How her sense of belonging to a participant community was affected by the pandemic

Participant Fifteen reflected that she was not seeing her participants for the final study and hadn't spoken to them. She thought she might still do the study for her own interest and research later as she was passionate about it. Participant Fifteen reflected here on the importance of belonging to this peer community of participants and interacting with them. However, she accepted the fact that she could not see them during the pandemic, despite a disruption to her sense of belonging and 'habitus' here associated with not seeing the group of research participants. As Donohue et al. argue (2021) difficulties that doctoral students faced during the pandemic included a lack of motivation and isolation.

"I'll still do the research 'because it's something I'm passionate about. They won't be part of my thesis, which is yeah, disappointing, but there's not much I can do about it and I'm definitely not in control of a global pandemic, so I've kind of tried to come to terms with that."

How the birth of her nephew was a life event that interrupted her journey

Participant Fifteen reflected that the birth of her nephew was a happy life event, but one which disrupted her journey. She described how when her nephew was born, she couldn't do much on her PhD because she became involved in helping with childcare, and that this was exacerbated by the pandemic. She mentioned that at this time her PhD became her second priority, and her family and friends came first. She also reflected that the PhD was part of everything, but was not her life, echoing what Participant Twelve also said about this. This again is a constant issue that is experienced particularly by part-time PhD students whose PhDs are often disrupted by life events (Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013).

"And then after that my nephew was born, so I really couldn't do much work then because she was with the new-born and then I had to look after my other nephew most of the time

so. That was an excuse, but also it was just a difficult time here in the pandemic, and we were just having to make the most of what we could do. So, the PhD took a backseat, which I knew it had to and I will always put obviously family and friends above because for me it's not my life, it's part of everything so it took a very much back seat."

Moving back to her flat during the pandemic, and feeling isolated and demotivated

Participant Fifteen moved back to her flat in the summer of 2020. Previously she was with her brother for three months. She thought she would be more productive in her flat, but that wasn't the case as she said she couldn't focus in that environment. She mentioned having trouble with her work/life balance when studying from home, similarly to Participant Twelve in the pandemic. She reflected that all she did was write up and edit the chapter, but that was at least something. This reflects how part-time PhD students' isolation can affect their wellbeing and engagement (Watts, 2008; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012).

"I moved back and then I thought I would be more productive not being around the boys and being distracted by them all the time. But actually … it was worse because I had so much time that I couldn't focus, and because I couldn't be at work, I couldn't work in my living room because my flat is a 2-bed flat, and the kitchen and dining living area are linked together, so there's no specific space. So, I was working in my lounge and trying to work in a place where you relax and watch TV and chill. At nighttime I just couldn't switch between it, I found it really hard so I was actually trying to work but I just found myself staring at my laptop and just not being productive at all. So that took nearly the whole year."

Participant Fifteen reflected on the year and tried not to be pessimistic, but she felt disappointed in terms of what she could have achieved during lockdown and was frustrated. She wanted to have achieved much more. As Donohue et al. found, the pandemic adversely influenced PhD students' motivation and progress (Donohue et al., 2021).

"I try not to be completely pessimistic about myself, but in terms of what I knew I could have achieved over a lock down, it's quite frustrating because I wanted to have completed my lit review last year and I didn't even touch it. I wanted to have done study three and study four write up, so it's just been frustrating. It was a time where I was trying to be productive, and I just couldn't. I just couldn't get in the mindset of it."

How mental health issues and personal and family health concerns affected her PhD journey

Participant Fifteen reflected that she had also suffered mental health issues since 2019 and coming out of an abusive relationship didn't help her PhD. She also reflected on her mental health issues in the early stages of her PhD beforehand, which affected her wellbeing and motivation. She said that this was also connected to her past. She described how she suffered a childhood trauma, which she had not dealt with until the beginning of her PhD. Hence, she was trying to deal with a lot at the same time. She was receiving counselling previously, which didn't work well for her. She then changed to a new counsellor who helped her work through her issues from the past. Participant Fifteen showed how she acted with agency here by changing counsellor and freeing herself from her past trauma (Archer, 1982).

In addition, in 2020 cancer had affected a close family member and she had her own health scare recently, so she found it difficult to focus on her own study about cancer. She reflected that she had to come to terms with illness in her family. After the health scare was over, she reflected on how it took two months to get back into study. This shows the difficulties that PhD students face in making progress in their PhD journeys when affected by life events, such as family and personal illness (Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013). This also echoes the experiences of Participant Nine and my own experiences in this context. Participant Fifteen reflected, also, that she was having more regular meetings with her first supervisor, so was returning to her sense of belonging of being in that academic supervisory relationship, which was supportive. Participant Fifteen also reflected on how the pandemic, and her withdrawal related to mental health issues, had disrupted their communication and academic working relationship. It appeared that Participant Fifteen was building confidence again at the time of the interview related partly to her restored academic relationship with her supervisor and managing to cope through this challenging time and that it was another positive turning point in her life and PhD journey.

> *"Luckily, it's fine now so I've got back into a routine in the last couple of weeks, but yeah it took a couple of months to try and get back into that. So, I've been having more regular meetings with my main supervisor who's apologised that he's sort of lost track of me because I'd just closed off really. So, what I do when I'm not in a very good mental state, I close off from everyone….so we have more regular meetings every two weeks now. I don't think I spoke to him from July maybe, so there were quite a few months of not really checking in, so I'm back on a better track now I think."*

Challenges in her relationship with her second and third supervisor regarding her mental health but support from her first supervisor

Participant Fifteen reflected on a lack of both pastoral and academic support and engagement with other members of her supervisory 'team', apart from her first supervisor, and how she was disappointed with their lack of involvement with her study. At the time of her mental health lapse in 2019, she described how she tried to reach out to her supervisors as she hadn't worked on her PhD for two months and was just teaching and surviving, but not studying (like Participant Nine). At this point she reflected that working and surviving were her priorities. She said that she shared her mental health issues with her supervisors in December 19, and recounted how she felt upset that two of them didn't follow up or check in on her much since then. However, she reflected that at the time of the interview she was more determined about finishing her PhD, though she was disillusioned with supervisors Two and Three. Instead of dwelling on the disappointment regarding the second and third supervisors, Participant Fifteen said she was trying to focus on her positive relationship with her first supervisor, which made up for the lack of support from the others. She reflected that she was honest with her supervisors because she wanted to keep them aware of what was going on with her PhD because of personal life issues. She described how her relationship with her first supervisor was very different, as he was much more supportive emotionally and like a friend. It may be argued that support from her first supervisor and a good working environment in her office was positively influencing her sense of belonging and doctoral student 'habitus' helping to motivate her to progress with her study. Participant Fifteen reflected that the role of supervisors here and expectations from herself as student and from her supervisors were not clear or explicit. She mentioned that her supervisors were not all acting in the same way, as a team. One was described as supportive, but the others not, which affected her overall sense of belonging to a supervisory team and community. Participant Fifteen also questioned whether there may also be a disciplinary divide in terms of the support that was provided, as reflected by Delamont, Atkinson and Parry (2000). Participant Fifteen's narrative shows her confusion over a lack of consistency in the way different supervisors provided support, which raises the question of whether they should all be equally supportive in terms of pastoral care.

How her personal relationships influenced her PhD journey

Participant fifteen reflected that she ended the previous damaging relationship and had been with a new supportive partner since August. Participant Fifteen described her new partner as very supportive and encouraging of her PhD and took an interest in it, helping her get her PhD back on track. This shows how personal relationships help support PhD students and their journeys (Leonard and Becker, 2009). However, with reference to the other interviews and Participant Fifteen's previous experiences, personal relationships can also be very disruptive.

> *"She's very supportive about My PhD, which surprised me, and bought all these books and stuff to help. And she's very thoughtful. She follows all the PhD stuff I do on Twitter so she's trying always to get into the know because you can't ever understand anything connected to a PhD. You can't understand what we go through day to day, but she's trying, which is really appreciated, and she helps me set goals …even just planning my day a bit. She's helped with that. So, I think a new relationship has helped me, in terms of my PhD getting back on track."*

Participant Fifteen reflected on how different relationships support her best and confirmed that her new partner and supervisor had been most supportive of her PhD. Participant Fifteen also reflected that it was good for the PhD because the vicious cycle of the bad relationship had ended. She reflected that her PhD had taken longer because of the bad relationship, but she had developed greater determination, agency, and control over her journey (Archer, 1982).

> *"We ended it in July and still it's only in the last month that she's completely gone out of my life, which has been hard. Because I've got a new partner and have done since August, so trying to cope with processing that while starting something new has been difficult for me too. But it has been good. I'm glad I'm at the end. I think that's probably why I'm positive about the PhD now because that vicious circle has now ended...But, as a person I've grown 5000 times more than I would have if I had been with her and learnt all these things about myself and coped really. I guess it has been tough but I'm proud now that I'm at the end of this cycle."*

Developing agency to complete her PhD with support from her first supervisor

Participant Fifteen described her determination to finish her PhD and succeed at the time of the interview, that year, so that her future would be OK. She reflected on how she needed to sort her life out and expressed her resolve. She discussed how routine and time management were important, and the idea of 'knuckling down'. She said she felt in control at the time of the interview and was making conscious choices, acting with agency to progress in her journey (Archer, 1982; Bourdieu, 1988). In this context, Participant Fifteen mentioned starting a new routine, and working each day in short bursts in the office at university, rather than going home and not returning. Participant Fifteen reflected on the importance of having a learning space away from home in this context. In the last year, Participant Fifteen reflected that she had been working on herself, not expecting too much from others, and was in a place where she could talk about previous problems, which she had worked through in counselling. In this way, it may be argued that she had acted with agency to resolve issues that came from external sources and relationships, overcoming challenges and learning coping mechanisms. In this context, her first supervisor was described as supportive and positive and was setting deadlines again.

The loneliness of the journey despite support from doctoral research peers

Participant Fifteen reflected on her loss of sense of peer community and sense of belonging to that, which was worsened by the pandemic, and that now her PhD was a lonely journey. She reflected that there were few other people who understood. She described how there used to be more people in the office where she did her PhD work, so it felt like a real peer community, and now most of them had gone, which felt sad. This suggests that Participant Fifteen had a disrupted sense of doctoral student 'habitus' and belonging in this sense both physically in terms of the learning space for PhD study and the people that she shared it with, her previous peer community (Anderson, 2001, p141; Delamont, Atkinson and Williams, 2000). As Watts found, part-time PhD students' isolation can negatively influence their wellbeing and engagement (2008).

> *"When I started, we had a really quite big community here in our school at X and Y. There was maybe 10 of us at the time. It's different for part-time and full-time students, and the full-time students were near the end, so they've all gone now, so it's just me and X really. So, it's quite sad also because I would do all their mock vivas for them. I read all their*

stuff and…. even when I'm in the office now, this was the office of four people and now it's just me. So, it's quite lonely anyway I think the PhD journey."

This quote shows how the pandemic had not helped this participant's sense of peer community in terms of her peers' physical presence, but Participant Fifteen described how she had joined various online workshops and PhD webinars and felt there was more of an online peer community than in a physical sense. This suggests that she had begun to develop a sense of belonging to the online community as she was attending online sessions once per week. Participant Fifteen reflected this was important because she felt more support than before in the challenging final year. Hence, it may be argued that she was building 'social capital' online, which helped her to belong and remain motivated (Gopaul, 2014).

"And now there's loads of workshops and there's more of a community because of the pandemic on-line. We have probably one a week - whether it's a workshop or it's a PhD coffee informal break. I've felt I've met more people now doing the PhD online workshops than I have the whole time in person here, so it's been a bit strange in this pandemic, in some ways a good thing. But yeah, it's quite an isolating process I guess, and I think it feels like now I need more support than ever because I'm in the final year and it is the most stressful."

In terms of belonging to a university community, Participant Fifteen described how she felt the ethos of the university had completely changed. Previously she said there was a big academic community in her field including lecturers and students. At the time of the interview, she described how she didn't have any of that. Hence, it may be argued that she experienced a loss of 'institutional habitus' and belonging in the wider university community too (Thomas, 2002; Thomas, 2012). As a result, she felt she did not want to pursue a professional career as a lecturer at the university. This suggests that a disrupted doctoral 'habitus' and belonging can adversely affect PhD students' decisions regarding their future careers.

"We had a huge network and environmental labs group, like there were 10 of us in terms of the lecturers and the students where we did help each other's research and we had journal clubs. And now we just don't have any of that and haven't had any of that for two years now…But yeah, I feel now I just want to get it done just to get out of here because it's not the same as when I joined. There's no community now, apart from my main supervisor really."

A published study – a high point in her journey showing acquisition of 'academic capital'

In 2020 Participant Fifteen said she had her second study accepted and published and the other study that she had written up was ready for publication. Participant Fifteen reflected that this was a positive step for her. As Bourdieu discusses, the prestige associated with original research publications is a form of 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988).

> *"Well, the beginning of last year I got my second study accepted, and a publication, which is good. And I got this study, the one that I've written up in the last year ready for publication, which I think is probably a good thing. Because that was my main impact, really aiming for a high journal for this one, … no one's ever done that …. So, for me that was good writing because I know it will hopefully impact other people. Um, not policy or anything like that, but just knowing that a bit of research is done on that population that hasn't done that before."*

Participant Fifteen talked about preparing articles to go in high-ranking journals, which could give her prestige and recognition by her research community in her field. She described how she had also found an external co-author to write with her, hence, she was building 'social capital', and this was also helping her to build academic confidence (Bourdieu, 1988).

> *"So, I think getting it to a level where we think it is good enough for these higher impacting journals has been good in the last month or so, and having a co-author that's from the University, Z, who's actually helped shape quite a lot of the Journal article. Having his validation of - oh, wow, I really want to be honest because it's good and we can get it here. Just having an external person who said it's good was nice and so that's been a positive part of the PhD in getting it to this stage."*

The struggle to stay motivated as a central theme in her journey, while remaining resilient

Participant Fifteen reflected that struggling to stay motivated with her PhD was a key theme in her journey and meant she had not made full progress or achieved her full potential. She felt that there was also a lack of impetus, deadlines and career opportunities at the end of her PhD, which were all related to the pandemic. However, it may be argued that Participant Fifteen was resilient by trying

to get out of her demotivated mindset and be positive in terms of having the end of her PhD in view as a goal.

> *"So, I've tried to get out of that, which is maybe why I'm a bit more positive in doing it now because I'm like - Well, even if I finish in August, September and there's still a pandemic and you can't travel, and there's no jobs, then I'll find something else. That's been a key thing for me is trying to get motivation and do it. …When I know what I must do and I know that I can do it, it's just getting to that point and that has been the struggle for the past five years. Yeah, motivation being the main thing for the PhD that I've either lacked or struggled to get or keep consistent."*

Participant Fifteen reflected that she was now in a better mindset than before and had more realistic expectations regarding her PhD, and she was working at her own pace. She said she was also helping contribute to the online community and give other students advice. Participant Fifteen reflected how the PhD had been a journey of personal growth and this is what was most important about what she would take away from her journey.

> *"So yeah, I feel like the PhD for me, obviously I'm interested in it and it's good and you'll see it will give me a PhD, but I think I've been on more of a personal journey with it and learning about myself. That's what I've learned more in the PhD than the academic side of it. That to me is not as important anymore. What I've learned, how to communicate with people like your soft skills and things like that is what I will take away more from here. And probably what I'm saying I want it to be good enough academically for it to be accepted, but if it isn't, also that's not the end of the world to me because I've learned a lot of things along the way and how to speak to certain people."*

I have recently been in contact with Participant Fifteen and she has passed her viva and graduated.

Summary

This chapter has presented the findings from two stages of narrative interviews with six part-time doctoral students in pre and post 1992 UK universities. These are presented as case-studies that relate to the influences of life events and academic, professional and personal relationships on varied aspects of part-time PhD students' journeys. With reference to Patterson (2013), Squire (2013) and Labov (1972), experiential narrative analysis helps to illuminate turning points over time. During

analysis, I have frequently referred to Bourdieu's concepts of 'habitus' and 'educational', 'social' and 'academic capital', and 'playing the game' to illuminate ways in which participants' experiences changed in relation to life events, their institutional contexts, their relationships, their learning development, academic confidence and achievement over time (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014). While Bourdieu's concepts have helped to inform narrative analysis, and address the research questions, it is important to reiterate that this analysis was inductive rather than deductive and was not based upon Bourdieu's ideas as a theoretical framework.

Participant Two's narrative clearly shows how he developed academic confidence, belonging, achievement, a strong sense of his own voice, independence, agency and ability to negotiate with his supervisors. However, throughout his doctoral journey he described how a challenging working relationship with one of his supervisors caused him considerable stress. Moreover, he did not feel a sense of belonging to his doctoral community or the university when starting his PhD. He felt marginalised and even excluded as a part-time student by not being given a desk near his disciplinary community. Throughout his doctoral journey life events and personal and professional relationships also related to increased stress and the need to juggle different roles and identities. However, this can be seen to relate to his increased determination to manage these conflicting roles and succeed as a doctoral student. Participant Five's narrative shows that she had a strong established academic network in her field even before starting her doctoral journey and already had a strong sense of belonging, academic confidence and even some success in her academic field. This gave her a distinct advantage when starting her doctoral journey, and when she started, she evidently already had a strong sense of independence and agency as doctoral student. Her narrative shows her awareness of ways in which her doctoral belonging and academic confidence changed and became stronger during her PhD journey. While she combined the roles of professional, wife and doctoral student at the beginning of her journey, during her doctoral journey she retired and then separated from her husband. She implied that by no longer having role of professional or wife also signified the end of stressful relationships and unfolding life events. In turn, this removed a burdensome pressure in her life that affected her confidence and her PhD journey. She could see that being a doctoral student and her PhD had become her main purpose in life. Her working relationship with her supervisors was supportive, but she also felt she had the support from peers, lecturers and a wider external academic community or 'landscape of practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015), which helped contribute towards her confidence and success at different stages during her doctoral journey. For Participant Fifteen, relationships and communities were also

crucial to continuing with her PhD and making progress. The network of support combined to support the student on her journey, reflecting the idea of the 'landscape of practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Each of the participant's journeys was unique. However, for most participants, supervisors or a team of supervisors were influential in supporting them to keep going when undergoing academic and emotional challenges, and the emotional support provided by supervisors was shown to be significant alongside the academic learning development inherent in the supervisory relationship. For most participants, peer communities were also influential in providing emotional as well as academic support in this context. While some family and friends were described as supportive to participants in some ways, some family members and personal relationships in association with life events, such as illness, marriage, birth and separation were also described as having a disruptive influence on participants' journeys. In this context, academic relationships could provide some sense of stability through academic and personal difficulties that participants faced.

Conceptually, this chapter shows how the six participants acquired doctoral 'educational' and 'social capital' over time linked to transitions and turning points throughout their different journeys. They also developed belonging and their doctoral 'habitus' evolved and became stronger over time, as they became more confident, determined and acted with greater agency and independence. For some participants at the end of their journeys they were approaching the 'academic capital' of finishing their PhD journeys. However, they could not do this alone. As part-time students who were often doing their PhD over a period of eight years, the participants experienced very challenging life-events, which often adversely affected their mental health. At these difficult times, and particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, the participants often questioned whether they could carry on. Their narratives show that they could only do this with the encouragement and emotional support from other people, and most importantly supervisors and peers.

Findings in this chapter reflect part-time PhD participants' unique stories and experiences, and at this stage the analysis was not seeking to identify thematic patterns. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Chapter Six will relate to a cross-sectional thematic analysis of all 15 student interviews that will focus on ways in which academic and peer relationships influence part-time doctoral student journeys. The next chapter focuses on a self-reflective narrative account of my own experiences, which provides my own voice and perspective as a part-time PhD student; and ways in which relationships and life-events have influenced my doctoral journey in changing times.

Chapter Five: A self-reflection on my own part-time doctoral experiences

Introduction

Like other part-time PhD students that have participated in this study, throughout my doctoral journey, global changes, life events, and relationships have played a powerful and often overwhelming role in impeding or supporting my doctoral progress. My experiences are comparable to those of the three PhD student participants who were interviewed in 2021 when the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns were still taking place; and to one participant's experiences who like me was receiving cancer treatment during this period. While such challenges may not be experienced by all PhD students, previous research suggests that challenges in juggling life events, relationships and study may be common for part-time PhD students (Watts, 2008; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012; Aitchison and Mowbray, 2013; Teeuwsen et al., 2014).

While my doctoral study has become an important part of my life journey, my main priorities in life are my personal relationships and my wellbeing. This became clearer to me during 2020 when I was diagnosed with cancer, and having taken a break from work and study, I had time to reflect on my life priorities. Relating to the topic of the influences of life-events on PhD students' experiences in changing times, at the same time as starting my chemotherapy treatment in 2020, the Covid-19 global pandemic started. This situation also turned my life upside down, and I was afraid. I knew that to survive this illness alongside the pandemic, I had to put my work and my PhD on hold and concentrate on my wellbeing. During this period family relationships became increasingly important, and I am trying to keep this in mind as I am working and studying again. Recent counselling sessions also helped me to strengthen my resolve to keep myself and my voice at the forefront of my life going forward, which helped me act with agency and feel more confident. In a recent annual review, my internal examiners also advised me to strengthen my voice in my doctoral writing, and to write this chapter, and life events since then have contributed to my voice and agency by strengthening my personal resilience (Archer, 1982).

My position in this research

I am a part-time PhD student, and I am narratively researching the experiences of students from this community. In this context, as Gergen argues, my own experience and background as a part-time PhD student who is part of the community that I am researching should be acknowledged (Gergen, 2009). This helps to compensate for what Fine describes as "othering" where the researcher's objectification of research participants can lead to not truly representing the participants' voices, but also not honestly representing the co-construction of the research dialogue that occurs between the research participants and the researcher (1994, p75).

I am a white middle-class female academic, and I come from a privileged background. I am aware that I have inherited cultural and educational capital that are related to my family, upbringing, and education (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). My father was a solicitor and entrepreneur. My mother also trained as a solicitor, although she gave up her career to look after us as young children, and she never worked while I was alive. I was privately educated, and my parents instilled in me the need to be well educated and qualified to be able to be successful and independent. However, my family has not always been middle-class. My father came from a working-class background. My grandfather died in a mining accident in Wales when my father was two years old. My father wanted to be successful and to leave his working-class background behind. His mother encouraged him. He went to a grammar school, and after the Second World War, he studied law and trained to become a solicitor. When I was a child, he spoke little of his life in Wales or his family. I only met my Welsh uncles once during a visit to Wales, though I have some more lasting connections with some Welsh cousins, who live in Australia. Later in life my father completed an MA, and started his PhD, but he was interrupted by a life event, which meant that he had to return to work in his seventies. He never completed his PhD. His drive to succeed and for us to be successful continued throughout his life, and this has also instilled in me a sense of determination, and a desire to achieve and complete a PhD.

I may come from a more privileged background than other doctoral students in terms of my education and upbringing, and, hence, as I have argued, this must be reflected in my research. Some part-time doctoral students may not have had the same good education, opportunities, and privileges as me. This research is partly about part-time PhD students' diverse experiences, backgrounds, and hence inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Gopaul, 2014). This is described in detail in the Literature Review in relation to Bourdieu's concepts of cultural and educational capital in Chapter

One. However, I have experienced some inequalities that other part-time doctoral students have also experienced. Firstly, I am a part-time student; secondly, I am a mature student with parental responsibilities and a part-time job; and fourth, I am disabled. This means that I can understand some of the difficulties and challenges that students who share these characteristics may experience, since I too have experienced them.

How my methodological approach relates to my position

Methodologically, as mentioned above, I am adopting a narrative inquiry approach, described in detail in the Methodology in Chapter Three. With this approach, as Sikes describes (2012), it is ethically important to include an autobiographical element so that "if we make any sort of truth claims there is a responsibility to be honest about the routes we have taken to arrive at them" (Sikes, 2012, p127). As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) also discuss, to represent participants' voices as accurately as possible, reflexivity is particularly important when the researcher is an insider researcher within their own community. For me it was a conscious choice (Bourdieu, 1988) to be an insider researcher. This was a turning point at the beginning of my doctoral journey, when I switched my doctoral study topic from international student journeys to part-time student journeys, which is related to truth and ethics in research. As Sikes (2012) and Clandinin and Connelly point out (2000), reflexivity is a good starting point for narrative research, which is also true in my experience, since reflecting on my own experience has helped informed the development of this study. Next, I will discuss what is meant by reflexivity.

Self-reflection: some methodological observations

I will now explain how I am conducting self-reflective methods in this study. Self-reflection may be described as a form of autobiographical research that links past with present, and places the researcher's own autobiographical data, constructed from his or her memories, within the socio-cultural context of the contemporary world and in relation to the community of which the researcher is a part (Allen-Collinson, 2013, p283). In this context, I am following the suggestion of Chang that autobiographical data is varied and can be collected through different methods: "recalling, collecting artefacts and documents (for instance supervision logs in my case), interviewing others, analyzing self, observing self, and reflecting on issues pertaining to the research topic." (2013, p113). Following Chang's suggestion, I am using self-reflective writing regarding my doctoral experiences

to engage with memories that relate past to present; and "self-analysis…and reflection" to express "present thinking, attitudes, perceptions, habits and emotions" (2013, p114).

My rationale for starting a PhD

The main reason why I am doing a PhD relates to my professional development. As well as being a PhD student, I am a Research Fellow in the Learning and Teaching Department at my University, where I practice higher education research and evaluation. My professional role and my PhD are important to me and are aspects of my identity – in that I see myself as an academic and doctoral researcher. My PhD informs my practice as a researcher and writer, and vice versa. I was promoted to become a Research Fellow in 2013, which was a turning point contributing to me starting a PhD. Previously I had been a Research Officer since 2008. I started my EdD in 2014 and my study originally focused on international doctoral students' experiences, which I had previously researched as part of my job. However, having started the EdD, I realised that a PhD would be more suited to me as I was more interested in the theoretical and philosophical aspects of doctoral study, rather than the focus on professional practice, which the EdD was aimed at. The EdD literature review revealed to me a gap in literature on the experiences of part-time PhD students, and this directed me towards a topic that would provide a small contribution to knowledge in the field of doctoral student experiences. This again was another early turning point at the beginning of my doctoral journey. The decision to change was supported by discussions with my colleague and friend, who was also a researcher at the University at the time. I wrote a PhD proposal, and after discussions with my line manager and colleagues in the doctoral college/graduate school, my proposal was accepted, and I started my PhD in 2015.

A retrospective overview: how life events and relationships have framed my doctoral journey

2013-16

In 2013 I was going to start studying for an EdD, but I postponed it till 2014. That year in October my mother became seriously ill, and later she passed away. This was a very upsetting time, I had lost my mother, who was also my confidante and best friend. I was grieving, but I had little time to grieve. My father, who at the time had Parkinson's disease was developing more serious symptoms. I drove over to see him and help as much as I could, while working, studying intermittently, and being a busy mother with a young child and husband. My brother took on the main responsibility

for caring for my father, and we supported each other. The following autumn, my father went to live abroad with my brother, where he would receive 24-hour care and my brother's constant companionship. I went to see him regularly between 2014 and 2016. He became increasingly frail and in 2016 my father also passed away. There were periods during this time when I was not motivated to study because I felt huge sadness and loss.

2016 -18

My three supervisors critically encouraged me and helped me through this period. Regular meetings with them helped me progress taking small steps towards becoming doctoral. I took some retrospective time off my PhD but did not stop studying after my father died. I continued. In 2017 my PhD ethics proposal, though challenging, received a positive ethical review at Tier Two. This was another turning point and key step forward in my journey towards becoming doctoral.

Doctoral supervision log June 2017

> *"Following successful ethical review for this project, I am now focusing on developing my literature, developing a thesis plan and starting data collection. …*
>
> *My supervisors gave me feedback regarding my methodology and suggested I need to develop my reading on epistemology and ontology, including Social Theory, Constructivism and Critical Theory. Since Guba and Lincoln have a particular perspective on this, I need to consider some different authors and perspectives.*
>
> *I need to develop my reading for the literature review to inform my interview schedules with staff and students. I have developed reading/writing on the HE context and currently am developing reading/writing on PhD students' academic identities.*
>
> *For data collection, my supervisors suggested that I should wait until I had developed my methodology and literature review further before I start interviewing. However, I have now conducted one pilot and one other staff interview, which I will incorporate into my data."*

During 2017 I conducted some of the first stage of narrative interviews with students and in-depth interviews with doctoral college directors, which was a positive achievement in my journey. However, during this period work environment challenges were increasing. The university was undergoing regular restructuring processes. Colleagues were taking voluntary severance. This

continued and worsened and would later be exacerbated by Covid-19. One of my supervisors left during the restructuring in 2017.

Autumn 2017 supervision log

> *"We discussed how my supervision should now continue and X offered to continue supervising me externally, and I am very happy to accept and continue with X supervising me. …*
>
> *I submitted some developed work in my literature review, and received some constructive feedback ... My supervisors suggested that I should deepen the historical perspective and refer to earlier periods of history in HE, e.g., the Robbins Report (1963). This historical perspective will also be crucial if I take a critical theoretical ontological perspective, which I am considering. The changes in HE that I have referred to in my lit review so far are nothing new. I also need to discuss the differences between pre and post 92 universities and the histories of Universities A and B in this context. So, I have been reading 'The Development of Higher Education in the United Kingdom since 1945', which gives a great overview, also more of Collini, and some of David Watson's papers on changes in HE."*

Although my then second supervisor continued to supervise me at a distance, this situation was a disruptive influence on my journey. Sometimes I found the difficulty in communicating and lack of stability in our supervisory relationship demotivating, and face-to-face communication was also difficult.

2018-2020

In 2018, I completed more of the first stage of narrative interviews with students, and further interviews with doctoral college/graduate school directors, which was an engaging and confidence building experience. I enjoyed meeting the participants and the co-constructive process of conducting the interviews. I also worked towards completing my first three thesis chapters in preparation for the upgrade/transfer that year. My supervision meeting in May 2018 was emotionally challenging as one of my supervisors was very critical of my draft thesis chapters. In retrospect, however, this supervisor's critical feedback helped me to make progress with my thesis, particularly in my methodology leading up to passing my annual review and equivalent of upgrade/transfer in 2018. This was a key supervisory relationship in my journey to becoming doctoral.

Supervision log May 2018

> *"Today we focused on the theoretical aspect of my literature review and how this relates to my methodology. We also discussed the forthcoming annual review in September and a date for the next supervision meeting in July.*
>
> *1. I have developed my literature review in relation to the conceptual lens that I plan to adopt, which now comprises a combination of Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (2015). My supervisors were all happy with this. I need to develop this section more and emphasise further how it relates to my research topic and questions. This will also inform the originality of the contribution to knowledge. Later on, when developing my thesis, we discussed how I could weave the theoretical arguments through the literature review.*
>
> *2. We discussed my ontological and epistemological position. Social construction is an appropriate epistemological position for my research, and I am going to adopt this position."*

My two other supervisors were crucial in encouraging me through this period and their critical though sensitive and emotionally intelligent communication and feedback helped me to gradually progress when I often felt overwhelmed. During the summer of 2018, I finished writing the first three chapters of my thesis and submitted it prior to upgrade/transfer. A very positive turning point for me in my doctoral journey was my upgrade/transfer progression review in autumn 2018, in which I received very constructive and encouraging feedback from the internal examiners, and later my supervisors, leading to me feeling more academically confident and a greater sense of clarity about my journey going forward. I felt at this point that I was doctoral and had achieved doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu, and Passeron, 1977).

Supervision log autumn 2018

> *"I received very positive feedback from my supervisors following my annual review meeting on 19th September, and during the supervision we discussed my plans for my research moving forward.*
>
> *In discussion with my supervisors, areas that we focused on during this meeting related to areas of my thesis that needed developing, following the annual review.*

1. A decision on the number of student interviews that I will conduct. This needs to be reduced because the interviews are so in-depth, and the question is by how many. I feel that I want to conduct a few more and maybe 10 altogether. My supervisors were supportive of this decision and encouraged me to seek support from a narrative expert to confirm this.

2. We discussed how I need to sharpen the conceptual focus of my research and while I need to develop my understanding of and application of Bourdieu's and Wenger-Trayners' theories in relation to my study, I need to put the aspect of identity development in my work to one side now."

In autumn 2018, a new second supervisor joined the team, who had expertise and was very important in terms of my narrative approach and development of my theoretical perspective based on the ideas of Bourdieu and neoliberalism. This was a positive influence on my PhD journey and development of key theoretical ideas.

Supervision log December 2018

Since our last supervision meeting, I developed the theoretical section on Bourdieu in my literature review. We discussed this and overall, my supervisors were very positive about how this is progressing, which is encouraging. We agreed that in 2019 I should focus on arranging and conducting interviews and data analysis. …

Alongside this positive progress in my PhD, the University restructuring process continued, but only started affecting my work department, and learning and teaching centre in 2018, when I became aware that it was going to be fundamentally changed. Many colleagues across the university were taking voluntary severance in 2019 because of restructuring. This work period was stressful. However, I was continuing with my PhD journey and making progress. During 2019 I completed all first stage and some second stage interviews with doctoral students, which was another achievement in my journey. I was also developing my data analysis, and thesis chapters. In autumn 2019 I had another constructive and encouraging annual review that helped give me direction during the later stages of my PhD journey.

Annual review report 2019

"Jennie engaged fully with the annual review process both prior to our meeting and during the review meeting itself. We were encouraged by the progress she is making and

are pleased to confirm her successful progression. The issues outlined below include some suggestion discussion points as well as recommendations for consideration within the supervision process."

However, following some health concerns, in December 2019, I went to the doctor, had some scans and was told by a specialist that I probably had cancer. In January 2020 this was confirmed. I would be having a course of chemotherapy followed by a major operation. At the same time the Covid-19 pandemic was starting. At this point life-events took over my life, work and study. I took long term sickness leave from work and study until September 2020. I had regular and very supportive communications with my colleagues, supervisors and friends throughout this period. My family were vitally important in being there for me and caring for me throughout the difficult first months of treatment and my operation. As a result of this experience, I became stronger and more resilient, and it became apparent that relationships and communities were crucial to my survival and my continuing PhD journey in a time of crisis.

2020 – Present

During this period the restructuring process at work was concluding, and a key member of my supervisory team who had helped me with development of my theoretical framework for my doctoral work, left the university. In the summer of 2020 important close research colleagues in my department who I had worked closely with for many years and who had encouraged my PhD and my academic development also left the university. I returned to work in September 2020 and doctoral study in October 2020. Work was initially very different from what I was previously used to, and, hence, challenging. I missed my colleagues who had left. Alongside this I was juggling my continued protective cancer treatment every three weeks at the hospital, which though beneficial had side effects and made me tired. My daughter was attending school and I was constantly anxious about Covid-19. It was challenging, but I managed to continue studying, with determination and resilience. This all affected my doctoral progress as I was sometimes struggling to find clear days to focus on my PhD or to plan. I had to postpone my final PhD interviews due to needing to finish a work project quickly, an inability to plan, and general tiredness because of my treatment.

In early 2021 I completed the final second stage narrative interviews with students, which was a turning point in my journey, in that I knew I had finished data collection, and could focus on completing the narrative analysis. In my professional role, however, I felt somewhat isolated as a qualitative researcher in my department and my PhD started to become the most important way that I could connect with my research community. This was exacerbated by working and communicating

online rather than face-to-face; and in this context, my experiences were like those of Participant Nine, who also described how he preferred face-to-face meetings with research colleagues and was missing this during Covid-19. As with other participants, my 'habitus' was 'disrupted' (Anderson and Williams, 2001). However, I gradually began to re-establish my sense of belonging as a Research Fellow to a departmental research community and to the wider university research community.

Alongside this, I have enjoyed working on my PhD knowing that my supervisors and other educational and social science research colleagues are supporting me and will continue to do so, and that I can grow as a researcher in my doctoral work and my belonging to associated research groups. In autumn 2022 I completed a first full draft of my thesis, and I then completed a second full draft in early 2023. My supervisors continued to encourage me, and I planned to finish and submit my thesis in March 2023.

I am feeling well and feel very grateful for all the support that I received from academic relationships and communities within the university, and from the wider research community outside the university. During my journey members of my family, friends, and other individuals and communities outside the academic world, have also supported me in my PhD journey. In some cases, these relationships and communities have been instrumental to my survival, my confidence, and hence my ability to reach this point in life and my doctoral journey.

This chapter has focused on my own position and reflection on my own experiences as a part-time PhD student in changing times. Like other part-time PhD students, my journey has been disrupted on several occasions by life-events and global events throughout the past eight years, including bereavement, serious illness and the Covid pandemic. The support from different individuals and communities has been vital for me to continue with my PhD throughout the challenging times that I have experienced. The emotionally intelligent and quietly encouraging support from two of my supervisors that have been there from the beginning of my journey to the end have been particularly important in motivating and engaging me when, like some other participants in this study, at times I have felt like giving up.

For me and the six participants whose case-studies are presented in Chapter Four, our part-time PhDs have been challenging individual journeys of struggle, disruption, solitary study, determination and developing agency. In addition, academic and emotional support from supervisors, peers and academic and research communities have emerged from the six participants' stories and my own as crucial in contributing to our part-time PhD student journeys. This support

has helped to enhance our belonging, collective ‘resilience’, motivation, academic confidence and progress, alongside the challenges that we have faced over several years. The next chapter will focus on a thematic analysis of interviews with all 15 participants relating to the influences of academic, research and peer relationships and communities on part-time PhD students’ journeys in changing times.

Chapter Six: Academic, research and peer relationships and their influences on part-time PhD student journeys

Summary of methods relating to this chapter

The data in this chapter relates to 15 narrative interviews with part-time PhD students across two universities. The chapter is based on a thematic analysis of all 15 narrative student interviews. (Please see Methodology Chapter for more details about the Methodology and Ethics). As described in the Methodology chapter, the 15 participants across one pre and one post-92 university included six males and nine females, four of whom were over 45 years of age and 11 of whom are under 45 years of age. Participants were at different stages in their PhDs, some in the early stages, and some were nearing completion. Participants were also from varied backgrounds in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender identity and disability status. Participants were studying within a wide range of disciplinary fields that represent the four areas categorised by Gardner (2009, p388): 'Humanities, Applied Social Science, Technologies, and Pure Science'. In this context, as described in the Methodology, the sample was homogenous in that all participants were part-time PhD students, which is important because this PhD focuses on part-time PhD student experiences; and it was heterogenous in that participants were from a range of different backgrounds, which is important in order "to ensure that any differences in perspectives...can be explored" (Ritchie et al., 2003, p79).

Chapter Four focused on six case studies based on narrative 'experiential' analysis informed by Patterson (2013), Squire (2013) and Labov (1972). From this analysis, supervisory and peer relationships emerged from the data as being most influential on part-time PhD students' journeys, although other academic relationships also emerged as influential in this context, including relationships with the wider external research community, with academic colleagues and with research participants. Informed by these findings, this chapter is thematic and narrative analysis focuses on the influences of supervisory, peer and other academic relationships on part-time PhD student journeys. When analysing the narrative interviews thematically, firstly, a non-cross-sectional analysis approach was adopted, analysing each interview separately, which as Spencer et al. argue, is appropriate to "understand complex narratives" (2003, p203); and secondly, a cross-sectional approach was adopted to identify themes (Spencer et al., 2003). In presenting the narrative findings below, following the example of Frelin (2013), aspects of students' experiences were

"represented through a number of themes and sub-themes woven together from accounts of participants" and vignettes relating to this theme.

Findings

Academic relationships' influence on students' decisions to begin the doctoral journey

Most participants recounted how they felt stimulated and engaged by initial meetings and discussions with supervisors (and/or peers) at the beginning of their journeys where supervisors showed enthusiasm for their projects. Some of these meetings took place at events such as conferences. This may be conceptualised as an important first step in participants feeling a sense of belonging to a doctoral 'community of practice' (CoP) with supervisors and peers (Wenger, 1998). Meetings where students felt comfortable with supervisors and perceived their interest in their PhDs helped build participants' sense of belonging and confidence. These meetings also helped some students to develop a sense of prestige, for instance, by being 'recognised as a potential candidate and taken seriously'. Participants were also likely to feel a sense of prestige when they were offered or provided with a studentship or funding, which according to Bourdieu is a form of 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988).

> "*They used to run a doctoral retreat to start you off and we had this most amazing, stimulating week and we just talked about our projects, and we talked about epistemology and ontology, and it was the most fabulous experience, really. Really great, and that set it going."*
>
> *(Participant 14)*
>
> *"But at that meeting I was just like, oh wow, you know, if this offer is on the table now then it almost felt wrong to walk away from that offer, the grant and things like that, because you don't know in five- or ten-years' time what the situation is going to be."*
>
> *(Participant Two)*

Several participants described how discussions with master's and sometimes undergraduate degree tutors helped encourage students to pursue PhDs; and many participants also said that their master's degrees led them to their PhD topic and direction.

"So, during my master's and during the write-up of my dissertation, I realised that I was really good at this, and I enjoyed writing, exploring and researching. I also did that on a topic that I really enjoyed. For the first time, I also had a supervisor who was tending to my needs and realised I brought my talent and what I was good at and guided me towards that decision."

(Participant Six)

Changing roles and relationships with supervisors throughout the journey

Early stages of supervisory relationships and the shock of starting doctoral study

While a few participants found starting doctoral study manageable and described their early relationships with supervisors positively, e.g., 'appropriately challenging and supportive', most described early meetings with supervisors comprising critical feedback on proposals or early chapters challenging. This was often related to participants experiencing a shock when they realised that they needed to evolve from master's to PhD level in their study and writing, e.g., moving from descriptive to illustrative analysis. Most participants described how they had to rewrite proposals and early chapters. Initially students reflected that they lost confidence at this stage, and sometimes felt anxious, overwhelmed or uncertain. This relates to what Kiley and Wisker describe as a 'liminal stage' in doctoral transition (2009, p433). However, participants then described how by rewriting a proposal or chapter at this stage helped them to develop their PhD thinking, writing and direction and then they regained their confidence. This may be argued to be the beginning of their developing doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988).

"*My lowest point was when I did the first research plan. You know when you get feedback on something and you put a lot of hours in and then it comes and they say, actually this is not the way you do it. I'm like oh. And then you start again. But after realising that I went about it the wrong way, by writing and doing a lot of research…, I was actually getting myself back into that system of study or research, and I ended up understanding quite a lot. Because most of the material that I was writing was in the wrong way; it was in the old way. So, good. It was a low point that turned out to be one of the highest points."*

(Participant 10)

"I guess quite exhilarated but also a little bit of, well, what do I do now? How am I going to develop this? And then, when faced with the research proposal form, thinking I knew what it was, and then being very quickly advised that actually this is not what they want. It was all over the place and not at all focused, as it should have been, and having to go through it again, and then discussing it and finding that there was still more, I think was very helpful and a very worthwhile process."

(Participant Nine)

Part-time PhD struggles balancing life and study: the importance of supervisors being understanding in the early stages of the PhD

Most participants reflected that at least one supervisor and sometimes all supervisors were sensitive to their needs as part-time PhD students to juggle study with other aspects of life, which is reflected by Watts (2008) in relation to being sensitive to the needs of part-time PhD students. Such aspects in this research included work, childcare and disruptive life-events, such as mental or physical illness, family illness, having a child, bereavement and changes or difficulties in personal relationships. Participants described how life events caused them to feel under pressure and they then needed to slow down or take time off study. In the early stages of their journeys, this was accompanied by some participants feeling uncertain of the direction of their PhDs and wanting to change and finding the academic workload too pressured when approaching a deadline. Supervisors were described as supportive of most participants under these circumstances, for instance, by encouraging them to intermit or take short periods off study. Most participants also described how at least one supervisor in their team were emotionally supportive and would talk to the participants about their problems and provide encouragement and 'empathy', as also found by Watts (2008). This was important in participants remaining motivated and keeping going under challenging circumstances.

"*And I had to say, "I haven't really made any progress since I last saw you". And, my supervisors were fine, and just said, "Look, we're not going to tell you off", and I talked about where I'm stuck. And they came up with some good suggestions for ways around that and things to do to try and get me back into a positive frame of thinking about my PhD."*

(Participant Seven)

However, it was not always the case that supervisors were emotionally or practically supportive and understanding when part-time participants were going through such challenges. For instance, one participant described how all members of their supervisory team seemed continuously unappreciative of the difficulties that he experienced as a part-time student juggling work, family and study and placed too much pressure on him regarding his PhD.

> "*Obviously as a part-time student there continues to be the same lack of insight in that I'm a part-time student so I should be doing about two and a half days of university stuff a week. Now actually in reality that's mostly evenings, so therefore, I should only really be here one day a week because I should also be earning a living. I've got family to support, I've got a mortgage to pay and all these things. But actually, there's a massive expectation that I'm here three or four days a week attending all these different things."*
> *(Participant Two)*

Etienne and Beverly Wenger-Trayner explain in their framework 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' how "Professional occupations and even most non-professional endeavours, are constituted by a complex landscape of different communities of practice" (2015, p15). This argument is relevant in relation to the participant's narrative here since this doctoral student evidently operated within academic and university communities; professional communities; and varied social communities that may include relationships with family, partners, friends and acquaintances. Hence, he was required to continually shift between roles and identities. In this context, the participant described how he is "very professionally focussed now". While this comment foregrounded this professional aspect of his identity at the time of the interview, different aspects of his identity appeared to be subject to conflict and change throughout his journey. This process is explained by Wenger as follows:

> "We all belong to many communities of practice: some past, some current; some as full members, some in more peripheral ways. Some may be central to our identities while others are more incidental. Whatever their nature, all these various forms of participation contribute in some way to the production of our identities."
>
> (Wenger, 1998, p158)

In relation to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (2015), Fenton-O'Creevy et al. (2015 a, p38) discuss how individuals' experiences of changing identities relating to different communities, e.g., doctoral education or business, within a

landscape can be "laden with emotion and instances of failure". In this context of this participant's working relationship and communication with his supervisor, the participant perceived that the supervisor was not sufficiently aware of his other roles and commitments as part-time student, or that the emails accusing him of not working hard enough was causing the participant stress. As Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) explain, this may be seen to relate to ways in which boundaries between different communities (such as professional and doctoral) can result in conflict. "Because of the lack of shared history, boundaries are places of potential misunderstanding and confusion polarising from different regimes of competence, commitments, values, repertoires and perspectives." (2015, p17). For another participant, disappointment due to a lack of support from supervisors was exacerbated by the lockdown experience during Covid-19.

> *"Also, during the lockdown everything is heightened, and my other two supervisors really have not been up to scratch the whole time and I think that was just reinforced quite a few times over the lockdown and it upset me with some of the things that they would do. Like one only read the study chapter once in total. So, I was a bit miffed. So, I think it was a mismatch in terms of expectations and in different schools as well with how much support they will give. But when you're in a time where you have things a bit rubbish anyway to hear that was a bit upsetting and disappointing and they've not really stepped up since really."*
>
> *(Participant 15)*

The difficulties that this participant, and the other participants, faced in their PhDs during the pandemic is also reflected by Donohue et al. in relation to doctoral students' challenges and resulting demotivation during the lockdowns (2021).

Supervisors pushing and easing off at different stages throughout the journey

As their part-time PhD students' journeys progressed, most participants described how at least one of their supervisors, generally the main supervisor, would know when it was right to push the students further to make progress or ease off the pressure on students. In this context Kiley and Wisker refer to supervisors' need to "nudge" students (2006, p198). For instance, this might be related to the pressure of the PhD deadlines when juggling other life priorities, such as transfer or upgrade, that it was difficult for students to meet, so supervisors would give the students more time. However, looking back, the students realised that it was important for their supervisors to push them

at the right time, giving them short term phase related goals and deadlines, which helped them to progress, and to work at the right pace for them.

> *"Yeah, I've got two supervisors. I think they're very understanding of what's happening in life. So, for example when I got married. They said OK, you don't need to do anything in that manner because you're probably focusing on other things, so they're quite understanding. I think I had situations when I had to push the deadline a bit. I mean like for example, if it was the 1st of February I had to extend until the 15th or so that happened quite a lot, but then they always tell me, 'OK, you know your workload in your full-time job, we don't know about this, so you have to tell us', which is quite good."*
>
> *(Participant 12)*
>
> "*I felt the pressure of the transfer coming towards March and felt that I couldn't make it. And yeah, my supervisors were feeling that and gave me a call and said look, we've got to move that. And that was a big relief for me because the pressure was mounting so high that I felt it's not going to be possible to deliver anything at PhD level at this point."*
>
> *(Participant 11)*

Transfer or upgrade – the importance of supervisors' support

The transfer or upgrade process and stage was often shown to be a key turning point for participants leading to their evident transformation towards becoming doctoral, and acquisition of doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron,1977; Bourdieu, 1988). However, this experience was described as challenging by those participants who had gone through it. In this context, it was important that the supervisory team supported the students through the challenge of a successful or unsuccessful transfer or upgrade; and that the participants perceived that they were supported by their team. This may be seen to relate to what Wenger conceptualises as "mutual accountability" in a 'community of practice' (1998, p81).

> *"The supervisors were helpful because they were there. Then I was, like, oh my goodness, I should have a supervisor whose thing is phenomenology. I still am a little bit like that at draft stage. Although I know my external readers are not going to have that background, I still have a bit of a sense of, I need to run it by a phenomenologist to make sure it hangs properly, although I did feel a lot better after that process and it did*

become a much better document. But supervisors, it's the only time I've ever felt critical of them. I just wish I'd been better prepared."

(Participant One)

Different roles that supervisors played within the team at different stages

Most participants described how their individual supervisors played different but important roles within the team, and sometimes the contribution of individual supervisors would be more important at different stages of their PhDs. Sometimes this also coincided with some members of a team leaving and new members joining. Several participants described how supervisors left and new ones arrived throughout their journey. Some participants described this change as beneficial, and this also reflects my own experiences.

"And since he's joined the team, I have found myself really empowered. He understands the social theories. We have conversations about, you know, agency and structure and structuration theory and social theories and Bourdieu and Giddens, and he gets it. You know what I mean? And so, I felt confident that there was somebody that got that part of my project. Who could be – you know, he can't create my project for me, but he can be a foil. He can be an informed critical friend. As opposed to just a critical friend. And so that was really empowering, and he's been great. And since he joined, I have been progressing well."

(Participant 14)

However, for one participant it was disruptive and demotivating when a peer who they relied on in the same way as a supervisor left.

"In the second year of my PhD the fellow PhD student who then became a staff member moved to Canada. It was a blow as I wanted him to become one of my supervisors. He was the person I could ask about academic questions and queries regarding content and concepts. We're still in regular contact, but removing that instantaneous feedback was difficult."

(Participant 13)

In this context, it was important and motivating for most participants that their main supervisor would be interested in their topic and be able to discuss and hence engage students at a relevant

theoretical and/or methodological level. Occasionally, participants described how their academic and pastoral relationship with their supervisor(s) developed as time went on and the working relationship between student and supervisor then improved.

> *"I've got a good balance. I have somebody who is really experienced. Neither are ego-driven. I'm so relieved about that because I have colleagues who have not had that pleasure. One is very detailed and focused and will focus in on - you must do this. But thankfully the other one is like, you're doing a great job, well done."*
>
> *(Participant One)*

> *"My main supervisor is more hands on and better– I did a supervisory course, and he ticks all the boxes. Whereas she ticks only a couple. So, yeah, I think supervisors are interesting. Because my third supervisor, I think, will come into play later. But again, she offers to help a lot. But it's not her sort of expertise. So, she's only limited in what she can do, really. She can proofread stuff. She read my study before it got accepted for publication. …But, yes, she does her best and she always offers, which is good, which is more than what my second supervisor does."*
>
> *(Participant 15)*

When some participants did not feel that their main supervisor was sufficiently interested, enthusiastic or sometimes an expert in the field, this was described as demotivating, and participants found it more difficult to progress or find the right direction for their PhDs.

> *"Great anxiety associated with it not being good enough all the time. You know? And, quite anxious that although I had good supervisors supporting me, they were supporting me, but they didn't necessarily know about the project. They weren't experts in the field… They understood X. They understood strategy a bit, but the supervisors were not experts in my field, so they didn't understand the social theories particularly well."*
>
> *(Participant 14)*

> *"The early experiences and memories were not so positive, just being heard, being understood, not just in terms of my mental health, but also, struggling to communicate what I wanted to do as part of my research, which I thought, I know best and I had the*

> *audacity to say, 'I'm paying for this, so I think I do know best.' … I have done my reading and I know that I want to do this topic. I know how it falls into specific areas. I know where the lack of research is, I know where the gap is. So, I'm trying to, in a way, convince my supervisors, this is what I want to do…."*
>
> *(Participant Six)*

As already discussed above, other issues within supervisory teams that participants described related to second and third supervisors sometimes not contributing sufficiently, either academically or pastorally, and some participants' lack of clarity about how much to expect from second and third supervisors, and how this may also relate to processes and customs relating to supervision in different disciplines (Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000; Trowler, 2012). One participant did not feel that they had a good working relationship with any supervisor and felt that their supervisors were overly and continuously critical and insufficiently encouraging, which meant that the participant did not feel supported. A few participants felt confused when different supervisors in the team contradicted one another. This perceived lack of support and clarity was demotivating for students, and particularly so during the pandemic.

The ongoing importance of constructive and critical Feedback in students' development

Supervisors have different roles to play at different stages of students' doctoral journeys, which has been established above. In this context, the importance of supervisors' provision of ongoing and continual written and spoken constructive and critical feedback was described as important in supporting participants' doctoral student development throughout their journeys. As mentioned above, for some participants, some supervisors were described as more critical, and some were described as more encouraging in this context. Though participants mostly found this critique challenging, particularly in the early stages of the journey, in retrospect they said they were grateful for this critique, which helped them to progress in their studies and enhance their academic confidence and achievement as doctoral students. This also reflects my own experience. Again, this may be seen as a stage in becoming doctoral and acquiring doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

> "*Well, it makes me think about it. It makes me modify what I'm saying, what I'm writing. I have occasionally taken it in different directions, and they've wanted me to*

explain why, which has been really helpful in terms of my formulating my thinking, but the result has been that I've been looking at citizenship and diagnosis and an adaptation in a way which was very different from what I've done before, but they were very supportive about saying, "Yeah, okay, that's a really good direction to take it in." And I think it is innovative so I'm hopeful that it's going to produce some good results."

(Participant Four)

As their journeys progressed further, most participants described how they became used to and expected this critique.

Actually, going back, instead of thinking that I knew what it was, literally finding that I didn't really know what it was, and so that helped me. And some advice from one of the supervisors to really look at what research meant and understanding research in this field, what it means, and going back to some of those sources and discovering that I didn't know what I thought I knew. Which I think is always the journey in any academic field; you don't know what you think you know.

(Participant Nine)

My picky supervisor he's so brilliant. It drives me nuts because he is so detailed… but I'm grateful. So, when I've had to do summary reports and things …around my grant feedback, he comes back to me like that, gives me clear direct feedback, and I know he's checking for all of that, so I'm super grateful."

(Participant One)

The ongoing importance of encouragement in boosting students' confidence

However, most participants also often said that it was important for them to receive continuing encouragement alongside constructive and critical feedback. This was mentioned as particularly important for those participants who were juggling study with other aspects of life and life events; or struggling to cope with meeting deadlines in their PhDs. In these situations, the encouragement of at least one supervisor was seen as vital in supporting those participants to keep going and not to give up.

"Well, what I always recall as very positive and it gives me a lot of confidence, was the first paper I handed in, a paper on methodologies, qualitative methodologies, and I wasn't sure what to expect when I basically arrived for the feedback session. So, I had then a couple of weeks later travelled to the UK to meet with my supervisors and they were extremely positive about this, so they said it was really well done and they really liked what I wrote there and the way I wrote it. So that gave me a lot of confidence, saying okay, I'm able to do it. I'm able to do this."

(Participant 11)

Serious and ongoing issues in supervision

Despite the mostly positive experiences of being critiqued, and encouraged, a few participants said they experienced considerable challenges in supervision, some of which have been described above. However, most of these were described as time limited and were resolved by changing members of the supervisory team, finding more appropriate supervisors, and sometimes deciding to work at a more appropriate pace, take time off or change direction. Some participants also reflected how they benefited from acting with greater agency (Archer, 1982), taking greater control through making conscious choices and 'playing the game' (Bourdieu, 1977, p6), and, hence, finding their voice and independence in the supervisory relationship. However, this was not always the case, and at the time of the second interviews some participants mentioned that some challenges had not been resolved and seemed to be ongoing, which adversely affected participants' motivation. Participants described how these related, for instance, to the supervisory team being overly critical and insufficiently encouraging, their continuing lack of expertise, not providing enough academic or pastoral support, and in one case perceived professional jealousy.

"I was just a bit baffled as to why I wasn't even on their radar. I didn't even feel like for a check in for two months into a pandemic, there was no - How are you getting on? - at all. And I just felt disappointed because I know I wouldn't be like that if I was a supervisor or even just as a person. I just wouldn't have gone about it that way, and then I've had many conversations about this because I've been quite upset about it during the pandemic and will see with some of their comments about only reading something once, it hit me more than it would have in a normal time."

(Participant 15)

"*I must argue my point every supervisory meeting. I have to cover, for example, why have we included these papers as opposed to these papers that we discussed two or three supervision sessions ago. I must repeat that and stand up for it. Even to the point that sometimes I have to repeat back at them what they told me to do because they're saying that they didn't, it's completely the wrong thing or the worst thing that I could be doing… ultimately I don't trust the next supervisory session or the supervision session after that, they're not going to try and make me out for doing the wrong thing when they've told me to do it."*

(Participant Two)

For a few participants, issues in supervision were described as difficult to cope with, when they had other difficulties and disruptive life events to also deal with. In some cases, participants expressed how they felt overwhelmed by this and considered quitting or taking a break from their studies.

"*And they'd put me right through the ringer. And it was really, unpleasant. …so, there was that combination of a gruelling critique and lack of time pressures to address it. And that was really low. So, I think that – and being ill and then having finally got some supervisors and finally making progress, albeit totally unpleasant, it was progress. And then being so ill that I couldn't do it. That having to suspend was terrible."*

(Participant 14)

Participants' mental health difficulties and the need for supervisors' pastoral support

Many of the participants described mental health difficulties during their journeys, which ranged from short term anxiety caused by stress and pressure to longer term depression. As outlined in the previous chapter, and reflected by Watts (2008), part-time PhD students are more likely to experience more overwhelming or devastating life events than full-time students because they are studying over a longer time frame. This research shows how part-time PhD study alongside other aspects of life can affect part-time PhD students' mental health. Also, participants who I interviewed during the pandemic described how their mental health difficulties were exacerbated by the pandemic and its effects on their lives and study, which is also reflected by Donohue et al., (2021). In this context, participants described how it was important for supervisors to be understanding, to

listen, be empathetic and to provide pastoral support to encourage their students and feel that they were cared for, which is also discussed by Watts (2008).

> *"My main supervisor, for example, has been there the whole way through. … he's a great support and most of the time we have catch ups it will just be talking about life and having a cup of tea rather than focused on the PhD. He doesn't force it or pressure it, he just lets me do it as I try really. And I think now he knows my mindset if I'm in a place where I can work and I can be pushed, he'll help me set some deadlines to help that. But if I'm not then he would just let me be and just I'll come to him when I'm ready."*
>
> *(Participant 15)*
>
> "*I think … just my mental health meant that… I just was operating at kind of half speed, probably, and feeling slightly dazed and confused by having to navigate this massive new organisation and bureaucracy. Work out what was what. I mean… fortunately my supervisors have been supportive, and helped, you know, and didn't pile on loads of pressure, and… you know, took things quite gently."*
>
> *(Participant Seven)*

However, some participants did not feel that they received enough support from some, or all, of their supervisors when they were experiencing mental health difficulties or overwhelming life events. This was demotivating for students.

> *"Yes, I remember just before the pandemic, so I think it was November time in 2019 that will be then, I had a big mental health lapse… and I was in a really bad place, and I tried to reach out to my supervisors because I hadn't really done anything for two months. So, I was just teaching and just surviving really, so I had a meeting with them in December, which is probably why I'm more upset now that the other two haven't really checked in or done anything since, especially during the pandemic, because of what I shared in terms of the information. So, I felt a lot of trust in telling them a specific life-event, which then affected how I was as a person and obviously this affected my PhD work."*
>
> *(Participant 15)*

A few participants discussed the need for more specific mental health support for PhD students at a doctoral level:

"*I think maybe you should have like a clinical supervision for PhD students, because I know for a lot of jobs you have it, to make sure that you're doing okay mentally. So, I think that would be really beneficial. Because I think until I told some of my supervisors only a fraction of what was going on person-wise, they'd have no idea. … I know no one would be none the wiser, until I tell them and they're like, "Oh, …, are you all right?" and I'm like, "No. Not really".*

(Participant 15)

"*I think PhD journeys have cognitive and affective elements to them, and we completely under-estimate and under support the affective part of it. So, it's almost like you need support and guidance tutor type input into the process. So, you know, we have all those technical workshops, but actually what we need is actually workshops or –, one to one coaching that deals with the affective side of it."*

(Participant 14)

Developing doctoral student agency, independence and voice in supervisory relationships

As their journeys progressed most participants described how they developed from being dependent on supervisors to becoming more independent, this was both in thoughts and actions. They began to think critically and at a more doctoral level, which meant looking critically at one's own work and not always agreeing with supervisors. They began to make conscious choices, and to act with agency, for instance, by 'taking back control' of their PhD and not being led down paths they didn't want to follow (Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014; Archer, 1982).

"*I realised I was feeling quite dependent on that when I was writing the findings chapters for instance, thinking, well I can't do any more till I hear from X. I really need her comments before I go on. Well, actually I have to get beyond that, I think. And that is certainly the case now, especially probably in discussion because it's very much your thoughts, isn't it? It's your conclusions, your chance to say what you think. … It feels like another level of competence and another level is being demanded of me at this stage."*

(Participant Five)

"I think for the PhD to first say OK they're my supervisors, but they're not always right. This is, I think, a challenge to have your own thoughts about ideas and maybe. Try to talk to

your supervisors and say I'm not quite happy with this. This is, I think, well to actually say - that I'm not sure about your idea. Yeah, that's something I learned in the last year."

(Participant 12)

Actively engaging in the supervisory relationship, or team community, and thinking about how to act and behave in this context, arguably contributed to the participants becoming doctoral.

Attending workshops and events: meeting with peers during the early part of the journey

Before the pandemic, some participants described how they found the early stages of their PhDs engaging. They reflected on how they enjoyed being a PhD student and taking part in university doctoral training events where they could meet peers. Several participants mentioned that they found that taking part in training modules were important for them to gain a sense of belonging and make friends. In this way they were 'playing the game', acquiring 'social capital' and their doctoral 'habitus' was evolving (Gopaul, 2014; Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Bourdieu, 1988). In relation to 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015), it may also be argued that by 'engaging' fully in being a doctoral student, participating in doctoral communities, and 'aligning' to what is expected as a doctoral student by attending doctoral training is contributing towards their doctoral 'competence' and 'knowledgeability' (Wenger, 1998).

Reading and writing groups

Attending fora, reading and writing groups was an important aspect of this process described by several participants during the PhD and beforehand.

> *"To kind of ease myself into academic study even before I started my MRes, I joined an academic reading group where every six to eight weeks we discussed an academic text…. So that got me into a community of people who were doing PhDs already. I've also been giving papers at conferences since the start of my master's, and so again that's helped me form my ideas in front of an audience, find other academics with similar interests, discuss with them different ways of looking at things, and that has got me published while I've been going on."*
>
> (Participant Eight)

Writing groups were described as providing opportunities to discuss academic texts, share work, engage in debate, critique other students' work and receive feedback. Participants described the feedback as helpful and developmental. It was also described as a useful preparation for future experiences in giving and accepting feedback from supervisors. Participants also described attending PhD student fora as useful, where they could discuss topics that the whole PhD student group was interested in, for instance relating to vivas. Some participants also set up informal groups with peers, which they described as providing mutual encouragement and support, which was motivating. In this context, some participants described how the opportunity to connect with other PhD students was crucial in keeping them going with the journey. Sometimes, this was accompanied by participants' awareness that all students experience similar struggles.

> "*I was encouraged by the fact that it hadn't been such a smooth journey for everyone else. Maybe it feels like, when you don't always talk to other people about what they're up to, you imagine that they're all having an easier time of it than you are. A lot of them had had a break since their other studies, so some people have worked for a few years, but a lot of them are younger than me. And you tend to imagine that they have less complicated lives and fewer commitments. But in many ways, they've experienced some of the same frustrations and difficulties so it's very reassuring."*
>
> *(Participant Three)*
>
> *"So, my friend who's also doing a PhD, it's helpful to talk to her, just to share where you get stuck, and the trials and tribulations of doing the PhD. So, although she's full-time, she's in a fairly similar situation, in the sense that she also does work. And sometimes the work, ends up eating into the PhD time, so just those battles around that. And she has issues that I don't have, her supervisors aren't as supportive. So somehow there's that schadenfreude thing where you can take comfort from the fact that somebody else is having a tougher time on some things than you are, and you end up supporting each other."*
>
> *(Participant Seven)*

Belonging to a disciplinary peer community

In this context, participants often emphasised how feeling a sense of belonging to a peer community in their discipline was important. Participants mentioned that other PhD students in the department

were an important source of support in providing encouraging words about keeping going and staying on track. The support provided in this context was often related to a feeling of being in the same boat, and a sense of collective 'resilience' in keeping going with the PhD journey (Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2015 b, p45).

> *"The people who probably influenced me the most during that period though were the other PhD students — talking about their experiences. I got the impression based on my perceptions of how they were interacting with their supervisors, how their projects were going, about the differences between their projects and mine… It was only at times when I started talking to them about specific feelings that I was having, did I find out that they also had similar concerns or that their perceptions of my project were different to how I was feeling… yeah, they were the main sources of support there."*
>
> *(Participant 13)*

Discipline related events, meetings and groups where participants could engage with other students in their field were described by participants as ways to participate in their communities. For instance, one participant discussed how presenting about her proposed change of direction at a mini conference including members of her discipline group helped her to feel more confident and motivated to carry on, which was important as she felt she was "turning a corner". Previously, she described how she had been lacking in confidence for a long time before that and was uncertain. This may be conceptualised as her going through a transition where she was initially in a 'liminal state' (Kiley and Wisker, 2009, p433). However, following the mini conference, she described how she felt positive and had a sense of belonging again, showing her evolving doctoral 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Moreover, this participant also expressed her greater confidence following positive feedback from her peers and felt able to cope with academic challenges. She described this as a safe space to reveal ideas that she was uncertain about because of the history of being master's students together in the past. Again, this may be conceptualised as developing collective 'resilience' through participating in a peer 'community of practice' (Fenton O'Creevy et al., 2015 b, p45).

> *"We had a little mini conference just for the cohort of PhD students who started at the same time, organised by one of my peers. That was a positive thing. I think there were only 10 of us or so we just got together to do a mini presentation to each other. And there were others who had changed direction or had gone down the wrong route or*

were unhappy with where they were going and unsure of what they were doing, just as I was, so it was really reassuring. … I can remember getting some really encouraging feedback. I think that the opportunities to get together with other PhD students has been important. I'm not sure that I would still be doing it on my own."

(Participant Three)

A physical sense of belonging to a community and the importance of physical learning space

In this context, it was discussed as equally important for many participants to feel a physical sense of belonging to a learning space, such as: a university faculty, building or campus, and to access a desk, where participants could study with peers in a shared space. For instance, one participant discussed how they felt comfortable and familiar with the university because of studying there before. In a shared room, they were able to study alongside their established network of peers, which they described as an important reason for them to choose to study at the university. Several participants mentioned how studying alongside other PhD students in the same field was engaging, since students could discuss their work with other PhD students who were studying similar topics. One participant described how another student's enthusiasm and passion for their PhD topic was inspiring, and this student became a role-model for the participant to follow. For some participants, physical proximity also provided opportunities for camaraderie, where students could share jokes and problems, take breaks together and motivate each other. Hence, participants' sense of belonging to a disciplinary community associated with a physical learning space was academically and emotionally engaging and supportive. These are all examples of ways in which part-time doctoral students develop collective 'resilience' in a 'community of practice' (Fenton O'Creevy et al., 2015 b, p45). In this way they can also acquire 'social capital' and strengthen their evolving doctoral 'habitus' which in turn helps to enhance their belonging and confidence (Trowler, 2012; Gopaul, 2014). In contrast, some participants imagined that without the beneficial influence of working with other enthusiastic PhD students in a shared space they would feel isolated, lose motivation and make slower progress.

Struggling to belong

Some participants reflected that a shared physical learning space with other PhD students was not always accessible, especially during the pandemic and consequent lockdown periods. This is echoed by Donohue et al. who described how doctoral students were demotivated by a range of factors including lack of access to appropriate learning space and contact with peers during the pandemic (2021). In this research, some part-time student participants also struggled to belong to a learning space because of working full-time, having too many other life priorities, or because of living overseas. These factors prevented students from participating fully in a 'community of practice' with other PhD students in the university. One participant said they found it difficult to connect and establish relationships with other peers in their discipline as they perceived that the environment was not welcoming and lacked a sense of community. A few participants perceived that the nature of being part-time meant it was difficult to attend social gatherings with other research students, but appreciated the times when this was possible.

> *"… the whole feeling that I had in the Department was that people aren't really communicating, there's no actual community. I don't want to say stay away from PhD students, but the engagement was zero. There was no proper PhD community, and I think that's due to the diverse cohort that we have. So, I found it a bit tough in that respect... I found it really difficult to make any sort of connections, and it's the same to date."*
>
> *(Participant Six)*
>
> "*Well, one thing is that you don't really get into this University setting. I'm not really into the feel of being there, integrated with other PhD students, and interacting and sharing thoughts, reading groups, those things. I'm in a completely different environment. I'm in the work environment. Everybody else here is… working, just doing their job. So that's the environment that I'm usually in, which is keeping me away from doing my PhD. Whereas I think at the University this is rather different. If you're there you encourage the other PhD students and are supportive towards each other…"*
>
> *(Participant 11)*

Feeling out of place as a part-time doctoral student in a peer 'community of practice'

A few participants expressed how their lack of sense of belonging to a community and associated learning space was compounded because as a part-time student in some university contexts they were not entitled to a desk (in a shared learning space). In contrast, in these contexts, full-time students were described as entitled to a desk. In these cases, university rules and processes (structures) were described as causing part-time participants to feel marginalised since the part-time students did not have access to this form of 'social capital', and related 'habitus' in comparison to the full-time students (Gopaul, 2014). In this situation, it is argued that part-time PhD students may perceive themselves as isolated. In this research, while some part-time student participants were happy to rely on their own resources and access help, if necessary, other participants felt a lack of confidence and self-esteem within this context. In addition, some participants felt out of place because they were part-time, and this may be reflected by Thomas' description of students feeling like a "fish out of water" (Thomas, 2002, p431).

> *"I would say that I'm a lot more rushed in terms of what I'm trying to do, PhD wise, because of the external pressures… Because actually I don't want to be seen within the university as that weak part-time student..." we should never let part-timers do it" … Because I'm the only part time student in our cohort, so I don't want to be seen as the weak one. And there's almost that pressure on you."*
>
> *(Participant Two)*

For instance, in this quote, the participant described how he felt marginalised as a part-time doctoral student and did not want to be seen as 'weak' because of being part-time. As Wenger discusses (1998), a situation like this may be argued to relate to the participant being at the 'periphery' of a 'community of practice' in his discipline, where as a 'newcomer', felt a sense of belonging in some ways, but not in other ways:

> "Peripherality is thus an ambiguous position. Practice can be guarded just as it can be made available; membership can seem a daunting prospect just as it can constitute a welcoming invitation; a community of practice can be a fortress just as it can be an open door."
>
> (Wenger, 1998, p120)

As circumstances changed (for instance during the lockdown in the pandemic) and other students moved on, participants often described how their sense of physical belonging to a learning community and their associated 'social capital' had diminished. For instance, one participant described feeling lonely because she perceived that few other people (supervisors or peers) understood her PhD or her journey. The isolation that doctoral students experienced during the pandemic and lockdowns is also reflected by Donohue et al. (2021). Other participants described how full-time students that used to share the same learning space and belong to the same community as them, had finished their PhDs and left. University restructuring processes also sometimes detrimentally changed the dynamic of shared spaces with other students, by creating smaller (and more isolating) rather than larger shared offices. However, one participant described how they acted with agency by becoming a student rep and hence creating their own sense of belonging since they were forced to engage with other PhD students. Hence, this was a way of building belonging to a community and accruing 'social capital' with peers (Gopaul, 2014).

How the pandemic adversely influenced participants' sense of belonging to a peer community

As discussed above, the pandemic and lockdown often exacerbated the sense of isolation and loneliness that some participants expressed, because they found it more difficult to communicate with the small number of peers that they previously were able to talk to. Under these circumstances, while participants said they were able to join PhD training sessions or communicate with peers online, a few said this was not the same as face-to-face interaction where one can bounce ideas off one another, and the associated sense of belonging and motivation. A few participants described how during the pandemic, and beforehand, the whole ethos of their university changed, affecting their sense of belonging to a learning community in their discipline. These participants mentioned how their previous thriving discipline-based research and peer community had now disappeared, and hence, their sense of belonging to a 'community of practice' and consequent motivation had decreased, their only doctoral community being their working relationship with supervisors. For one participant, their consequent sense of isolation caused them to want to finish their PhD and leave rather than stay and pursue an academic career, which they had previously anticipated. This is an example of how loss of 'habitus' related to students' lack of sense of belonging to a community in their discipline and associated learning space can be demotivating (Delamont et al., 2001; Gopaul, 2014). Although this participant created some sense of belonging by going back to the office, the

overarching Covid-19 global structural force was overwhelming, as reflected by Donohue et al. also found in relation to doctoral students' experiences during the pandemic (Donohue et al., 2021).

Belonging to a peer community through engaging with other students online: building collective 'resilience'

As described above, online communication and contact with peers was not favoured by all participants and some participants mentioned that they preferred face-to-face contact. However, several participants, particularly overseas students, discussed the importance of meeting and being in contact with other PhD students online and through social media. Some participants described online connections with other students outside the university who were also studying PhDs and shared similar interests. A few participants mentioned that online communication with peers was through attending regular online workshops or discussion groups on Teams organised by the doctoral college or graduate school. For participants who talked about their experiences of studying during the pandemic, online workshops were particularly important to provide them with contact with other PhD students during lockdown periods. For instance, a few participants described how when they felt isolated, taking part in the online workshops was supportive, and they realised that other students were also experiencing feelings of isolation during the pandemic. A few participants also mentioned that they were glad to share their experiences and advice with other students and support them in this context. This was a way of developing collective 'resilience' through belonging and engaging in a 'community of practice', and a means to reinforce their sense of belonging and 'social capital' (Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2015, b. p58; Gopaul, 2014). Participants described how they felt these online workshops were important and should continue after the pandemic and be available at times that could include overseas students.

The doctoral college or graduate school

Most participants described positive experiences of the doctoral college or graduate school. As described in the previous section, several participants mentioned that the workshops, training sessions and events provided by the doctoral college or graduate school were helpful. They were also a means to meet other PhD students across the university, particularly in the early stages of their PhD journeys. These workshops helped enhance participants' sense of belonging to a

'community of practice' at this important time of transition (Wenger, 1998). This is also reflected by Thomas in relation to undergraduate student transition and the importance of feeling supported and developing a sense of belonging (2002). As described above, a few participants mentioned that the online doctoral training and workshops provided were particularly helpful during the pandemic and lockdown in supporting isolated students to feel that they belonged to a 'Community of Practice', where they could share experiences and problems and develop collective 'resilience' (Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2015 b, p58). Organisation of annual reviews, transfers or upgrades and vivas were also described as important aspects of this support, which participants often, but not always, described positively. In addition, some participants described how they had developed supportive working relationships with administrative staff in the graduate school or doctoral college, which was important, especially when, in a minority of cases, participants felt they were receiving insufficient support from their supervisors.

> *"The whole three months to date, the graduate school/doctoral college is very supportive. If you ask a question or if you are lost, they always try to put you in the right direction. That's one of the things I picked up: they never leave you on your own, say, okay you sort it out. The admin staff they're always …, okay we'll try to do this, try to do that."*
>
> (Participant 10)

A few participants described some aspects of their experiences regarding the doctoral college or graduate school, which were challenging or where they would have liked more support. One participant also mentioned the issue of mental health and that representatives of the doctoral college or graduate school were not sufficiently supportive of PhD students' mental health issues in this context, and that more needed to be done.

Annual reviews

One of the most positive aspects of support described by participants provided by the graduate school or doctoral college was annual reviews. Most, but not all, participants described these annual reviews as developmental and encouraging and that they felt more confident after their annual reviews. Participants described positive experiences of annual reviews at different times during their doctoral journeys. For instance, a few participants mentioned being nervous before their first

annual review, and then felt challenged but encouraged by the internal examiners. Examiners also provided participants with important advice that helped direct them in the next stage of their journeys. Some participants described this as a pleasant surprise. These participants then continued with their PhDs feeling optimistic and confident.

> "*Well, I guess my annual review I think was a very good experience. I was slightly apprehensive of it … I was worried that I hadn't written enough. So, I went in. I had sent to the external examiners everything that I had written…And going into this not knowing whether I'd achieved what was expected of me or not because of conflicting information it actually did feel like a very positive event, that these two examiners, I think I'd maybe bumped into one of them before but certainly hadn't met the other, were very positive of what I was doing. I felt that the questions they asked me were at times provocative, but at the same time useful, giving me things to think about going forward that perhaps neither my own supervisors or any other kind of additional session that I'd attended about methodology or whatever had raised. So, I found it a very positive experience."*
>
> *(Participant Eight)*

Transfer or upgrade

As described above, transfer or upgrade was a challenging and transformational turning point for the participants who had been through this experience. Participants described varied experiences of internal examiners in this context, in that some were very positive and encouraging, and some overly critical to the extent of being demotivating.

> "*And then the actual transfer itself, the conversation, was fantastic… And they asked really good questions. Really incisive, but supportive. And the whole transfer was just like a lovely critical conversation… So, it was brilliant. And it gave me confidence. It helped me reorganise my thoughts. It helped me identify areas where I needed to strengthen my argument. And it gave me a shopping list of things to do, which I'm working through. … And so there was this sort of safety net concept, this affirmation concept. For me, the transfer was really important. It was validating, supportive, backstop, creative, critical, forward-looking. It was everything you could ever want from a transfer/upgrade."*
>
> *(Participant 14)*

Some participants did not successfully go through the transfer or upgrade initially and then had to rewrite their submitted chapters. In this situation, a few participants questioned whether they could cope, but they mostly remained determined and persistent through this process. Arguably, successfully navigating this challenge marked a key PhD turning point leading to the participants' development as doctoral students, and acquisition of (doctoral) 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). This resonates with Fenton-O'Creevy et al.'s argument that: "Experiences of failure are an inevitable consequence of moving into contexts with an unfamiliar regime of confidence…It involves difficult emotions such as shame, grief and anger" (2015, a p42). Arguably, these experiences should be recognised as a core aspect of doctoral learning development.

> "*But I found it tough, the transfer/upgrade viva because I'd not done a viva before. I did a viva for my undergrad, but it was very different. The two readers were both strongly methodological in their focus… it was a tough viva. I found it really hard. The head of school/faculty was gracious. I'm so grateful to her because she said, we're going to let you through, but you must do this rewrite. It was a helpful thing actually having that methodological focus in retrospect, but boy was that hard, to get back at my computer and write. I found that's been the hardest time to get back to write. "*
> *(Participant One)*

> *"The transfer/upgrade itself, I found it was very harsh. It felt like an interrogation rather than discussing my topic, discussing my methodology, discussing where this fits into the field, what I was contributing, or planning to contribute. … There were so many emotions connected to that, that it collided with how the transfer/upgrade was conducted… And it was quite traumatic… It has pulled my confidence down a bit, and even more so right after it happened because I thought: 'Is this how an upgrade, or how a viva should be conducted?', and I thought: 'If this is what my actual viva is going to be like, I was actually scared'. What helped was that I had passed, but it was quite traumatic."*
>
> *(Participant Six)*

The wider university community

Teaching colleagues and lecturers

Though it was not the case for most participants, some participants said that they worked at university themselves, and had formed important working relationships with academic colleagues. This also reflects my own experiences. These working relationships were often described as playing a key role supporting participants throughout their journeys at specific times within the PhD. For instance, some teaching colleagues were described as encouraging participants to start a PhD, or to pursue an academic career following a PhD. Some participants recounted how their colleagues had already done PhDs themselves and were able to provide the participants with helpful advice from their own experiences, and provide encouragement when participants were feeling uncertain in the early stages of transition into doctoral study. This again arguably supported such students' development of belonging and evolution of 'habitus' at doctoral level (Thomas, 2002). Participants also said that some of their colleagues provided continuing helpful advice throughout their journeys including feedback and critique. For a few participants, their working relationship with teaching colleagues was evidently more important than or replaced the relationship with student peers. In this context, participants reflected how those working relationships with colleagues provided discussion, feedback and encouragement, which were important in contributing to the participants' ideas. This finding resonates with Wenger's notion that engaging in a 'community of practice' influences community members' 'meaning' making (1998, p51) and creativity through 'imagination' (1998, p178). However, one participant described how, during the lockdown, talking to colleagues online on Teams was not the same as talking and discussing with them face-to-face, and were missing that relationship during the lockdown period, which was demotivating.

> *"But it's not easy when you don't have people there on a one-to-one basis to discuss things with. It's just not such a happy situation when you're talking to someone through a screen, or through this kind of meeting, I guess. Yeah, it's not the same as when you can just bounce ideas around and talk to a colleague …And that doesn't really happen over there in this sort of online venue where you're meeting with a colleague."*
>
> *(Participant Nine)*

Having good working relationships with colleagues who were lecturing staff was shown to be important in enhancing some doctoral students' confidence, if they were academic staff. It may be

argued that because these participants felt at ease in different communities within the university (with other PhD students, supervisors, the doctoral college/graduate school and academic colleagues) they acquired 'social capital', and a developed a sense of belonging and evolving 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014).

> *"Well, they haven't really been events, it's been more like a slow process of unfolding and thinking and discovering through conversations, discussions, through my teaching work, … with colleagues from the department, and just quite loose conversations over lunch or occasionally around ideas that are discussed in informal meetings …. So again, it's a slow process, I think, that just unfolds. … and so…if I'm stuck on something or a particular way of working… you can just talk to your colleague and say, 'What do you think?' …which can often help."*
>
> *(Participant Nine)*

> *"A friend of mine who teaches on the module has asked me to give a couple of lectures each year a couple of years running. This friend has been very supportive and is also doing a PhD in the same field and it means that we can talk about it even though our subjects are very different. And like I said, this person … gave me better feedback than my supervisors had over the previous two. Having this person as a friend and a colleague has been enormously helpful."*
>
> *(Participant Eight)*

University support staff and unions

As well as the significant influences of different academic relationships on part-time PhD student journeys described above, support staff in the university were also described as significant in either supporting or, on some occasions, not sufficiently supporting some part-time PhD students during their journeys. As mentioned above, one of the key elements of support often needed by participants was mental health support. The examples below show that when this was provided, for example, through mentoring, it was shown to be important in helping participants to cope emotionally and progress with their studies.

> "*My mentor… she's amazing. A mentor, or any sort of therapist, who takes on that very close role, if you connect with them on a personal level, that's key. And I don't know where they found her or how they allocated her to me. I think she was just available. But she definitely had a massive impact, because I think we connected on a level and we can be very sarcastic together!"*
>
> *(Participant Six)*

However, several participants did not feel that they were receiving sufficient support with their mental health in the university or felt that this was not appropriate for their needs and made suggestions for greater additional support for PhD students in this context, which are described above. Some participants also described that they found relationships with other support staff such as technical staff, library staff and administrators friendly and encouraging. A few participants also mentioned that they enjoyed their working relationship with the colleagues in the Union and wanted to be part of that community where staff were supporting one another and experiencing a sense of camaraderie. These are all examples of ways in which part-time PhD students can feel welcome and feel a sense of belonging to the university community and 'landscape of practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The external academic and research community

However, it was not only working relationships and communities within the university that were described as an important support for part-time PhD participants during their journeys, but also academic relationships and communities outside the university. Key relationships and communities described in this context, included research participants, writers and theorists and the wider research community that PhD students engaged with at external conferences or when writing publications.

Research participants

For several part-time PhD students engaging with research participants during data collection was described as an engaging, meaningful and fulfilling stage of their PhD journeys. In some cases, the research participants arguably provided another 'community of practice' that part-time PhD students belonged to, which motivated and kept them going during challenging times, because they

felt a sense of belonging and that they were helping those people. In other cases, participants described how conducting in-depth interviews as part of their PhDs enabled a meeting of minds and a connection with participants. Part-time PhD participants' experiences in this context demonstrated the engaging nature of socially constructed qualitative data collection, and how this helped to build their 'social capital' and belonging to another important community within the 'landscape of practice' (Gopaul, 2014; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). A few participants felt that they were part of the community they were researching, and hence, felt strongly about their own insider role in relation to the research participants and wanted to capture the voice of this community. A few participants also described how they felt privileged to be able to talk to their participants and interview them as part of their PhDs. As Wenger argues, this may be seen as part of a process of conflict resolution in which "reconciliation …that proceeding with life – with actions and interactions – entails finding ways to make our various forms of membership co-exist, whether the process of reconciliation leads to successful resolutions or is a constant struggle (Wenger, 1998, p160)".

> *"From a phenomenological perspective we had some beautiful fusions of horizons in those interviews with participants … lots of lovely memories of meeting and talking and uncovering people's stories. That's been a real pleasure in the mix of everything else…. I think it reinforces and validates that it's valuable to be listening and valuable to be recording and trying to take learning from that. I'd say most of all it's validation, and that those things are valuable in and of themselves, beyond the PhD. …I obviously needed to get the PhD out of our data-gathering, but in those moments, there was something beyond that which was lovely."*
>
> *(Participant One)*
>
> "*I felt a great respect for them and… was very pleased to be in a position to have heard that story, aware that that was a rare opportunity, as it were, because it had been set up in the way it was, you know, it was official, and it was safe and so on. The benefits of being a research interview, as it were. The privilege of sitting down with someone for that length of time wouldn't come… I can't think of many circumstances in which that would happen, yeah. So that sort of feeling."*
>
> *(Participant Five)*

Writers and theorists

Several participants also described reading, discovering and developing knowledge concerning writers and theorists that informed their PhD studies as very engaging and inspiring. This often happened during the early stages of the PhD during the reading stage that informed the literature review and methodology chapters. Hence, writers and theorists are also argued to be part of the 'landscape of practice' to which part-time PhD students belong and can help them develop doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu, 1988; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

> "*In relation to the doctoral topic I'd say it has been the supervisors and readers, and the academic literature that you're reading and people that have come through to very much speak to you within that. I was very interested in the philosophers around phenomenology and ended up getting really absorbed in their stories because of it all flowing out of a period and the war and identity and things. It was interesting to read into all of that. That invariably shapes you to a certain extent, and I'd have loved to have more time to do that."*
>
> *(Participant One)*

> "*I think … when I was writing and doing the work for my literature review chapter and learning the language, learning what pedagogy meant and different theories and different ideas, … suddenly things started to make sense."*
>
> *(Participant Seven)*

Conferences and developing contacts with the wider research community, building social capital

Participants' experiences of going to conferences was often described as beneficial. At internal and external conferences participants had the opportunity to meet other researchers and academics in their field, and to build their doctoral 'social capital' and sense of belonging to their research community both within their university and outside it (Gopaul, 2014). For some participants, attending and/or presenting research at a conference may be seen as a turning point, which contributed towards the participant's decision to start a PhD. For some participants, presenting at a conference and receiving positive feedback from an external audience helped enhance their

confidence and sense of doctoral independence, when they had not developed this through supervision meetings. Presenting at conferences was evidently confidence building for most participants, and at international conferences, was a way of building their reputation as researchers in their field, and an example of what Bourdieu calls 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988).

"So, I sort of seized the chance even though I was only early on. And, again, there were lots of Americans there who were very experienced, and it was a very good-hearted conference, very welcoming and inclusive. And I met other PhD students who were sort of in this area, but not from an educational point of view, who were like nurses into spiritual care and that kind of thing. So, I did begin to find a bit of an academic home that wasn't exactly what I was into, but nearer than I had encountered before. So that was encouraging too. "

(Participant Five)

"As per usual this paper I gave on the f……. in comics in A went down well. So, it's been useful in giving me a chunk of writing that I'll be able to adapt for my first chapter. Also, I met another academic at the conference who is interested in the idea of the f….. and is writing a paper on the subject for the Journal of …Studies, and so he's given me a copy of that paper to read even before it's published, which I think will be useful. … And it was useful to discuss it with him at the conference just because I haven't found that much useful writing on the subject so far. Probably because not that many people have talked about the f…. in comics, and so actually to meet someone who is doing that research already, albeit it in a slightly different field, has proved very useful, and as I said is useful in giving me another deadline to produce a bit of work for."

(Participant Eight)

It may be argued that at this stage the participants were at the 'boundary' and 'crossing' point of belonging to a doctoral 'landscape of practice' where "boundary crossing and boundary encounters are crucial aspects of living in a landscape of practice" (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p18). With reference to 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015), the participants' experiences of starting to belong to an associated academic community within their research field, may be linked to Kubiak et al.'s argument that "a peripheral member of a community of practice can have a significant connection to it. …this connection reflects an identity position of *imagination with peripheral engagement*" (2015, p78).

Publications

In a similar way to presenting research at an international conference, writing and then publishing an article based on participants' PhD research was evidently very confidence boosting for participants. This was described as helping participants to feel more independent and recognised as researchers in their external research communities, and the wider 'landscape of practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Writing and publishing an article was arguably a pinnacle turning point towards the end of participants' doctoral journeys where they achieved 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988).

> *"So, I think we are getting it to a level where we think it is good enough for these higher impacting journals, which has been good in the last month or so, and having a co-author that's from the University, Z, who's actually helped shape quite a lot of the journal article. Having this validation of - oh, wow, I really want to be honest because it's good and we can get it here. Just having an external person who said it's really good was nice and so that's definitely been a positive part of the PhD in getting it to this stage."*
>
> *(Participant 15)*

> "*The last couple of months since I'd started writing up, there are two chapters for my thesis, but they're going to be submitted to publication as one experimental paper. So, I was writing that up before Christmas and then I got the full submission of that manuscript to my supervisors at the end of January, just beginning of February. So, when the process of just going through the last kind of few rounds of edits and then hopefully I will submit that, yeah, it was really positive. It feels like now that I've got something."*
>
> *(Participant 13)*

This chapter has presented a thematic analysis focusing on ways in which varied academic relationships and communities influence part-time doctoral students' journeys. Analysis shows how part-time doctoral students' engagement in, participation in and belonging to core doctoral 'communities of practice' including with supervisors and peers; and to additional academic communities that are part of the university 'constellation', and the wider doctoral 'landscape of practice' outside the university all contribute to part-time doctoral students' learning journeys and doctoral learning development (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). In

this context, part-time doctoral students' working relationships with supervisors and peers are shown to be particularly important in their PhD journeys contributing to their: developing a sense of belonging, 'social capital' and 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Gopaul 2014); learning development, achievement and doctoral 'educational capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977); academic confidence; and, in some cases 'academic capital' at the end of their PhDs (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015; Bourdieu,1988). The importance of and the need for mental health support for part-time PhD students, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, have emerged as an important theme in this context. The implications of all findings, including this chapter, will be discussed in relation to the main conceptual lenses of this research in the Discussion Chapter. The next analysis chapter focuses on the perspectives of doctoral education directors on part-time doctoral student journeys. This chapter also discusses how recent changes in UK HE and doctoral education, and associated ideologies, such as 'neoliberalism', influence part-time PhD student journeys, providing a contextual narrative, and an additional analytical lens for this research.

Chapter Seven: The wider narrative: doctoral education changes and ideologies and their influences on part-time PhD students' experiences

Introduction

This chapter focuses on answering the following research questions:

- What are doctoral education directors' perceptions and experiences of doctoral education changes in UK universities; and ways in which these changes influence PhD students' experiences?
- What are the contextual ideologies and factors that frame part-time PhD students' experiences in UK universities in changing times?

As this study seeks to explore the context of change in which part-time PhD students experience their doctoral journeys, it is important to explore the historical and socio-political context of change in doctoral education in recent times as a wider narrative that situates the unique narratives of part-time PhD students. This wider narrative has already been discussed in Chapters One and Two in relation to the changing context of HE; and how doctoral students are on the one hand influenced by socio-political structures and discourses; and on the other, they are also free agents who can make choices leading to change and transformation throughout their PhDs (Goodson and Rudd, 1977; Archer, 1982). In the context of this research into the experiences of part-time doctoral students in changing times, as Goodson and Rudd argue (2017), "this dynamic interplay between structure and agency, capitals and context, gives rise to the dynamism inherent within social practices" (2017, p186). The methodological implications of the wider narrative and what Goodson and Rudd describe as "historical periodisation" (2017, p189) are discussed at greater length in the Methodology Chapter.

Methods summary

The methods and findings described in this chapter relate to in-depth interviews with doctoral college directors in two UK universities. The Methodology Chapter provides an in-depth discussion of ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations in relation to these interviews. In summary, individual in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with two doctoral college directors in Universities A and B and were conducted in two phases, once in 2017/18 and then again in 2018/19. An additional participant was interviewed once in University A in 2017/18, which adds to the diversity of staff perspectives. These were suitable to explore staff experiences and perceptions of doctoral education in their own university contexts, how this was changing, and how this was influencing part-time PhD students' doctoral learning experiences (Ritchie, 2003). As previously explained in the methodology, these interviews were helpful to generate insights into the changing context of doctoral education that informs the wider narrative that is part of this research. In-depth interviewing techniques encouraged a discursive conversation, which is argued to be appropriate, as this helps to elicit open and natural responses from participants (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). (For further details of participants and analysis please see the Methodology Chapter.)

Findings

The changing landscape: funding changes and doctoral training partnerships

There were important findings in relation to the changing UK higher education and doctoral education landscape, which reflect some of the key debates discussed in Chapter Two. In Chapter Two, I discussed how political forces and discourses driving change in HE and doctoral education related to neoliberalism including: the rise of student tuition fees and introduction of student loans following the Browne Review (2010); the notion of students as consumers; the employability agenda; the Higher Education and Research Act (2017), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), and the Research Excellence Framework (REF). In the interviews with doctoral college directors, participants discussed how, since 2017, changes taking place in the HE landscape, including funding, played an important role in university restructuring across the sector, which often had a detrimental influence on doctoral colleges and education. For instance, they described how government and institutional research funding became increasingly selective, e.g., through the HE Research Act (2017) and introduction of the research and enterprise agenda.

Funding changes

In relation to these HE changes, participants discussed how over three decades there had been three PhD student funding routes: self-funders often part-time, research council funded, and government or industry funded who were often international. This was described by participants as changing at the time of the interviews. Participants described how the proportion of part-time PhD students had substantially decreased during the last decade. In University A, one participant explained that before the recent financial crisis more PhD students were self-funded part-time, but at the time of the interviews self-funding had become less possible due to the recession and lack of financial support from employers.

> *"At the start of the doctoral college/graduate school we were predominantly a self-funded part-time, group of PGRs, I mean that was the dominant sort of thing. That's changing. I mean it's changing in part because self-funding has become less possible for many people. You know, ten years of recession have not helped. Many of those who were in our terms self-funders were getting support through employers. "*
>
> *(Participant One)*

Doctoral training centres and partnerships

Participants described how three decades ago university based doctoral training centres started, which concentrated students in universities that had resources to bid for funding and that research councils felt had sufficient capacity, excluding many post-1992 universities. At the time of the interviews, changes in funding council processes meant there was a greater focus on doctoral training partnerships and working in collaboration with other universities. Participants confirmed that this was beneficial in that some of the discourse between universities became more collegial. For instance, a participant in University B explained that it used to have its own doctoral training centre and was strong in research income, but recently needed help from partners and became a member of a doctoral training partnership. This was described as positive to support and learn from other universities.

> *"Some of the other changes are around the way the Funding Councils are working and managing doctoral training partnerships much more now than doctoral training*

centres, so there's much more of an emphasis on us joining up and having partners and working in collaboration with other universities... Some of the discourse, really, has become more collegial, I think, because of that. "

(Participant Two)

Participants explained that there were 30 to 40 universities engaged with research councils that saw doctoral training and doctoral colleges or graduate schools as part of research and enterprise strategies. In other universities, where doctoral education was not enterprise related then universities became more teaching focused, and that trend would continue. One participant in University A explained how a shift had been away from widening participation to higher quality doctoral students, and that this was also happening across the sector. Hence, the expectations of students and their training had become more formal.

"I think the more that universities bid for blocks of studentships through doctoral training partnerships, the more formal becomes the expectation of the learning programme that students go through. "

(Participant One)

University restructuring in 2017

During the second phase of interviews that took place in 2018/19, participants commented on how universities were in a constant state of transition. Participants explained that doctoral colleges and graduate schools were set up in their universities after a previous university restructuring, and since 2017 there had been further university restructuring, which negatively impacted on the doctoral college or graduate school, staff and students.

"I was two years into my role when the restructuring happened, which basically meant I couldn't achieve anything in the third year in role, because everything that we'd been doing around harmonising practices and making sure that our five different disciplines were doing things in a coherent way, suddenly those disciplines were strewn across the university and we had a new combination of disciplines so it was like going back in time to harmonising again."

(Participant Two, Stage Two)

Since 2017, participants explained how there were: a reduced number of faculties, voluntary redundancies based on cost cutting, and supervisors who left. Participants reflected on how it was hard to support students through that**.**

> ***"****Yes. It interrupted, for some, it gave some a hiatus. Some people were coming up to milestone events, like upgrades, transfers, that we tried very hard to make happen when they should happen but sometimes, they were delayed. So, interruption was the main thing, and I don't want to overplay it but it was there. "*
>
> *(Participant Two, Stage Two)*

Participants described how another change that was taking place in HE was BREXIT, which increased anxiety for staff, especially those overseas staff from Europe. Participants described how this adversely impacted student recruitment, universities' financial security, and student and staff wellbeing.

> *"The other big context in the background of course has been BREXIT. So that has meant more a feeling of being unsettled for staff, especially our staff from European countries, which is a big chunk on our staff, as well as impacting on our recruitment of students, our feeling of financial stability…There was a sense of uniting in our unhappiness but as it's gone further and further and nearer and nearer to the BREXIT time, …there is the feeling of the direct impact."*
>
> *(Participant Two, Stage Two)*

In University B, participants mentioned that the research culture was also affected by the focus on the National Student Survey (NSS) and on supporting undergraduate students. In this context, doctoral students were considered less of a priority. Participants observed that staff had also stopped peer reviewing papers for journals, which was affecting the doctoral student experience because supervisors reviewing articles was part of the research culture.

Doctoral colleges and graduate schools

Participants explained how doctoral colleges and graduate schools were set up in University A and B in 2011, following reorganisation and as a reaction to concerns over PhD student performance in league tables and a way to oversee doctoral education. Participants explained that a key role of these schools and colleges was to enhance doctoral training, process management, audit and timely

completion. In this context, the participants argued that this process may be seen to dilute the doctoral experience. As Boud and Lee (2009, p11) argue "Often change is driven by intensifying accountability requirements as governments increase scrutiny on matters such as time to completion, the distribution of candidature across key fields, the need to skill graduates in terms of employability indicators and so on."

Another aspect of the role of the colleges and schools was described by participants as overseeing the quality process of doctoral education and the PhD student journey. Participants explained that this included providing an advocacy role for staff and students, overseeing the supervision process and supervisors, the student research environment, and support with future careers. Participants mentioned that this last employability aspect was becoming increasingly important at the time of the interviews. During the first stage of interviews one participant described the following ways in which doctoral education had improved since the doctoral college/graduate school had started. The QAA review mentioned improvements in doctoral education. There were multiple doctoral training partnerships funded by research councils and the doctoral college/graduate school played a role in that success; and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) results showed that the postgraduate student experience improved since the doctoral college/graduate schools started.

Since 2017

During the first stage of interviews doctoral colleges/graduate schools were perceived by participants as managing and supporting doctoral students and education effectively and successfully. However, since the recent university restructuring, participants described how this success had been disrupted in different ways in different university contexts. During the second phase of interviews, one participant described how progress that doctoral colleges/graduate schools made in improving doctoral education was adversely affected following the recent restructuring.

> *"I have to say it was an extremely frustrating final year in role, and anything that may have been happening in the wider world around HE and impacting on doctoral students was just far off and irrelevant really because we were in the absolute firing line of 'everything that we had in place won't be in place on* in *August' and …the impact was huge."*
>
> *(Participant Two, Stage Two)*

Participants concluded that disrupting such development was an example of the cost of repeat university restructuring. In University A, one participant explained that the doctoral college/graduate school was like a separate school when it started, and it was successful. They used to be agentive and were more part of the culture and rhythm of the academic life of schools and the university. However, since 2017 they were being pushed to take on a strategic governance overview role, which meant that the doctoral college/graduate school was changing.

> *"The college that we've had has been a sort of living, breathing organism … and I think it's been very successful in those terms. I think if the wish is that there is a very much more strategic governance overview of things then everything else needs to change with it…so I think the tensions will continue…My own experience of things is that agency is a far more powerful part of our work than structure and I think in the first seven years or so of the college's life we were much more agentive and certainly when I started…, and we dealt much more in that way and we were much more part of the kind of the culture and the rhythm of the academic life of the schools and of the university."*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage Two)*

Doctoral student training and employability

Participants described how providing doctoral training, with an emphasis on employability, and supporting students with their future careers had become an increasingly important aspect of the role of doctoral colleges or graduate schools. While important, this affected students' sense of identity, and their expectations regarding their future career were uncertain. Participants said that training opportunities were not equal for all students depending on their university and whether they had studentship grants. Participants described how there had been two pushes relating to doctoral training linked to employability, in that doctoral colleges and graduate schools provided discipline specific methods training, and professional development training. Participants mentioned that, in contrast, in the past there were no training or methods classes. However, at the time of the interviews there was an emphasis on doctoral students being multi skilled in different methods, to be able to conduct mixed methods research, work in a mixed methods team, write reports and practice team skills. As discussed in Chapter Two, this is reflected by Edmond (2017, p78) who described such

development as being related to "new vocationalism in HE, including, the introduction of new types of work-based and work-related provision."

> *"… now this whole kind of emphasis is around, 'You need to be a multi-skilled methodologist who can turn your hand to different methods and be in mixed Methods' teams … but it also requires an outlook of, you know, you need training in how to write a report, how to sell yourself, team skills, … "*
>
> *(Participant Two)*

In this context, a recent Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) call for funded doctoral training programmes argued that three-month research employment in placements should become the expectation for all research students (UKRI, 2022). However, the emphasis on employability was perceived by participants as diluting some of the creativity of the PhD. Moreover, as Edmond argues, the downside of part-time work alongside study is "the negative impact on study and study outcomes" (2017, p79) and "the commodification of experience..." Participants also reflected how since recent changes took place in HE, PhD student morale had suffered, and stress had increased. For example, they mentioned that: there was uncertainty for PhD students about the future, there weren't many easily obtainable academic careers available, students were feeling less confident about achieving an academic position, and there was a realisation that the doctorate had less value.

> *"I think the other side though is that the stress on doctoral students is now greater and the uncertainties are greater than they ever were. … A really good student that I admitted who's just graduated said 'you know, as I got through the doctorate, I began to realise that this might be it,' he said, 'you know, …well, what's the future?' …And this particular person I think became quite depressed over the whole thing and I can understand that. "*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage One)*

Participants reflected how doctoral students therefore were having to turn themselves into someone with transferable rather than academic skills. They had become more entrepreneurial and were thinking about how to become a consultant or self-employed researcher.

> *"Having to turn themselves into someone with generally transferable skills rather than just academic skills, that shifts a bit; it makes them more entrepreneurial in a way – how can I be a consultant, how can I be a jobbing researcher on a zero-hour contract?"*

(Participant Two, Stage Two)

This is reflected by the argument in Chapter Two that recent changes in UK HE marked a move away from the university ideal of the pursuit of knowledge described by Newman in 'The Idea of the University' (1852); and towards the marketised, financialised and managerialised university, which will be both financially worthwhile and useful for the UK economy and society (Hall, 2017).

Changes since 2017

Influence of doctoral college and graduate school practices on PhD students' experiences

Participants described how doctoral education regulations had changed. While there was increased pressure on time to completion, the new annual review process was perceived by participants as beneficial for students in both universities. Since 2017, benefits described in different university contexts included better completion rates; and the developmental nature of the annual review, which was seen by participants as supportive for part-time PhD students.

> *"Under the annual review system every year they get the opportunity to present the work that they've done and to have then an in-depth conversation with people who are independent from their supervisors, talking about the development of the work, not necessarily about their developmental needs. I think that will be a major benefit to people who are remote and not getting all the peer-related benefits of regularly communicating with other doctoral students…It's a process where they can get a sense of their own development."*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage Two)*

In relation to progression regulations, participants explained that students generally disliked transfer or upgrade until it was over, and perceived that supervisors thought that it took students away from their work. Participants also reflected how transfer or upgrade could be bureaucratic - the writing of the chapters, the word count, the criteria. In contrast, they felt that the new transfer or upgrade annual review equivalent was more helpful because it was more about: knowing the student was able to articulate their thesis, trusting them to be at the right level even though it may be less clearly

evident in the written document, articulating the learning from the internal examiners' direction of the PhD students; and giving students support about how their PhD was developing rather than meeting quality assurance criteria.

> *"If I take transfer/upgrade for example, which many students dislike bitterly until the moment they've done it… one can make that a very bureaucratic process, which says 'you've got to have these chapters and you've got to do this and you've got to, and if you've got it all there it'll tick all the boxes, or you can say 'actually at this moment you really ought to be able to articulate your thesis'."*
>
> *(Participant One Stage One)*

Participants discussed how if students were not directed as they were by doctoral colleges or graduate schools, then some of them would thrive and be creative, but others would not develop to their full potential. Participants reflected that because of the control over the doctoral process, some of that isolated creativity from students may be lost; and concluded that the processes put in place to manage doctoral students' experiences must have a clear reason, which is understood by students and staff, are beneficial to students; and there must be a balance between control and creativity.

> ***"****I think one must find a balance. And one must make sure that the interventions that you make in things have clear reasons, that's understood by the students, the supervisors and everybody, and that they have a benefit to the student."*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage One)*

Since 2017

As discussed above, participants described how the restructuring in universities had a disruptive influence on students and doctoral colleges or graduate schools. Because of the restructuring, voluntary redundancies and job freezes, one participant described how the doctoral college or graduate school had to cut down on the number of doctoral students coming into the university because they had less supervision capacity. Hence, this participant described how there was a drop in the number of PhD students, which changed the postgraduate research environment. These changes were described as causing students stress because there were changes in supervisors and supervisory teams, some students were approaching milestone events, and some academic connection was lost.

> *"So sometimes you felt a close alignment in your multi-disciplinary mix, and you went to the seminars and things in the other discipline, and staff from that discipline put on training for the students, and then the cake was cut differently, so some of that easy access to some of that training and some of that expertise was severed."*
>
> *(Participant Two, Stage Two)*

PhD students' mental health issues

Participants described how mental health of doctoral students had become a major concern across the sector; and this reflects what the student participants also described. While participants observed that mental health issues in UK society had become more widespread and frequently reported, doctoral students were described by participants as experiencing particular mental health issues; and part-time doctoral students were described as more likely than full-time students to experience pressures of disruptive life events, which may exacerbate mental health challenges. As described above, since 2017 and the university restructuring, participants described how students experienced greater stress, uncertainty, disruption and decreased support when they experienced mental health problems.

> *"There's now also coming in this idea that there's a huge amount of pressure and it sits on them individually in ways that they've probably never dealt with. So mental health has become a huge issue within, and it's not just us, it's everybody, in a way that if you'd gone into most universities ten years ago and said mental health of PGR students, people would have gone, well what's different to undergrad? You know, whereas now it's becoming much more recognised that there are stresses and particular health requirements and well-being requirements on PGRs that are unique to them because of the type of course they are doing."*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage Two)*

Participants described how there were a greater number of students who were self-declaring that they had mental health issues. A climate was described in which students in general and PhD students felt able to talk about mental health and it was less taboo in society. Participants explained that one aspect of this was that stress and uncertainty for doctoral students was greater than ever. In the past, participants reflected, it was easier for PhD students to get a good job, particularly an academic one. At the time of the interviews, participants explained that students realised that the

future was uncertain, and some students may become depressed as a result. More recently, the difficulties that doctoral students recently faced in their PhDs during the Covid-19 pandemic were discussed by Donohue et al. (2021) who found that doctoral students' contact with their peer community, mental health and motivation were adversely affected by factors related to the pandemic.

In terms of support, participants perceived that some students may not have found their supervisors sufficiently supportive when they talked about mental health issues. Participants suggested that for supervisors, there was sometimes a lack of clarity around to what extent they should provide emotional support for PhD students. Hence, participants concluded that staff roles in supporting students with mental health issues needed to be clarified. Participants considered whether it was fair to ask supervisors to take on a counselling role; and whether a supervisory team could cover the aspect of emotional support for PhD students sufficiently. There was an awareness from all staff participants that doctoral colleges and graduate schools needed to enhance their support for PhD students in relation to PhD students' mental health; and this was also reflected by the student participants.

> *"I mean I suppose one of the issues on the agenda now which had been there for quite some time, but it's become a bit more present is mental health and wellbeing for PhD students. And I think that is one of the things we don't do especially effectively though I don't think we're by any means alone in not doing this especially effectively, but the kinds of support that undergraduate students can access – We effectively direct PhD students to the same kinds of support, and I don't think we've built up the kind of intelligence or kind of experience around what it means to support a postgraduate research student in those ways that we have with undergraduates. …So, I think that's something as an institution but also as a sector that we probably could be better at supporting students again, not just part-time, but maybe for particular issues for part-timers."*
>
> *(Participant Three)*

Changes since 2017

In both universities, as described above, participants described how the restructuring affected students' sense of security because: grants and supervisors were not considered to be stable or

secure, and while studentships continued, less students were starting and there was future career uncertainty. In University A, participants perceived that students were more aware of the pressure to finish on time than previously, and consequently their stress levels had increased, particularly when they were around half-way through the second year. In University A, one participant described how there were also concerns around how to deal with addressing students' problems when they arose. Participants explained that the doctoral college or graduate school didn't have the capacity it had. Participants reflected that postgraduate students were not the highest priority for universities as they were a small percentage of the student population. Participants were concerned that if it was not possible to support students' issues quickly and completely then that created difficulties.

> *"My concern is how we then deal with the follow up, where we certainly don't have the capacity that we did have. And the student department … has been in a bit of turmoil; we were working with the old management there. You know, …the new people are still getting to grips with things and PGR doesn't come high up on the list. Not when you're a small percentage of the total student population. "*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage Two)*

However, doctoral colleges or graduate schools were still perceived as providing a lot of support for students. For instance, participants explained that doctoral administrative staff were supporting students on the front line, and they often knew more than supervisors. To help students with mental health issues, participants described how in University A, the doctoral college or graduate school was setting up a health and wellbeing network, indicating good practice. They were introducing sessions for the doctoral training partnership students who were under the greatest stress with a partner university. In that sense they were able to help prevent issues arising. Despite this, participants believed that there was a possibility that the numbers of withdrawals would increase because students were finding it difficult to cope and didn't feel they were receiving the necessary support.

> *"I think there is also quite a possibility that the number of withdrawals will go up because students can't cope, and don't feel that they are getting the support that they need. You know, quite often we have dealt with students who were on the verge of leaving and as a last thought they've said, can I speak to somebody in the doctoral college? Now for some of those it's the best thing for them, it's not the right time or the right place or whatever it is. But for others, you know, it's isolation and*

getting things out of proportion and needing support, which the doctoral college, certainly in the past, could organise."

(Participant One, Stage Two)

Supervisory relationships

Supervisory relationships were described as changing, with less emphasis on the traditional master-apprentice supervisory relationships, and greater emphasis on supervisory teams, which were perceived to protect doctoral students. In this context, as Trowler discusses, supervision is moving from 'individualistic' towards a more 'social practice' (2022, p. 1743). While this was seen by participants as a positive change, since the restructuring in universities, participants reflected that many supervisors had left through voluntary severance. Participants reflected that this has caused stress, uncertainty and disruption for PhD students and was affecting part-time PhD students more than full-time PhD students.

"So, I think having people who are really into your topic was threatened, and I think that did affect part-timers more than full-timers because the full-timers were more likely to be funded as part of a project and then the staff are more likely to stay whereas part-timers have already got a less strong connection with the supervisor's topic maybe, and they were passed around a bit more."

(Participant Two, Stage Two)

Participants explained that current regulations required team supervision at the time of the interviews and teams were critically important. However, every team was described as different and ways in which individual supervisors played a role in their students' lives varied a lot. Supervisory teams were perceived to help to protect students in terms of quality of supervision, pastoral support, supervisors' life events, and supervisors' commitments outside supervision.

"Yeah, but we gain and lose things with the emphasis on supervisory teams. So, clearly, teams are what's in our regs, it's what we need. You can't be dependent on one person, you need teams if somebody falls under a bus, you need teams for if people get tetchy with each other, or whatever. Teams are critically important, but it kind of isn't quite the same as it was in my day where it was a very kind of tight-knit one-on-one relationship."

(Participant One, Stage One)

Participants described how supervision varied a lot in terms of whether supervisors provided pastoral support as well as academic feedback. Participants also argued that not all students wanted pastoral support and not all supervisors were good at delivering that.

> *"It varies quite a lot because some supervisors provide pastoral support as well as academic feedback… But not all students want that, not all supervisors are good at delivering that, so I think it varies."*
>
> *(Participant 3)*

There were considerations around which staff should appropriately provide pastoral support for PhD students. Participants reflected that supervisors could do this, but not all of them wanted to. Personal academic tutors could provide pastoral support, but students may find it difficult to openly talk to people who they do not know well. As Watts argues the role of supervisors in providing pastoral support is "contested" (2008, p.372).

> *"Who is best placed to provide that wellbeing support for a doctoral student? And in some cases, it is the supervisor, because they're the only person that really has this ongoing relationship, but some supervisors want that, and some don't! You know, and some students say they want that stuff kept away from the academic debates, so then there's this idea about personal academic tutors, somebody who's just responsible for the wellbeing side, not the academic development side, but then the issue is part-timers just will never have met this member of staff, so why on earth would they go to this other person they've never met before, to say, 'I'm going through a major life event and it's slowing me down.' It is a bit of a conundrum."*
>
> *(Participant Two)*

Participants also discussed the art of supervision in terms of how supervisors responded to students. For instance, participants suggested that some supervisors responded to students' needs and some expected students to adapt to them. Participants reflected that the intensity of relationships between supervisors and students could be positive, and that could help part-time students more than full-time. However, participants also concluded that students are different, and some may benefit more

from a team with other students or people who are not their supervisors, and that the student's agency was perceived as important in that respect.

> *"I think there are benefits to that, but I also think the intensity of relationship between a student and supervisor, where it works, is something quite remarkable. So, I suspect that some of these things will help part-time students more than, than full-time. But I mean the same part of it is actually that if you look at any doctoral student they develop relationships: some of them it's very intense with one supervisor, some it becomes a team, some it's with other students or with people who are not formally their supervisors or whatever it is, you know, so I think within that there's always the agency of the student."*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage One)*

In this context, as discussed in Chapter Two, Brew and Peseta propose a "student focused approach … where supervision becomes a co-constructed relationship and process that enables the student voice to be heard" (2009, p135).

Changes since 2017

In University B, one participant described how some parts of the university were severely affected by the restructuring. One discipline lost a lot of staff and so there were questions over who could supervise the students. Participants described how the doctoral college/graduate school approached other faculties to find new supervisors for students, but the expectation that students would have a supervisor with expertise in their topic was threatened. Part-time students were perceived as particularly affected by staff redundancies and changes in both universities, because they were doing their PhDs for up to eight years and there was a likelihood of having to change supervisors. Participants argued that the supervisory relationship was crucial and if that worked well students could cope with everything else.

> *"The key is their relationship with their supervisors, if that's okay then they can cope with the rest…but I think one of the things that the re-localisation does is it puts more stress on that relationship,"*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage Two)*

Participants also explained that previously, the doctoral college or graduate school could arbitrate and speak to the head of school or faculty on the supervisor's or student's behalf. Participants explained that if students were having problems in supervision, they could go to the doctoral college or graduate school as an independent arbitrator, who knew the supervisors, and students could trust that their problems would be dealt with sympathetically. Participants reflected that at the time of the second interview the students didn't have that and both supervisors and students struggled, because if students talked to other supervisors or staff then it may be difficult to maintain confidentiality or there may be a conflict of interest. Participants described that for supervisors the sense that their relationship with students was protected by the doctoral college or graduate school was lost and that was important.

> *"They could go to somebody outside the school who knew them, knows the staff, the supervisors and trust that it would be dealt with sympathetically. They now don't have that, and on both sides I think they struggle with that because they're going actually to see a colleague or they are going to see the mate of their supervisor and whether or not that person can maintain a confidentiality ….So I think for many people in schools there is a sense that their relationship with their student enjoyed a level of protection that it now doesn't and I think that's really important."*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage Two)*

Relationships with peer communities

Participants described how relationships with peers and learning communities were at the time of the interviews perceived as important alongside supervision in doctoral student learning, and this would become increasingly important in the future in helping to build doctoral student agency, resilience and independence in their learning and success. This may be argued as increasingly important in times of uncertainty and disruptive change as described above, and more recently during the Covid-19 pandemic, but may be more difficult to access for part-time students, as found by Watts (2008), Gardner and Gopaul (2012) Aitchison and Mowbray (2013). As mentioned previously, participants described how the traditional master apprentice model of supervision was changing and moving towards cohorts and communities of learning, which students and staff were all a part of. Participants suggested that what universities could do was build resilience, independence and flexibility into doctoral students' experiences through that.

> *"I would say there that we're kind of on a cusp of something where we've lived with this old idea of the …professor and the student and, you know, kind of the student absorbs everything the supervisor gives them and they become if not a carbon copy then something similar to a point where I think we will move much more towards cohorts, towards communities of learning where …part of what we do is building resilience to all sorts of things, and flexibility and all sorts, and perhaps more independence."*
>
> *(Participant One)*

This is reflected by Trowler (2022, p1743) who discusses how supervision is moving towards a more 'social practice'; and Boud and Lee (2007) who suggest a more holistic approach to doctoral pedagogy that includes both supervision and the research environment, encompassing 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998). Pyhalto and Lonka (2009) also maintain that doctoral student engagement with peer learning communities convened by supervisors promotes reflective and deep rather than surface learning; and suggests that universities should develop strategies to encourage these practices to positively influence student retention. Participants reflected that the growth of student numbers in some disciplines and the cohort feel meant that students were also learning from each other and sharing ideas, which benefited the students in terms of counteracting isolation. Participants suggested that when students face difficult and lonely moments in the PhD, sharing with colleagues is important.

> *"The growth of student numbers …and having a cohort feel is… students are learning from each other…There are quite a number of students here who've formed themselves effectively as a kind of cohort and are sharing stuff and are learning from each other very effectively, and I think that's great for them. And I think that really benefits them firstly in terms of PhDs can be quite a lonely journey, and I think the way I always put it is that it's right that there is a kind of lonely moment in the PhD where it's you and you have to work it out, but actually it shouldn't be the whole experience, so I think actually having colleagues that they can share with I think is a positive."*
>
> *(Participant 3)*

Relationships with colleagues and family members

Support from professional and family relationships were described by participants as important and was more likely to be present now than 20 years before the interviews. In this context, as Leonard

and Becker argue, PhD students including part-time PhD students may rely on support from other people outside their university or course research community (2009). However, in some circumstances participants observed that family and community relationships may increase PhD students' sense of isolation, and some women overseas students were described as experiencing challenges in this respect.

> *"We've then got a community which is broadly ...., where most of the doctoral students will be married with families, where there are very differential relationships. I mean probably three quarters of them are men but a quarter of them are women, where it's all quite formal, you know, and where the partner who isn't doing the PhD is expected to support but in a pretty uncritical sort of way. Those people find it very difficult. The men less so than the women I think, but the women have got to be very strong in terms of making sure that they've got the space, you know, intellectually and personally and all sorts."*
>
> *(Participant One)*

Participants suggested that in the past employers and colleagues often wanted PhD students who were employees to do doctorates and saw the value in it. That had changed, in that staff doing PhDs were less common and less understood by colleagues. Participants argued that in universities when academic staff were doing PhDs that was not always sufficiently supported in terms of workload.

> *"So mostly employers and colleagues want the person to have their doctorate, they see the value in it. They will cover for them and do all sorts of really supportive things…it's different now in schools and other universities and people really value that, so you get support. I think sometimes some of the least supportive is when people work within this university, so they're already a lecturer, they're doing their PhD, and yet they'll still get loads and loads of admin piled onto them….We know how hard it is to do a full-time job and a part-time PhD, but somehow, in your own doorstep, we can be the worst."*
>
> *(Participant Two)*

Participants reflected that students receive support from different people at different times during their PhDs, family, colleagues and peers depending on what students need at different times. In this context**,** PhD students were seen to need support from people outside the PhD because it is very intense and absorbing, so having other supportive people and activities in students' life was described as important. Participants suggested that this could be family members giving students

space for studying or colleagues recognising that it is a demand. External relationships were argued to be perhaps more important to part-time students because they have to sustain their doctoral journey over a longer period. This is also reflected by the student participants, and by Leonard and Becker (2009) as discussed above.

> *"I mean I think the kind of external roles are clearly going to be more important …to part-time students… because you've got to sustain it over a longer period, because it's not the focus always of what you're doing, that you've got to somehow, nurture it in order to for it to kind of be realised and that we have to have other kinds of support to do that, whether that's family members, …asking you about your PhD or giving you space to work on your PhD or whether it's …work colleagues outside of the PhD recognising that it's a demand that …you have and …respecting that."*
>
> *(Participant Two)*

Differences between part-time and full-time student experiences of doctoral education and life events

As discussed in earlier research (Wright and Cochrane, 2000; Park, 2005; McWilliam, 2009; Gardner and Gopaul, 2012), participants described how part-time student completion rates were a concern across the HE sector. Participants discussed how this may relate to a variety of factors including: greater pressure to complete in a given time, which may increase their stress and anxiety; less opportunities to access funding and training opportunities than full-time students; their likeliness to be isolated and not belong to peer learning communities or groups; their rhythm of doctoral study may not match university expectations; their doctoral journeys are more likely to be disrupted than those of full-time students by life events and other competing life priorities; and changes since 2017 relating to supervision and support detrimentally affected part-time students more than full-time students.

Participants also observed that the changes that had taken place in doctoral education and the requirement to achieve milestones and complete in a specified period put more pressure on part-time students, and there were particular issues around part-time PhD student mental health and wellbeing. Participants were aware that more support was necessary for part-time doctoral students and questioned the expected workload for these students. Participants reflected that the way that part-time PhD students were supported varied a lot according to discipline. Some disciplines

supported part-time PhD students well and others focused mainly on full-time students. Issues that part-time PhD students were described as often experiencing to a greater extent than full-time students included: disrupted progress; a sense of dislocation and isolation; coping with the academic challenge of working at doctoral level alongside additional life priorities; frustration of not developing work quickly; juggling academic work and other life priorities; and greater likelihood of suspension or withdrawal following bereavement, illness or family crises. In this context, participants observed that when doctoral students were doing a part-time PhD over seven or eight years, their studies were likely to be interrupted because of life events, which could make completion more difficult. This is also reflected by the student participants.

> *"Mostly what you see is life events, like illnesses, bereavements, you know. It's kind of quite hard to get through seven or eight years without one. We look at special circumstances, where a student can put in a case to say they need to suspend, or that because of their special circumstances, they need to extend their registration for another six months, and we thought it would be about their illnesses and things, but it's often about, 'My wife is ill' or, 'My mother is...' you know. So, you know, it's quite hard to just keep up the work while the people around you are poorly or needing you, and I really sense that in our students often, are being torn in two directions, or three directions if you've got a job, a PhD and a family. You know, which wins out? And this notion, I think, sometimes our senior leadership have, that every PhD student is 22, able to move around the world, looking for their first job, fully funded, it's just imaginary. You know, they aren't like that, and their life is much more complicated than that! … and I almost want to remind them of the person in their 50s, who are caring for, you know, two generations either side, and a demanding job, and a PhD, yeah."*
>
> *(Participant Two, Stage One)*

This is reflected by Watts (2008), Gardner and Gopaul (2012) and Teeuwsen et al. (2014) who all found that part-time PhD students often balance different roles, responsibilities and identities including: professional, family and academic. In this context, participants also perceived that part-time PhD students' rhythm of life and study could be at odds with that of the university, which was mainly geared towards full-time students. Full-time students were perceived as more likely than part-time students to feel a sense of belonging to a research culture and peer community. Participants explained that for part-time PhD students, there were some part-timers who attended university regularly and were like full-time students in that way. However, other part-time students

were described as only attending once or twice a year. Participants observed that those that were successful did participate in learning communities, either at home, at work or virtually. Some part-time students were perceived as finding it harder to engage in cohort or group activities because of other commitments, but it varied for different individuals and depending on where they were living.

> *"Some part-time students find it harder to be able to engage in some of the cohort-type activity because of other commitments but, … that varies quite a bit by individual really because … if someone's a part-time student living in London, which you get a bit of here, then it's quite an effort for them to come. And if they're working it's difficult for them … even if you schedule something … so the research forum that happens at five is going to be difficult if you've got a working day in London, to get here for five. On the other hand, some students who have a sort of different pattern of commitments who are local can turn up to stuff as much as any of the full-timers."*
>
> *(Participant Three)*

Participants suggested that part-time students' sense of belonging may also be affected by the availability of social learning space. For instance, participants described how in some university schools or faculties permanent desks were available for full-time students, but not part-time students. Again, this is reflected by the experiences of some student participants.

> *"The part-timers hot desk and the full-timers, have a proper desk. The hot desk thing is completely different thing to having your own. Um, so it's not big but it's theirs' and, you know, you've got all the things around you– make that space yours, which the part-timers can't do in a hot desk scenario. …So, one of my part-time students uses a hot desk regularly. She kind of gets to know people by coming and using that desk in a way that she wouldn't if she just worked from home. So, I always encourage my part-timers to use the hot desks."*
>
> *(Participant Two)*

Participants also mentioned that pushing full-time students to improve was more acceptable because supervisors saw them regularly and could provide support, but for part-time students, participants explained that pushing them too hard could be demotivating because if the students felt unable to cope, and didn't see supervisors regularly and informally, it could be challenging for the students.

"You can push them a little bit because in a sense you can see them quite regularly and you can support them, and if they get very lost, or, they lose confidence because the reading that they're doing is difficult, you can help them. If you do the same for a part-time student, you risk really quite demotivating them because if they're getting into work that they feel they can't do, and they also don't see the supervisors in the corridors and have a cup of coffee and say 'how on earth do you get to grips with this?' it can be, I think, can be quite difficult."

(Participant One, Stage One)

In terms of funding, participants explained that most studentships were for full-time students, and part-time students did not have the same opportunities in terms of research council funding for studentships.

Since 2017

The restructuring and changes since 2017 were perceived by participants as affecting part-time students more than full-time in that there was less flexibility for dealing with their individual circumstances. For instance, in University A, one participant explained that the doctoral college or graduate school was dealing with more cohorts now, and trying to push full-time students through a system, so running sufficient training sessions had become harder, while the push to put training online so that part-time or distance learning students could access it became less of a priority. In University A**,** one participant suggested that pressurising full-time students had forced the doctoral college/graduate school to reconsider whether that system suited part-time students, which they felt it mostly didn't. On the other hand, participants also argued that the pressure on part-time students to complete in a shorter time could be advantageous because then they were seen as more valuable, or at least the risks were high enough that they should be managed. This view is reflected by McWilliam (2009) who discusses how "Categories like mature-aged, part-time, international …are examples of aggregates that are applied to doctoral candidacy and that do a particular kind of work in framing students as more or less problematic" (p190); and how in the UK, this type of risk assessment led to the need for governments and universities to manage and monitor doctoral students' progress more closely (Bitusikova, 2009; Lunt et al., 2014). However, as argued in Chapter Two, part-time PhD students may not always want to focus on the extra training demands of the contemporary PhD that are not related to their specific PhD subject.

> *"So, I think inevitably students who are part-time and who cannot come to the university on a regular basis could well become more marginalised. On the other side, there is also still now a pressure to have part-timers complete within a certain period and I think that could work to the advantage of part-time students because actually in a way they become much more valuable, or at least the risks that sit around them are sufficiently high that they need to be managed."*
>
> *(Participant One, Stage Two)*

In University A, participants explained that the doctoral college/graduate school was looking at how to modify the regulations for part-time students who were remote. In University B, one participant suggested that part-time students were more affected by staff redundancies and changes than full time students, because they were at the university studying for their PhD for longer, and the likelihood of having to change supervisors was greater. Moreover, participants explained that the expectation that students had a supervisor with expertise in their topic had been threatened and that affected part-time students more than full-time students. Full-time students were more likely to be funded as part of a project where the supervisors were more likely to stay, but part-timers often had a weaker connection with the supervisor's topic.

> ***"****There were bits of the university where it was quite desperate, in one discipline they lost a big chunk of their staff, and it was like 'who is left to take on these students?' And they were coming to us and 'can you help supervise a student in that discipline because you've got some vague distant connection with this student's topic?' So, I think having people who are really into your topic was threatened, and I think that did affect part-timers more than full-timers."*
>
> *(Participant Two, Stage Two)*

As mentioned above, on a positive note, participants described how the new system and the annual review seemed to be developmental and helping part-time students to feel part of a community because they were meeting other academics, talking about their work and gaining insights into what they were doing well, what could be improved and what directions they should follow.

> *"So far, the reports are that the annual review is the developmental process that we wanted it to be and that for part-timers it is helping them to feel more a part of things because they are meeting other academics, they are talking about the work and often they are also getting insights into which bit of the work is valuable or bits that they could improve, avenues that they could follow."*

(Participant One, Stage Two)

Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of interviews with doctoral college and graduate school directors, which identify how doctoral education changes in UK universities at the time of the interviews particularly influenced part-time doctoral students in comparison to full-time students. The findings suggest that since 2017 continuing changes relating to funding have played a key role in university restructuring, which have adversely influenced doctoral education, and particularly affected part-time doctoral students. Participants confirmed that the proportion of part-time PhD students had substantially decreased since 2017. They explained that before the financial crisis more PhD students were self-funded part-time, but at the time of the interviews self-funding had become more difficult due to austerity and lack of support from employers. In addition, participants described how doctoral training had a strong emphasis on employability, and supporting students in relation to their future careers, but that opportunities to access training opportunities were not equal for all students and may depend on whether they have studentship grants, which were less likely for part-time students. Staff participants said that they were aware that opportunities for part-time and full time students were not equal, that UK universities and doctoral education and training was geared towards full-time students, that most studentships and research council funding were for full-time students, that part-time students were less able to access and participate in peer communities and doctoral events and workshops, and that in some schools and faculties learning space was less accessible to part-time students.

In addition, staff participants observed that the doctoral education changes, including the requirement to meet doctoral milestones and deadlines throughout their journeys had put more pressure on part-time students. As reflected by the student narratives, part-time student issues that staff participants described included: disrupted progress, a sense of dislocation and isolation, difficulty in managing academic and life challenges at the same time, frustration of not progressing quickly, likelihood of suspension or withdrawal following bereavement or personal crisis. As described above, there were concerns around part-time students' mental health and wellbeing, as corroborated by the student interview findings. Staff participants were aware that more support was needed for part-time students, and they questioned the expected workload for such students. One positive change that participants reflected that was supportive of part-time PhD students' journeys

was the annual review process, which participants described as developmental and enhanced part-time PhD students' sense of belonging to a community.

In the following Discussion Chapter, with reference to Goodson and Rudd (2017), I will further explore how neoliberalism and related discourses of managerialism, financialisaton and competition have become pervasive in HE and affect doctoral education and part-time doctoral student journeys. This argument is reflected by findings of interviews with part-time PhD students and doctoral education directors. The Discussion Chapter will also conceptualise how part-time doctoral students acquire doctoral 'educational', 'social' and 'academic capital'; how their doctoral 'habitus' evolves throughout their journeys (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014) associated with their learning development, academic confidence and achievement. The discussion chapter will also discuss how part-time doctoral students' 'capital' and 'habitus' are influenced and disrupted by life-events. Ways in which part-time doctoral students develop agency by participating and engaging in 'communities of practice' in a wider 'landscape of practice' will also be considered, and how such participation contributes to their doctoral belonging, 'social learning', 'meaning' making, creativity, 'competence' and 'knowledgeability' (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Chapter Eight: Discussion

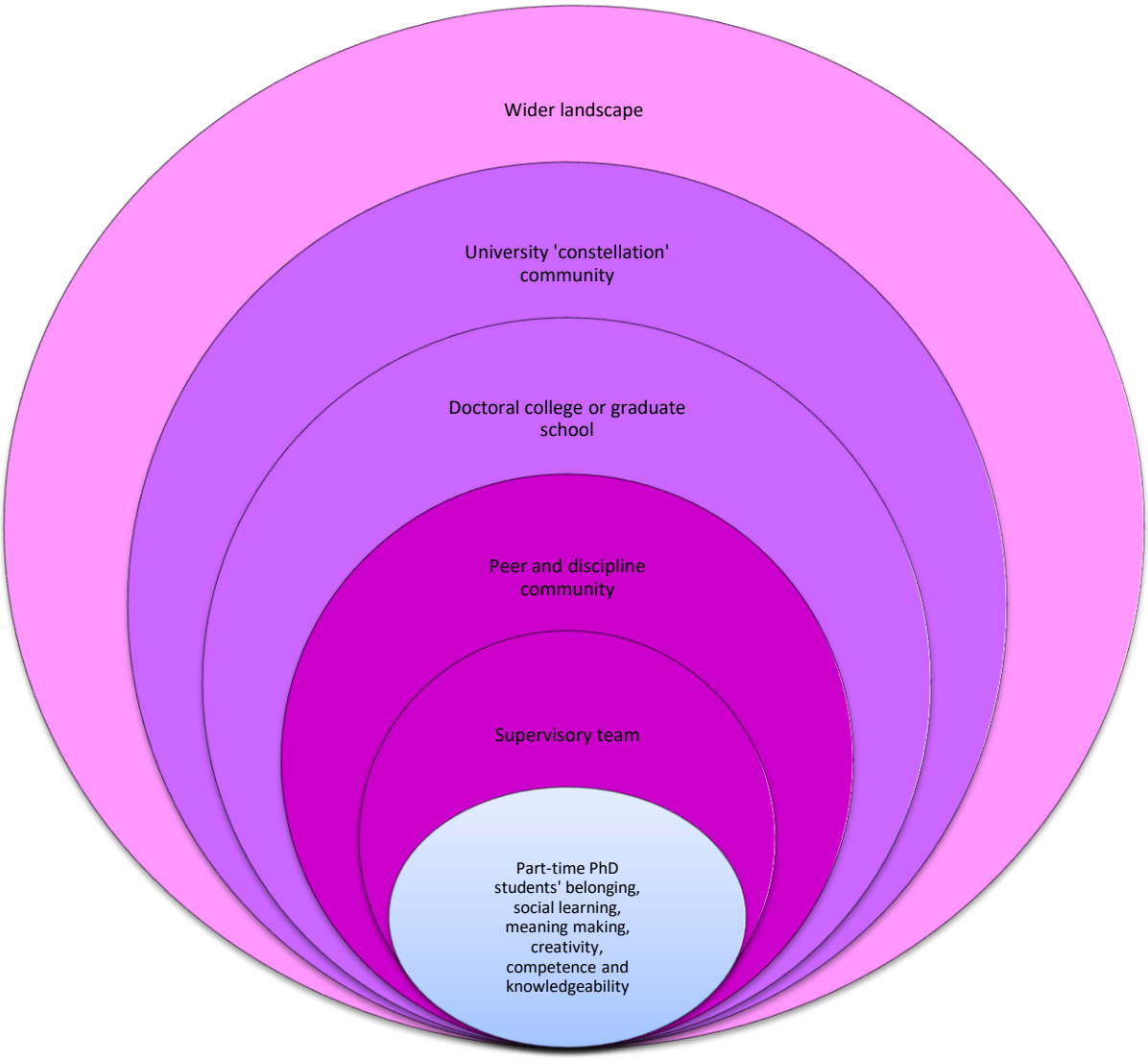
Part-time PhD students' journeys: peripherality, disruption, structure and agency

The peripheral nature of part-time PhD student journeys and how they engage in varied communities of practice within the wider landscape

This research suggests that during their journeys over a period of five to eight years, part-time PhD students experience opportunities to engage in varied 'communities of practice' within a wider 'landscape of practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). The data shows that engaging in varied communities can enrich participants' journeys and, as Wenger argues, provide opportunities for social learning and creativity (1998). I draw on Wenger's and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's frameworks of 'communities of practice', 'constellations of practice' and 'learning in a landscape of practice' (1998; 2015) as conceptual lenses to help illustrate the importance and scale of communities that part-time PhD students participate and engage in. These communities support the students': sense of belonging, collective 'resilience', 'meaning' making, 'competence' and 'knowledgeability' during their PhDs (Wenger, 2009; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015; Fenton Creevy et al., 2015 b). In this context, the student interviews show that some of the 'communities of practice' that participants engage in within the university 'constellation' and wider 'landscape' are more influential than others on part-time PhD students' journeys. The findings show how supervisory and peer relationships are at the core of the university 'constellation of practice' (Wenger, 1998). As shown by the findings, part-time PhD students also participate in varied working relationships with individuals and communities in the university 'constellation of practice', which include the university research community, university colleagues, university support staff and the doctoral college or graduate school. In addition, in the wider 'landscape of practice' part-time PhD students also engage in other academic and professional communities, such as, wider research communities in their field, research participants' communities, professional communities, political communities and charity groups. (Please see Fig. 1. below.

Fig.1. The different communities that part-time PhD students engage in during their journeys: the core, the university constellation and the wider landscape

(adapted from Jones, J. 2010; and informed by Wenger,1998; and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015) 'Original in Colour'



Colour key:

Core doctoral community

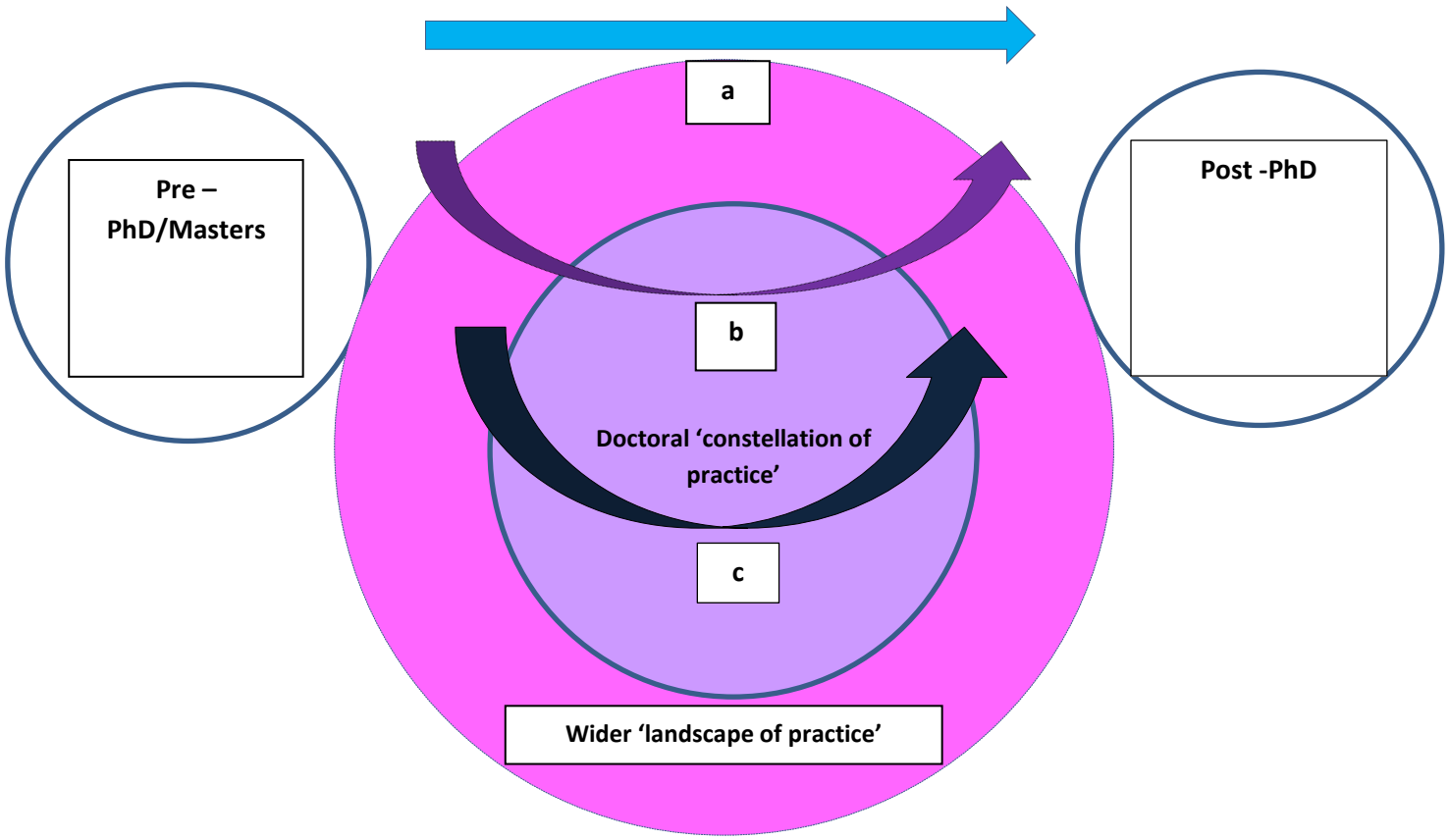
University 'constellation'

Wider 'landscape'

However, the interviews with students show that one of the disadvantages of being part-time is that part-time PhD students may often be, as Wenger (1998, p117) and Fenton O'Creevy et al. (2015, b. p.45) describe, 'peripheral' members of these different communities. Hence, they may have less opportunities to engage fully in the core 'communities of practice' within the university 'constellation' of practice (Wenger, 1998) in comparison to full-time students. This is reflected by student narrative interviews in this research; and Teeuwsen et al., (2014, p680) in their discussion of how part-time doctoral students are on the 'periphery of the academic community of practice' because they juggle multiple roles outside study and are less physically present at the university, in comparison to full-time students. The model below, that I have adapted from Fenton-O'Creevy et al. (2015, b. p46), illustrates the different suggested levels of participation of b. part-time PhD students and c. full-time students. Following Fenton-O'Creevy et al.'s argument, being 'peripheral' in this context may mean 'weaker participation', while being a full member may mean 'stronger participation' (2015, b. p46), which may have implications for progress in terms of the students' belonging and learning development. However, I draw on Wenger (1998) in arguing that, while part-time students are more 'peripheral' participants in their doctoral 'constellation' of practice comprising the supervisory and peer communities, as discussed above, they have longer journeys and greater opportunities over a longer period to participate in several communities in the wider 'landscape'. In this context, as Wenger (1998, p185) argues, 'non-participation' can provide opportunities for 'imagination', and creativity, which are important in rethinking the doctoral journey. For example, several participants discussed the process of taking time to think about their PhDs. As Kubiak et al. (2015, p78) also point out 'peripheral' members of a 'community of practice', such as part-time PhD students, can still "have a significant connection to it' through 'imagination with peripheral engagement".

Fig.2. Peripheral participation of part-time PhD students

(Adapted from and informed by O'Creevy et al., 2015, b. p46) 'Original in Colour'



Key

a. The PhD journey
b. The part-time PhD journey
c. The full-time PhD journey

As discussed above, and according to the student narratives, part-time PhD students may feel a lack of sense of belonging to their core community in comparison to full-time students due to their 'peripheral engagement', particularly during the early stages of their journeys. This early transition stage in PhD journeys where doctoral students do not yet feel a sense of belonging, particularly part-time doctoral students, is referred to by Lave and Wenger as 'legitimate peripheral participation' (1991). Wenger explains that this is 'the process by which newcomers become

included in a community of practice' (1998, p100). This process is not free from challenges and conflicts, particularly regarding engaging with other members of the 'academic community of practice' in the context of doctoral learning (Teuweesen et al., 2014, p680) and 'negotiating the joint enterprise' (Wenger, 1998, p780) that is the PhD. As the narrative interviews in this research show, the challenges of doctoral transition and belonging to the core doctoral community, are related to part-time students' balancing many different priorities and aspects of life outside study. As Watts (2008), Gardner and Gopaul (2012) and Teeuwsen el al. (2014) also discuss, these responsibilities can make it difficult for part-time PhD students to fully participate, and engage in all the events, workshops and access to groups that the university facilitates, and expects the students to attend. The student narratives show that sometimes this results in misunderstandings and conflicts between students and supervisors in terms of expectations, deadlines and pace of doctoral study. Also, some participants described how they felt frustrated that they sometimes could not engage in doctoral training workshops that they wanted to attend because of other life commitments, and/or time differences for distance learning and international students. The frustration of not being able to engage face-to-face and the challenge in not feeling a sense of belonging to a doctoral community was also exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown for some participants, which will be discussed at greater length below.

Unequal opportunities for part-time PhD students

In addition to Wenger's concepts of 'communities of practice', 'constellations of practice' (1998); and 'learning in a landscape of practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015), I draw on Bourdieu's constructs of 'educational capital', 'social capital', 'academic capital', 'habitus', and 'playing the game' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Bourdieu, 1988) to help illustrate part-time doctoral students' development of doctoral learning, academic confidence and achievement over time. I also discuss ways in which structural forces control, and life-events disrupt part-time PhD students' journeys, their acquisition of 'capital' and their evolving doctoral 'habitus' over time (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988, Gopaul, 2014; Goodson and Rudd, 2017). In this context, as Gopaul argues and the narrative interviews in this research show, part-time PhD students' opportunities are not equal to those of full-time students. In this context, Bourdieu argues how 'playing the game' to succeed within a field such as HE also means adhering to the 'rules of the game', and hence acting consciously and with agency within the controlling structures of HE

and doctoral education within their universities (Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Gopaul, 2014). This will be discussed at further length in the following sections.

The wider context: how structural forces and neoliberal discourses influence doctoral students' experiences

The third conceptual lens applied in this thesis is 'neoliberalism', which helps illustrate how discourses of managerialism and financialisation affect doctoral students' experiences (Goodson and Rudd, 2017). Such discourses are argued to contribute to inequality of experience and opportunity for part-time PhD students in comparison to full-time students, as has been seen from some of the student and staff interviews. In the context of this research, and as previous research has argued (Thomas, 2002; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), inequality may relate to varied factors, for instance, ethnicity, gender, age-group, disability status, and socio-economic background. Key findings that emerge from the interviews with staff and students in this research show that inequality is particularly evident in terms of the opportunities that part-time, in comparison to full-time, students experience. For instance, as the interviews with students and doctoral education directors show, and as Gopaul (2014) argues, good relationships with supervisors, colleagues or peers may not be equally accessible to or experienced by all doctoral students. In addition, evidence from interviews shows that part-time students may not be able to obtain a grant or studentship as easily as full-time students, have the same access to physical learning spaces, such as desks, as full-time students, and have the same access to training as full-time students. This relates to how their acquisition of doctoral 'educational capital', 'social capital' and associated 'habitus' may be unequal and evolve more slowly than it would for full-time students, placing them at a disadvantage (Gopaul, 2014).

In Table 2. below, Goodson and Rudd's Model of Refraction (2017, p191) has been adapted to summarise the contextualisation of part-time doctoral students' experiences in changing times. (The axis titles, historical periods, and 'macro', 'meso' and 'micro' levels were designed and written by Goodson and Rudd (2017), but I completed all the other sections in the table myself.) This model is completed here in relation to what can be ascertained from the literature reviewed regarding UK HE and doctoral education changes since the 1960s until now. It has also been completed according to findings from doctoral student and staff experiences. In this context, Douglas (1992) suggests that a more diverse PhD population is now associated with increased risk in the eyes of the global

HE sector, and that governments and universities create strategies and policies to mitigate against these risks. For instance, a key risk that has developed in the eyes of universities and governments over recent decades has been the danger of doctoral student non-completion (ESRC, 1996). This relates to ways in which some PhD student groups are perceived, monitored and controlled, including part-time PhD students. Key findings that have emerged from the interviews with doctoral education managers suggest that managerialism and neoliberalism are socio-political discourses associated with changes that are sometimes developmental, but often destabilising and turbulent in their influence on doctoral education. However, from the interviews with students, it is evident that part-time PhD students can remain undeterred by destabilising contextual factors, navigating their doctoral journeys from a position of 'agency' (Archer, 1982), and through their relationships with individuals, and participation in 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998).

Table 2: Doctoral Education Axes of refraction: Historical and vertical refraction (Adapted Version based on model by Goodson and Rudd, 2017, p190)

		Levels of Action and Refraction					
		Macro			**Meso**	**Micro**	
		UK HE systems, structures, ideology	**UK HE restructuring policies**	**UK Doctoral education changes**	**Doctoral education in universities**	**Doctoral education staff**	**Doctoral students**
Historical Periods	**1960-1979 Progressive narratives on welfare state expansion**	HE system to provide equal opportunities for all young people	Robbins Report (1963): the growth of mass higher education	Robbins Committee (1961/62) greater focus on postgraduate student experience Increase in PG students in UK following Robbins Report	Small proportion of doctoral students. Most doctoral students are men.	Traditional master/apprentice model of doctoral study involving supervisors and students	In 1970s most research students aim for university careers in teaching or research Doctoral study focus on preparation of scholars in a discipline and production of new knowledge in a discipline.
	1979-1997 **Marketisation narrative**	Funding crisis: increased managerialism and private sector practices	Thatcher Government:1981 White Paper The Jarrett report (1985): move towards strategic planning and cost effectiveness 1985 Research Assessment Exercise: More selective research funding	In 1980s majority of Postgraduate students are men (ABRC survey 1982). Research degree completion rates found to be an issue (Rudd, 1985; ESRC 1996). Supervision quality found to be an issue.	Compulsory doctoral training for students receiving research council grants introduced Professional doctorates introduced – EngD and EdD.	Still traditional master/apprentice model of doctoral study involving supervisors and students.	Doctoral study still elite comprising small numbers of doctoral students most of whom are men.
	1997-2007 Narrative of the middle way: targets, tests and tables	Widening participation and the increased financialisation of HE	1997: the Dearing Report recommended rise in student fees	Number of doctoral students doubled between 1995 and 2005 in UK. Growth in diversity of doctoral students. Review committee on Higher Education and Policy (1998) question relevance of PhD to requirements of UK employers and student careers.	New kinds of doctoral programmes, knowledge, partnerships and practices. Increase in professional doctorates. Growth in infrastructure supporting doctoral learning.	Supervisory teams starting. Greater pressure on supervisors due to Increasing workloads and greater number of students to supervise.	Focus on doctoral pedagogy and training. Though new measures are broadly beneficial, unequal experiences and benefits for different groups of students and individuals including full-time/part-time students.

				QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (2001)- greater focus on employability. QAA Code of Practice for doctoral education and UK GRAD programme set up (2004). Postgraduate research experience survey (2006).	Introduction of graduate schools and doctoral colleges. Introduction of doctoral training programmes for all PhD students. Development of academic research cultures adopting 'communities of practice' approach. Focus on doctoral pedagogy and training. Doctoral education as practice and product.		
	2007-present The reconstituted neoliberal period and discourse of austerity	Students as consumers; students at the heart of the system; financialisation of teaching and research; employability agenda	Browne Review (2010): Rise is student fees and new student loans system Teaching Excellence Framework proposed in Green Paper (2015) HE Teaching and Research Act (2017) Research UK replaces research councils (2017_ Introduction of TEF (2017) REF changes (2017) Office for Students replaces HEFCE (2017)	QAA Review of Research Degree Programmes (2007) Increased accountability, focus on time to completion, distribution of candidates across key fields, training for employability Increased risk assessment culture: risky (soft) doctorates, risky students (e.g. part-time), risk associated with diversity of students and doctoral subjects.	New doctoral education regulations – annual progression reviews for students (2017). Cost-cutting measures (2017). University and doctoral college/graduate school re-organisation. Staff redundancies/voluntary severance scheme	Part-time students considered less of a priority, due to emphasis on full time students. Supervisors focus on timely completion. Annual reviews are supportive/developmental. Supervisors unclear about their roles in providing pastoral and emotional support for students. Supervisors leave due to restructuring and voluntary severance.	Inequality of opportunities for full time and part time students Pressure on part-time students regarding workload and deadlines Difficulty in juggling academic work and personal crises and life events Part-time student mental health issues Greater participation and multimembership in academic and peer communities Acting with greater agency

Table 2: Doctoral Education Axes of refraction: Historical and vertical refraction

(Adapted Version based on model by Goodson and Rudd, 2017, p190)

The challenging personal and solitary aspects of the part-time PhD journey

Part-time PhD journeys are individual in that, as the narrative interview findings show, there are many solitary aspects of such students' journeys. The 'individual' and 'collective' nature of learning, and engagement in 'communities of practice' are also discussed by Wenger (1998) and Trowler (2001). As outlined in the literature review, and demonstrated by the findings of this research, the part-time PhD is at times a very challenging personal journey, which requires considerable personal determination to continue when times are difficult, and particularly in the early transitions of the journey.

Doctoral transitions, structural discourses, life events and disrupted journeys

I draw on Bourdieu in this context to conceptualise how doctoral students have often already acquired strong 'educational capital' by the time they finish their master's degrees when they start their PhDs, and hence are often starting from a position of confidence in their academic abilities and educational 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). However, the student narrative interviews show how the transition to starting doctoral study, and following transitions related to different academic stages of the journey can be challenging for PhD students, disrupting their sense of 'habitus' (Anderson, 2001, p141); and hence they may feel like a "fish out of water", which is demotivating (Thomas, 2002, p431). Kiley and Wisker have referred to these doctoral transition stages as 'conceptual thresholds', during which students may feel academically uncertain or stuck (2009, p433).

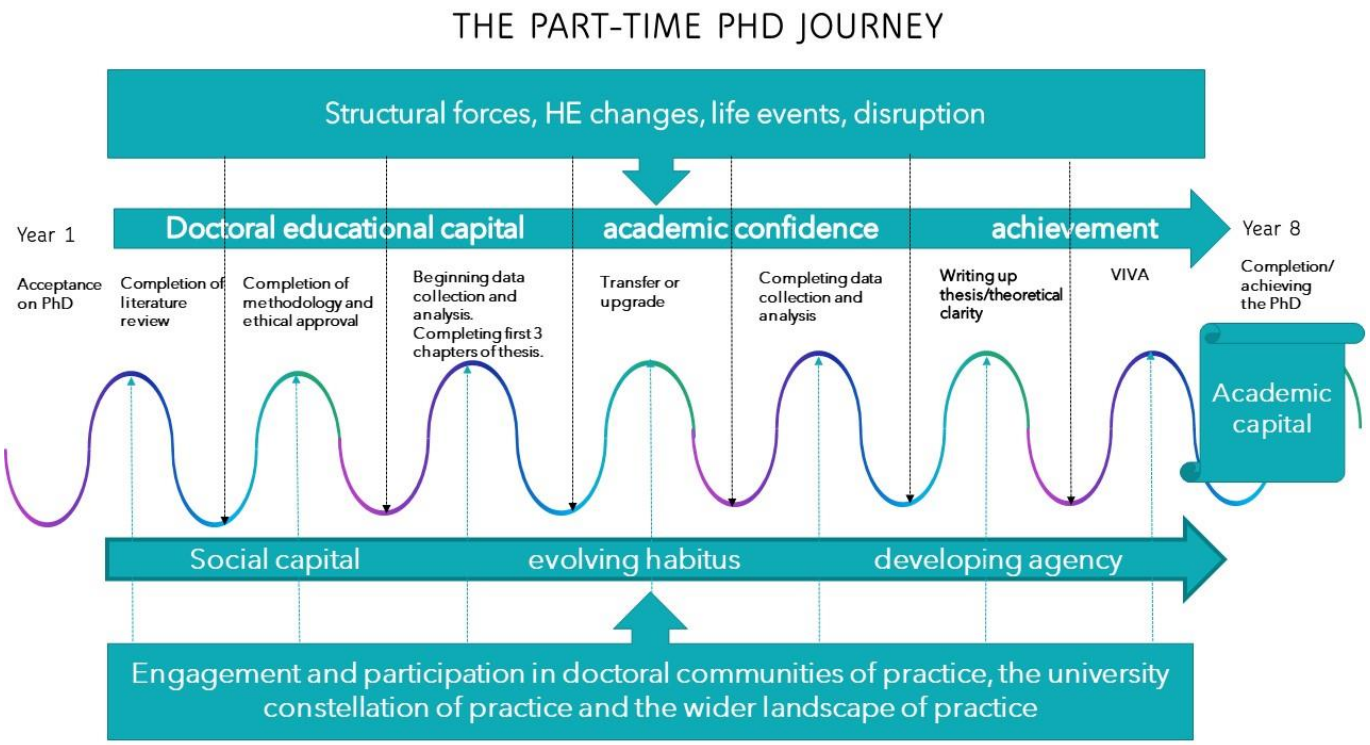
> "It is argued that motivation in particular can wane substantially when students are 'stuck' in the liminal state prior to the transformation that occurs after having crossed a conceptual threshold. While it is acknowledged that being in the liminal state and even being stuck at least at one point in the research journey are probably necessary stages, since research is 'messy' and challenging and not all its elements and results are predetermined, we would argue that it is damaging for research students to remain

stuck to the extent that they lose confidence and seriously question their identity as researchers."

For part-time PhD students, difficulties in academic doctoral transition at the different stages discussed above, may also relate to additional influences and factors including structural HE discourses, as discussed above. These contribute to limiting part-time PhD students' opportunities in comparison to full-time students as outlined above (Gopaul, 2014); and may be accompanied by the disruptive influence of life events and life priorities outside the academic PhD journey that are evident from the student narratives.

Fig.4 The part-time PhD journey

(Informed by Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu 1988; Wenger; 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015) 'Original in Colour'



The disruptive nature of life-events

As the interview data shows, part-time PhD students may take up to eight years to finish their PhDs, and hence gain recognition and, according to Bourdieu, the 'academic capital' associated with the completed thesis, the qualification of PhD, and associated academic papers that provide recognition and status (Bourdieu, 1988). The student narratives show that this can be frustrating and demotivating for the students involved. According to Watts (2008), part-time student journeys over five years or more requires resilience for students and supervisors (p369). Arguably, because part-time PhD journeys are long, there are many opportunities for them to be disrupted by life-events, which is shown by all the narrative case studies in Chapter Four, the interviews with doctoral staff and my own self-reflective chapter. Life events include, as shown in the interviews, global events, such as Covid-19, physical and mental illness, bereavement, childbirth, marriage, separation, moving house, changing jobs and retirement. As the data shows, these life events can disrupt and slow down part-time doctoral students' journeys including their learning development, academic confidence, motivation and achievement.

The Covid pandemic and its influences on part-time PhD students

The Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences on (part-time) PhD student experiences were shown to be substantial by the participants in this research who were interviewed in 2021. Three participants' narratives and my own self-reflective narrative identified how our part-time PhD journeys were disrupted in terms of progress, and that we experienced isolation during the lockdown due to working from home, and lack of physical access to a doctoral peer community. This often meant a "disrupted habitus" as described by Anderson (2001, p141) with reference to Bourdieu (1988). It also meant demotivation and mental health challenges. Sometimes overwhelming life events and global events such as the Covid pandemic combined in influencing our journeys, exacerbating challenges that we were already facing. For instance, one participant and I, were both diagnosed with cancer in 2019 and were undergoing life changing cancer treatment in 2020. The difficulties that doctoral students faced in their PhDs during the pandemic are also reflected by Donohue et al. (2021) who found that doctoral students' progress, research design, access to resources and learning space, and contact with

peer community, mental health and motivation were adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mental health challenges of part-time PhD students

Associated with overwhelming pressure of juggling life and PhD study, many part-time PhD student participants in this research experienced some degree of mental health difficulties during their journeys. As described above, and as reflected by Donohue et al. (2021) doctoral students' mental health difficulties were exacerbated by the lockdown because of Covid-19. In these circumstances, student participants often described how they needed emotional support and understanding from their supervisors, but mentioned that this was not always provided, which was demotivating for the students involved. In the narrative interviews, participants described how the difficulty in accessing supervisors was also related to Covid, which is also reflected by Donohue at al.'s findings, as discussed above (2021).

From a supervisor's perspective, it may be challenging to adapt to the particular and individual needs of research students, including emotional support for part-time PhD students (Li and Seale, 2007; Watts, 2008). A few participants mentioned the need for more mental health support for PhD students from supervisors. This is also reflected by a study by Teeuwsen et al., (2014), which found that a supervisor's role should incorporate support for part-time students who are experiencing isolation, but that this may be challenging. As Watts (2008) suggests, supervisors' "empathy" in supporting part-time students who are going through difficult times is a crucial aspect of a good supervisory relationship (p372), but this aspect of a supervisor's role may be "contested".

I conclude that part-time PhD journeys of acquiring doctoral 'educational capital' and finally 'academic capital' (Bourdieu, 1988) when the thesis is finished are often challenging. For part-time PhD students who are studying over a period of five to eight years, the combined difficulties of life events, structural inequalities and academic challenges can adversely affect students' mental wellbeing, and in some cases, contribute to mental health difficulties, which may adversely affect their motivation and progress on their PhD journeys, sometimes leading them to give up. In this context, the encouragement and support provided by supervisors, peer communities and other communities that were part of each participant's 'landscape of practice' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015) were crucial in helping them to continue with

their PhDs. In this context, the interviews showed that as PhD students' journeys progressed, participants often acted with greater independence and 'agency', making positive conscious choices about their lives and academic work in their PhDs (Archer, 1982). By 'playing the game' in the context of the HE 'field', (Bourdieu, 1977, p6), and engaging in varied 'communities of practice' within university 'constellation' and in the 'wider landscape', part-time PhD participants were often able to acquire 'social capital', overcome struggles, and regain their academic confidence, contributing to their evolving doctoral 'habitus', doctoral 'educational capital' and achievement (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The importance of engaging in core communities of practice

In this context, this PhD data shows that good relationships with supervisors, colleagues and peers – in the core 'communities of practice' - play a crucial role in enabling part-time doctoral students to successfully overcome challenges and complete the different stages of the PhD, as Gopaul also argues (2014). Participating and engaging in these core communities helps part-time PhD students to develop belonging, 'social learning', 'meaning' making, creativity, and acquire doctoral 'competence' and finally the 'knowledgeability' associated with successfully completing the PhD (Wenger, 1998). The interview data shows that life events and the different transitions within the doctoral journey need to be carefully negotiated by students, both individually, and by participating in and being supported by the core 'communities of practice'. As argued above, supervisors are at the core of the university 'constellation of practice' (Wenger, 1998) and most student participants said that good working relationships with supervisors and their ongoing support was a crucial influence on their journey. This is also reflected by earlier research (Hall, 1996; Kiley, 2000; Wisker, 2000).

The importance of engaging in varied communities across the 'constellation' and 'landscape'

The data shows, however, that when PhD students do not feel that they can rely on the support of supervisors at some points during their PhDs, they then find compensation and support by engaging in other communities, particularly peer communities. For instance, most participants described how actively participating in peer communities through their own agency not only

supported their belonging, engagement and doctoral learning development, it also provided them with important emotional support, and a sense of experiencing difficulties together and being in the same boat. This is reflected by Fenton O'Creevy et al. (2015, b. p52) in their discussion of ways in which participating in communities can help build collective 'resilience'. This was described by several participants as helping them to feel better during difficult times in their PhD journeys. Some participants also discussed other relationships and communities in the wider 'landscape' outside university as crucial in encouraging them and keeping them going. This suggests that, fortunately, access to varied communities that students can engage in and that can support them including those in the wider 'landscape' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015) is possible when needed during student journeys. For example, in the student interviews participants described how peers at external conferences, research participants, and support groups outside the university were important in enhancing their confidence, engagement, and belonging, which kept them going. By participating in these communities in the wider 'landscape', the findings of the interviews with students show how they were acting consciously, with agency, rather than through 'predispositions' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p25). They made conscious choices to participate, and develop doctoral learning, through engaging in varied 'communities of practice', in the 'landscape of practice' and through doing so developed greater 'competence' contributing to their achievement and finally, doctoral 'knowledgeability' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

> "We will use the term knowledgeability to refer to the complex relationships people establish with respect to a landscape of practice, which make them recognizable as reliable sources of information or legitimate providers of services…negotiated within the politics of knowledge in a landscape of practice." (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p23).

Conclusion

Part-time PhD students' acquisition of doctoral educational capital, evolving habitus and developing agency

This research has explored the unique aspects of part-time PhD students' individual experiences and key turning points linked to change that they experienced throughout their doctoral journeys. Turning points in participants' narratives were identified through 'experiential' narrative analysis informed by Patterson (2013) and Squire (2013) who adapted Labov's analysis framework (1972). Narrative analysis focused on students' reflections on their experiences of places, people, events and phases in their journeys. This highlighted how participants' development of doctoral learning, belonging, engagement, academic confidence and achievement were influenced by relationships and life events and changed over time. Although this research has explored the experiences of part-time PhD students, it is important to highlight that the following conclusions and recommendations relate to and may benefit all postgraduate students within the overarching context of inclusive practice.

I have frequently drawn on Bourdieu's concepts of 'educational capital', 'social capital', 'academic capital' and 'habitus' in conceptualising stages in participants' part-time PhD journeys (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988). Analysis of the narrative case studies presented in Chapter Four identified how the six participants developed doctoral 'educational' and 'social capital' during their journeys over time linked to the transitions and turning points described (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988; Gopaul, 2014). At the time of the interviews, a few participants were on the verge of, and have now, acquired 'academic capital' related to the completed thesis and associated academic papers at the end of their journeys (Bourdieu,1988). The participants also developed belonging related to doctoral 'habitus', which evolved as participants' academic confidence, doctoral learning and achievement developed (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Gopaul 2014). I have also referred to Bourdieu's concept of 'playing the game' and following the 'rules of the game' within the context of the 'HE field '(Bourdieu, 1977, p6). Relating to making conscious choices, and hence 'playing the game' (Bourdieu, 1977, p6), the findings identify how the six participants developed 'agency' (Archer, 1982), and how this was an important aspect of becoming doctoral. In turn, agency can help part-time doctoral students navigate the academic transitions, life events and personal challenges in their journeys. This process of developing 'agency' was accompanied by

participants' developing voice, determination to be successful and independence as doctoral students.

Influences of life events on part-time PhD students' journeys and mental health

However, the research showed that all participants experienced challenging life events and controlling structural forces and processes, which often disrupted their journeys, adversely influenced their academic progress and affected their mental health. As outlined in the discussion and in Chapters Four and Seven part-time doctoral students are more likely than full-time students to experience devastating life events since their journeys are longer. In this context, for four participants (including myself) the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns contributed to this disruption. Most participants in this research described mental health difficulties during their journeys that ranged from short time anxiety to longer term depression, and consequently some participants questioned whether they could carry on with their PhDs. The data shows that for most participants, individual or a team of supervisors were most influential in supporting them to continue with their PhDs when undergoing combined academic and emotional challenges resulting from the factors described above. The emotional support provided by supervisors was shown to be significant for part-time PhD students, alongside doctoral academic support. In this context, the research shows that it was particularly important for supervisors to be understanding and listen, to encourage their students, and let them know that they were cared for. Some participants did not feel that they received sufficient emotional support from some, or all, of their supervisors when they were experiencing mental health difficulties or overwhelming life events, which was demotivating for students. A few participants discussed the need for more specific mental health support for PhD students at a supervisory level. In this context, doctoral education directors described how supervisors' roles in supporting students with mental health issues and pastoral support needs to be clarified; and that doctoral colleges and graduate schools need to enhance mental health support for PhD students. Taking these key findings into account, I propose the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

1. Supervisors could consider how to enhance emotional support for students when appropriate by listening to students' personal problems, providing pastoral support and encouraging students. Supervisors should be more aware that part-time PhD students may be experiencing mental health difficulties and be clear on what steps to take if students talk about mental health issues, directing them to relevant services, or providing counselling themselves. One supervisor in the supervisory team may take on a pastoral role in this context.

2. Doctoral colleges and graduate schools could consider how to work with and support supervisors to provide enhanced mental health provision for PhD students, and particularly part-time PhD students. In addition, doctoral colleges and graduate schools might consider providing a counselling or mental health support service specifically aimed at PhD students.

3. Students could consider how to prioritise their wellbeing to help avoid or overcome mental health difficulties and seek out appropriate mental health support. They could also consider taking time off to deal with life events that are overwhelming; focusing on short-term goals in their PhDs to stay on top of their studies; talking to peers, supervisors and doctoral colleges and graduate schools about mental health difficulties and asking for support.

Influences of academic relationships and communities on part-time PhD students' doctoral journeys

Chapter Six presented findings from all 15 narrative interviews, based on a thematic analysis focusing on ways in which academic and peer relationships and communities influence part-time PhD students' journeys. The focus on academic and peer relationships and communities as opposed to other relationships is informed by the narrative analysis presented in Chapter Four. From this narrative analysis, as described above, engaging in core supervisory and peer relationships and communities (within the university 'constellation' and wider 'landscape of practice' (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015) were found to be most influential on students' experiences although other academic relationships and communities

also emerged as influential in this context, including: the wider research community, research participants, academic colleagues and writers and theorists.

Importantly, most participants found that at least one and sometimes all supervisors were sensitive to the needs of part-time PhD students to juggle study with other aspects of life, supporting students who were under pressure to slow down or take time off study if necessary. Most participants described at least one supervisor as emotionally supportive, providing empathy and encouragement. This was important in students remaining motivated and keeping going under challenging circumstances. However, supervisors did not always provide this support and understanding. For instance, one participant did not feel they had a good working relationship with any supervisors in their team, that their supervisors were overly critical and insufficiently encouraging, providing scarce emotional support. Perceived lack of support from supervisors, particularly during the pandemic, was demotivating for a few participants. The research shows that it is important that part-time doctoral students receive emotional support and encouragement alongside constructive critical feedback from supervisors throughout their journeys, and particularly for part-time PhD students who may be struggling due to life events and external factors alongside their PhD study. This research shows that issues in supervision may be difficult for part-time PhD students to cope with, leading them to feel overwhelmed, and they may then consider quitting or taking a break from study. Hence, I propose the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Supervisors could consider, as Brew and Peseta suggest, adopting a 'student focused' approach to supervision that takes account of students' diverse and individual needs, and which comprises 'a view of supervision as negotiation' where supervision becomes a co-constructed relationship and process that enables the student voice to be heard (2009, p135). In this context, supervisors might consider their awareness of part-time students' individual difficulties and needs and adopt the following practices: being gentle in supporting students to move forward in their doctoral journeys; setting short term goals and deadlines when appropriate; knowing when to push students and ease off, allowing students more time if necessary; encouraging students; and providing mental health support when appropriate as described above.

2. Students could consider being more assertive, ensuring that their voice is heard in supervision, and in the doctoral communities in their disciplines, universities, and externally.

Students could also discuss difficulties they are facing with supervisors and doctoral colleges and graduate schools and ask for appropriate support in terms of time off, mental health support, training, funding, access to peer communities, and access to appropriate learning space.

3. Doctoral colleges and graduate schools could consider adopting policies and practices that better support supervisors and students within the context of a 'student focused' approach to supervision.

Belonging to peer and academic communities in a 'landscape of practice'

Participating and engaging in peer 'communities of practice' was also an influential aspect of part-time PhD students' journeys, in terms of developing belonging, social learning, collective 'resilience', creativity, doctoral 'competence' and 'knowledgeability' (Wenger, 1998). However, without the beneficial influence of working with peers in a shared space, some students felt isolated. Some participants struggled to physically belong to a peer community in this context, because of competing life priorities. This was particularly the case for international and distance learning participants. In addition, it was difficult for participants to feel a sense of belonging as a part-time doctoral student, as in some university contexts, some participants described that they were not entitled to a desk in a shared learning space with peers, (in contrast to full-time students who were entitled to a desk). Hence, these part-time students felt isolated and that their journey was solitary. The pandemic and lockdown exacerbated physical isolation from a peer community for all participants who experienced this. However, participants mentioned how connecting with peers online during the pandemic was an important source of support; and that attending regular online workshops organised by the doctoral college or graduate school were important in enabling this contact and support and helping them to develop collective 'resilience' in this context (Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2015 b). A few participants said that more of these workshops should be provided to enable international and distance learning or part-time students with other life priorities to attend more easily.

The doctoral education directors also confirmed in interviews that doctoral students' relationships with peers and learning communities are an important aspect of doctoral students' learning journeys alongside supervision. They argued that peer relationships may become

increasingly important for PhD students in the future, helping to encourage doctoral student agency, collective 'resilience' in the context of peer 'communities of practice' and independence in learning and achievement (Wenger, 1998; Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2015 b). The staff participants also emphasised that doctoral student participation in peer communities may become increasingly important in times of uncertainty and disruptive change, which has become the case during the Covid pandemic and lockdown. This corroborates the findings of the student narratives, which are conceptually underpinned by Wenger's 'Social Theory of Learning' (1998); and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice (2015), which are discussed in the previous chapter.

As previously discussed in this thesis, participating in academic and research communities both within and outside the university were also important for participants. I argued that part-time PhD students' experiences of learning and participating in peer and other academic communities may be conceptualised according to Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) as their participation in a 'constellation of practice' within a wider 'landscape of practice' which includes varied 'communities'. Participants discussed relationships and communities in the wider 'landscape' as crucial in encouraging them and keeping them going. By participating in these communities in the wider 'landscape', the findings show that students were acting consciously, with 'agency', rather than through 'pre-dispsosition' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). As Wenger conceptualises, as part-time students, participants were often 'peripheral' members of these different communities, but multi-membership of varied communities over a long time provided opportunities for rich learning, 'meaning' making, creativity and even rethinking the PhD that full-time PhD students may not have experienced (Wenger, 1998). This contributed to their 'competence', and finally, doctoral 'knowledgeability' (Wenger, 1998). I therefore propose the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Supervisors could consider encouraging students to actively engage in academic and research communities, online and face-to-face, within and outside the university, which will help them in the ways described above.

2. Doctoral colleges and graduate schools could consider adopting policies and practices that provide more support, learning spaces, and opportunities for PhD students to participate online and face-to-face in academic and research communities both within and outside the university.

Opportunities could enable access to more online doctoral workshops at times to suit part-time, distance learning and international students. In this way students would have a more balanced experience of doctoral support through supervision, peer groups and other academic and research communities.

3. Students could consider acting with agency and taking opportunities to engage in varied peer, academic and research communities, online and face-to-face, within the university and in the wider 'landscape of practice'.

Influences of doctoral education changes and contextual ideologies on part-time PhD students' experiences

This study has also explored the context of changing times in which part-time doctoral students experienced their doctoral journeys. With reference to Goodson and Rudd (2017), I discussed how neoliberalism and related discourses of managerialism, financialisaton and competition have become pervasive in HE and affect doctoral education and doctoral student journeys. This argument is reflected by interviews with students and doctoral education directors, which identify how doctoral students are influenced by these discourses affecting doctoral education and universities. In this context, the findings of interviews with doctoral college and graduate school directors identify how doctoral education changes in UK universities have particularly influenced part-time doctoral students. The findings suggest that since 2017 continuing changes relating to funding have played a key role in university restructuring, which have adversely influenced doctoral education, and particularly part-time students. In addition, participants described how doctoral training has an emphasis on employability, and supporting students in relation to their future careers, but that opportunities to access training opportunities are not equal for all students and may depend on whether they have studentship grants, which are less likely for part-time students. Staff participants said that they were aware that opportunities for part-time and full-time students were not equal, that UK universities and doctoral education and training is geared towards full-time students, that most studentships and research council funding are for full-time students, that part-time students were less able to access and participate in peer communities and doctoral events and workshops, and that in some schools and faculties learning space may be less accessible to part-time students.

In addition, staff participants observed that the doctoral education changes, including the requirement to meet doctoral milestones and deadlines throughout their journeys has put more pressure on part-time students. As reflected by the student narratives, part-time student issues that staff participants described included: disrupted progress, a sense of dislocation and isolation, difficulty in managing academic and life challenges at the same time, frustration of not progressing quickly, likelihood of suspension or withdrawal following bereavement or personal crisis. As described above, there are concerns around part-time students' mental health and wellbeing, as corroborated by the student interview findings. Staff participants were aware that more support is needed for part-time students, and they questioned the expected workload for such students. In this context, they suggested that disciplinary differences should be considered relating to ways in which part-time students should be better supported.

Reflecting on some of the participants' suggestions, and key debates relating to the changing landscape of doctoral education, it is important to point out that the discourses of timely completion and student performativity are currently still key drivers for what may be considered 'good' supervisory practice (McWilliam, 2009). In this context, as McWilliam argues the relationship that supervisors have with PhD students may tend towards a relationship with "student information" rather than with a student as human being, where emotional and humane aspects of a supervisory relationship are considered less important (2009, p191). It is important to critique these structural discourses of 'timely completion' and 'student performativity' in terms of how they affect supervisory relationships and practice, and to consider from a student's perspective what might constitute a supportive good working relationship with their supervisor, for instance, 'a student-focused' approach to supervision as described above (Brew and Peseta, 2009, p135). In conclusion, I propose the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Doctoral colleges and graduate could consider developing policies and practices that provide more equal opportunities for part-time PhD students relating to: funding, training, workshops (face-to-face and online), and learning space (e.g., desks in an appropriate discipline based shared space). They could support supervisors to adopt a 'student focused' approach to supervision (Brew and Peseta, 2009, p135), provide enhanced mental health support for students; and provide opportunities to engage in peer, academic and research communities within and outside the university as described above.

2. As described above, supervisors could adopt a 'student focused' approach to supervision (Brew and Peseta, 2009, p135). In this context, supervisors could consider their awareness of part-time students' individual difficulties and needs and adopt appropriate practices as described above.

3. As described above, students could be more assertive, ensuring that their voice is heard in supervision and in the wider doctoral education community in their disciplines and universities, that they discuss difficulties they are facing with supervisors and doctoral colleges and graduate schools, and ask for appropriate support. As described above, part-time PhD students can benefit by acting with agency and participating in varied 'communities of practice' within the wider 'landscape'.

Original contribution to knowledge

The ways in which this study provides an original contribution to knowledge are as follows. Firstly, this research responded to a need implied in the literature for further qualitative research in relation to part-time doctoral student experiences in UK HE. For instance, it was suggested that further qualitative research was needed to gain a more in depth understanding of issues that emerged from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES, 2013; PRES, 2021) report, such as: reasons behind some part-time students' apparent dissatisfaction with the research environment including their opportunities to interact with peers. There were gaps in knowledge in relation to the role of relationships more broadly, which may include professional, academic and personal relationships, in conjunction with life events in influencing part-time PhD students' journeys in UK universities. Secondly, exploring part-time doctoral students'

experiences in UK universities in changing times is an important contextual aspect of this study that contributes to its originality. For example, three participants' and my own experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic provide an additional contribution to knowledge in this context. Thirdly, ways in which this research explores the experiences of part-time PhD students concerning relationships and life events, adopting a narrative inquiry methodological approach combining a Deweyian Pragmatist (1938) ontological, and Social Constructionist (Burr, 2006) epistemological position is an original contribution to knowledge (Please see Methodology Chapter). Finally, this PhD study's combination of Bourdieu's constructs of 'educational capital', 'social capital', 'academic capital' and 'habitus'; and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's framework of 'Learning in a Landscape of Practice' (2015) as conceptual lenses to explore part-time PhD students' doctoral learning journeys provides an original theoretical perspective on research into doctoral students' experiences. In this context, original research findings from this study are supported by these theoretical perspectives in conceptualising how:

1. Part-time PhD students experience opportunities over time to participate in varied 'communities of practice' within the wider 'landscape'. As discussed in the literature review and shown by the findings, the part-time students' experiences of their PhD may be conceptualised according to Wenger (1998) and Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) as their participation in a 'constellation of practice' within a wider 'landscape of practice' which includes varied 'communities of practice'.
2. While part-time students may be more 'peripheral' participants in supervisory and peer 'communities', they have longer journeys and greater opportunities over a longer period to participate in varied communities in the wider 'landscape', where 'non-participation' can provide opportunities for 'imagination' and creativity, which are important in rethinking the doctoral journey (Wenger, 1998, p185).
3. Structural forces and fields may influence part-time PhD students' journeys, their acquisition of doctoral 'educational', 'social' and 'academic capital' and their evolving doctoral 'habitus' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1988, Gopaul, 2014). In this context, there are inequalities that part-time PhD students experience in comparison to full-time students, in that their acquisition of doctoral capital and sense of doctoral 'habitus' may be unequal and evolve more slowly than it would for full-time students, putting them at a disadvantage.
4. While PhD students may start their doctoral journeys from a position of confidence, and 'educational capital', according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), their journeys of acquiring doctoral 'educational capital' and finally 'academic capital' when the thesis

is finished are not straightforward. For part-time PhD students, the combined difficulties of life events, structural inequalities and academic challenges can adversely affect part-time PhD students' mental wellbeing, and in some cases contribute to mental illness, which may adversely affect their motivation and progress on their PhD journeys.

5. The Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences on (part-time) PhD student experiences were also shown to be substantial by the participants in this research who were interviewed in 2021. Students' experiences in this context often comprised a "disrupted habitus" (Anderson, 2001, p141), demotivation, and mental health challenges. In this context, the encouragement and support provided by supervisors, peer communities and other communities that were part of each participant's 'landscape of practice' were crucial in helping them to continue with their PhDs.
6. The interviews also showed that as PhD students' journeys progressed they became more confident and acted with greater independence and 'agency' in making positive conscious choices about their lives and academic work, 'playing the game' in the context of the HE field, and engaging in varied 'communities of practice' within the university and in the wider 'landscape' (Bourdieu, 1977, p6; Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015.) By participating and engaging in these communities in the wider landscape, the findings of the interviews with students show how they developed belonging, 'social learning', creativity, collective 'resilience' and 'competence' contributing to their achievement and finally, doctoral 'knowledgeability' (Wenger, 1998, Fenton-O'Creevy et al., 2015 b).

Ideas for future research

Future narrative research might focus on exploring the continuing journeys of the participants in this study, for instance, relating to their future lives and careers after completing their PhDs. Additional research might also explore the experiences of retired PhD student journeys in relation to lifelong learning. Studies might also investigate the influences of Covid-19 and its aftermath on PhD students' experiences, particularly in relation to mental health. Moreover, a wider scale quantitative study investigating the experiences of part-time doctoral students might be informed by and build on this PhD research in the UK and/or in international contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Guidelines for PhD student narrative interviews

Based on: 'The Life Story Interview' (McAdams, 1995)
https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/Interviewrevised95.pdf

Prior to the interview I will go over the aims and objectives of the research, hand out a consent form and information sheet and ensure the participant is comfortable and has water.

Introductory comments (2 minutes)

In the first 45-minute part of the interview I would like you to provide an overall outline of your doctoral journey. This will be followed by a 15-minute break. The second 45-minute interview will focus on you describing particular episodes in your journey in detail. Do you have any questions before we start?

Timeline (10 - 15 minutes)

To start with, please can you spend up to 15 minutes noting down life events and phases of your PhD journey on a timeline. On this timeline please could you think about your journey as a series of chapters? What are the overall contents in each chapter?

Interview Phase I. Outline of doctoral journey (25 – 30 minutes)

- Please can you tell me about yourself and why you are doing your PhD?
- Please can you tell me about the chapters in your doctoral journey?
- You don't need to tell me "the whole story" now…just give me a sense of the story's outline.

Interviewer's notes

The interviewee will be provided with a template timeline and pens to draft their chapters.

[I will take notes. I may wish to ask for clarifications and elaborations at any point in this section, but not interrupt too much. This is the most open-ended interview.]

Following the interview there will be a break of 15 minutes in which I will look at my notes in preparation for the second part of the interview. I will also buy the participant a drink of their choice.

Interview Phase 2. Critical Events (Up to 45 minutes)

Introduction (2 minutes)

Focusing on relationships and life events and your doctoral journey, I am going to ask you to tell me about a few significant episodes that may stand out that are set in a particular time and place. For each episode, I will ask you to describe what happened, where you were, who was involved, what you did, and what you were thinking and feeling? And what impact these episodes have had on you and your doctoral journey? Questions?

Significant episodes (30 - 40 minutes)

Event 1: Beginning of doctoral journey

Think back to *the very beginning of your doctoral journey please can you* describe *your memory of an event* in some detail. It may be a positive or challenging.

Event 2 Early stages

Please can you describe another memory *during the early stages or first year of your doctoral journey* that stands out?

Event 3: Second year

Please can you describe a specific event during *the next stage/second year* that stands out as being significant?

Event 4: Recent experience

Please can you describe another specific recent event that stands out as being important?

Event 5: Peak Experience

Please can you tell me about an episode in your doctoral journey in which you experienced positive emotions?

Event 6: Low point

Thinking back over your *doctoral journey*, can you remember a *low point*. I would appreciate an attempt on your part to be as honest and detailed as you can be.

Event 7: Turning Point

In looking back on your *doctoral journey*, please can you identify "turning points" -- episodes through which *you experienced* change?

I should make sure that the subject addresses all of these questions, especially ones about impact and what the experience says about the person. Do not interrupt the description of the event. Rather ask for extra detail, if necessary, after the subject has finished initial description of the event.

Additional follow up questions if necessary (5 - 10 minutes)

Challenge

Looking back over the various chapters in your *doctoral journey*, please can you describe the single greatest challenge that you have faced?

People

Looking back over your story, please can you identify the people who have had the most influence on your doctoral journey? Please describe this person or people and the way in which he/she or they have influenced your journey?

Journey Themes

Looking back over your doctoral journey as a story with chapters and scenes, extending into the past, can you discern central themes or ideas that run throughout the story? What are the major themes of your doctoral journey?

Other

What else should I know to understand your doctoral journey?

End of Interview (3 minutes)

I will thank the participant for their valuable contribution to the research and tell them that I will provide them with a transcript for them to comment on and following this a copy of the findings for them to comment on before including this in my thesis or other dissemination.

Appendix 2: Guidelines for in-depth interviews with doctoral college/graduate school directors

Part-time PhD students' learning journeys in changing times: influences of relationships and life events Doctoral Managers and Directors - Interview Schedule				
1.	Please can you tell me about yourself? What is your role at the University of Brighton?	How long have you been in this role?		
2.	Please can you tell me about the doctoral college?	What do you feel is the role of the doctoral college in supporting staff and students?		
3.	Please can you tell me about changes in Higher Education over the past few decades?	How do you feel it has changed in this university?	What do you think about these changes?	

4.	Please can you tell me about recent changes in UK doctoral education?	How has it recently changed in this university?	In what ways do you feel these changes influence PhD students and their learning?	
5.	Please can you tell me about part-time PhD students at the University?	What do you perceive to be the advantages and challenges of part-time study for a PhD student?	What is your perception of supervision and support for part-time PhD students' experiences at this university? And in your discipline?	Are there any issues? Are there any ways in which these issues can be resolved?
6.	What roles do you perceive different relationships play in PhD students' learning journeys?	Academic, professional and personal relationships? How has this changed recently?	What do you perceive to be the differences for part-time and full time PhD students?	
7.	In what ways do you perceive life events influence the learning journeys of PhD students?	What do you perceive to be the differences for part-time and full time PhD students?	What support do you think is available for PhD students affected by life events?	

Appendix 3: Glossary of key terms

Annual review

An annual developmental meeting organised by doctoral colleges or graduate schools between doctoral students and readers or internal examiners that support research students in their doctoral studies and enable students to progress onto the next stage of their doctorates or PhDs.

Community of Practice

Wenger (1998, p72-187) explains the concept of 'Community of Practice' as central to the 'Social Theory of Learning'. Through participating in a 'Community of Practice', individuals develop social learning related to 'belonging', 'meaning making', 'engagement' and 'imagination'.

Completion

The formal final submission of the thesis following examiners' recommended corrections and the formal conferment of the award of PhD on the student by the university.

Constellation of Practice

Wenger (1998, p127) explains a 'Constellation of Practice' as a grouping of communities with shared attributes or qualities, of which individual 'Communities of Practice' are a part.

Doctoral college or graduate school

A department in a university that manages and oversees doctoral degree processes, assessment, supervision, administrative and pastoral support, communication with students, the doctoral community and doctoral training.

Doctoral educational capital

A form of 'cultural' and 'educational capital' (Bourdieu, 1988) that may be acquired by a student relating to doctoral education, doctoral learning development, and stages in doctoral achievement during their doctoral journey.

Habitus

"…habitus has the function of overcoming the alternative between consciousness and unconsciousness…Social reality exists, so to speak, twice in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself 'as if a fish in water', it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted." (Bourdieu, 1989, p43)

Knowledgeability

"We will use the term knowledgeability to refer to the complex relationships people establish with respect to a landscape of practice, which make them recognisable as reliable sources of information or legitimate providers of services." (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p23)

Landscape of Practice

"A complex system of communities of practice and the boundaries between them…a landscape of practice constitutes a complex 'social body of knowledge'." (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, pp 13-15)

Learning in a Landscape or Practice

"As a trajectory through a social landscape, learning is not merely the acquisition of knowledge. It is the becoming of a person who inhabits the landscape with an identity whose dynamic construction reflects our trajectory through that landscape." (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p19)

Narrative research

A socially constructed process between the researcher and the research participant, where the power to construct narrative both in the interview, analysis and interpretation is shared and negotiated between the researcher and participant and allows research participants to reflect on their life histories "in their own terms". (Burr, 2006; Gergen, 2009, p66).

Neoliberalism

"…a loosely demarcated set of political beliefs which most prominently and prototypically include the conviction that the only legitimate purpose of the stage is to safeguard individual, especially commercial, liberty, as well as strong private property rights." (Thorson and Lie, 20016, p14)

Refraction

"Change in direction arising from individuals' and groups' own beliefs, practice and trajectories that are at odds with the dominant waves of reform and intended policy directions." (Goodson and Rudd, 2017, p191)

Social Theory of Learning

Conceptualisation of "learning as a socially constituted experience of meaning making." (Wenger-Trayner, 2016, p141, cited in Farnsworth et al., 2016)

Structure and agency

According to Bourdieu (1977) "structures have autonomous life. They exist to be deployed and adapted by agents seeking to establish their social position within the possibilities offered to them" (Robbins, 1998, p31). Hence, within educational structures students can make choices about their decisions and actions and act with 'agency' (Archer, 1982).

Theory of Experience

John Dewey (1938) proposes three criteria for learning based on experience: 1. "the experiential continuum", 2. "interaction" and 3. "environment".

Transfer or upgrade

This process follows a formal annual review meeting and usually doctoral students' submission of sample parts of their thesis, after which doctoral students progress from MPhil to become PhD candidates.

Viva

An oral/spoken examination at the end of the PhD/doctorate in which doctoral students defend their thesis.