

NAVIGATING LEARNING DURING THE  
FIRST YEAR AT UNIVERSITY FOR  
DIRECT ENTRY PHYSICAL  
EDUCATION STUDENTS

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to explore and gain insight into year 1 undergraduate Physical Education student experiences of learning and develop understanding of the means by which students are supported in the transition to university. It explores the perceived cognitive, affective and social demands on learning; and the challenges and barriers faced by students in becoming academic learners in Higher Education.

A qualitative phenomenological approach was adopted. Interpretative phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides a methodological framework and analytical approach that enables an exploration of the individual [and shared] lived experience of the six research participants. The research is idiographic starting with a detailed exploration of individual experience and perspectives, followed by an interpretative analysis that preserves the participant voice. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at three key points during the first year of study and transcripts were analysed using an iterative, hermeneutic approach. A process of abstraction identified four recurrent master themes that capture the student experience of learning. It is by presenting a holistic understanding of the role that 'Self', 'Becoming', 'Belonging' and 'Motivation' play in defining student experiences of learning that this research makes its contribution to knowledge.

The findings of this research show that student experiences of learning are individually unique and illustrates the importance of re-evaluating transition. Participants were self-aware but held compound self-concepts that are emotionally and socially defined. Situated and meaningful interaction is critical in fostering resilience and a sense of control over learning and tensions between the relational and connected nature of experience are brought into view. Participants encountered disconnection between certain pedagogies and learning, self-determination and the regulation of study.

The conclusion identifies a series of developmental themes that can inform understanding and contribute to further research where the agenda for change seeks to respond to student needs through improvements in teaching and learning; student-centred pedagogy, connectedness, emotional coping, inclusion or exclusion, and mastery oriented learning.

Keywords: Self, Becoming, Belonging, Motivation, Interpretative phenomenological analysis.

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## Acronyms

ASK	Academic Study Kit
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
COP	Community of Practice
FE	Further Education
GEAR	General Examination and Assessment Regulations
GT	Grounded Theory
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LPP	Legitimate Peripheral Participation
NCIHE	National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education
NSS	National Student Survey
OAA	Outdoor and Adventurous Activities
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PE	Physical Education
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
WP	Widening Participation

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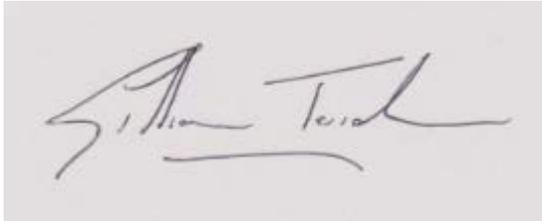
Finally, an enormous thank you to my supervisors, Graham and Angela for your guidance, kindness and generosity. Your wisdom and insight has been inspirational.

For Mum and Dad.

## **Author's 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.*

*Signed*

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and appears to read 'S. M. T. S.' followed by a long horizontal flourish.

*Dated 29<sup>th</sup> August 2017*

## **Chapter One – Introduction and Rationale**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The title of this thesis is 'Navigating learning during the first year at university for direct entry Physical Education students'. The term navigation refers to methods used to determine a position and plan a course to find one's way. As such, navigation encapsulates issues addressed throughout this study; it reflects the complexity of transition, anticipates the challenges and barriers encountered as students adapt to learning in Higher Education (HE), and implies a journey.

This research addresses a lack of understanding regarding student learning within the academic context; specifically, the experience of 18-21-year-old students. A review of literature has shown that there is limited research that addresses this demographic which represents 67% of the student population, suggesting that HE institutions should be concerned about their learning. This thesis chronicles a phenomenological exploration of six year 1 undergraduate direct entry Physical Education (PE) students' experience of learning. By exploring any challenges or barriers encountered during the first year of study, new understanding can inform pedagogy and prompt deeper consideration of how practice can foster learning potential.

This research provides insight that contributes towards securing strong foundations for study in year 1 and understanding issues of retention and non-continuation. The research has implications for university leaders and lecturers in both my institution and across the sector as they seek to attract young students from increasingly diverse backgrounds into HE. To enhance the quality of the student experience, all institutions 'have a vital responsibility to facilitate and ensure effort, engagement, interaction and active deep learning' (HEPI-HEA Student Academic Experience Survey, 2014, p.10). By considering the sense individual students make of becoming academic learners at university, this study shifts the research lens from a focus on the value of inputs and practice onto the learner and their experiences in the early stages of HE.

The rationale and literature review situate the research within discourse concerning issues of student learning, transition and retention in HE; this helped to formulate the research question, aims and outcomes. This is a qualitative study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology which supports my ontological and epistemological position and provides an approach to analysis that enables description and interpretation of the individual [and shared] lived-experience of the research participants.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection, conducted at three key points during the first year of study. The research is idiographic and findings present six individual accounts, representing the experience of each participant, before seeking patterns of convergence and divergence across the sample. Transcripts were analysed using an iterative, hermeneutic approach; text was scrutinised for descriptive, linguistic and conceptual features and interpretation is grounded in the data, preserving the participant voice.

A process of abstraction identified four recurrent master themes that capture the student experience of learning: 'Self', 'Becoming', 'Belonging' and 'Motivation'. The findings are discussed in relation to extant literature. The research shows that student experiences of learning are individually unique; cognitive, affective and social demands are closely interwoven and findings illustrate the importance of re-evaluating transition. Participants were self-aware, but held compound self-concepts that are emotionally and socially defined. Certain pedagogies and practice hinder adaptation, causing disconnection and motivational tensions to impact upon self-determination and the regulation of study habits. Relationships are key to participation and developing these within curriculum time should be promoted.

The conclusion returns to the research question and confirms how I have met the aims of the study. Outcomes are considered in relation to changing practice, the contribution to knowledge and possibilities for further research. More effective and meaningful opportunities for learning precludes delivering a better student experience; this demands flexibility in the strategic management and application of policy and practice. Findings have the potential to inform understanding and contribute to research investigating sector wide issues, where the agenda for

change seeks to respond to student needs through improvements in teaching and learning. The thesis ends with reflections on the research study, its impact and plans for dissemination, and my own Doctorate journey.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a rationale for the research and consider my own disturbance, and concludes with the presentation of my research question, sub-questions, aims and outcomes.

## **1:2 Rationale**

The rationale will present the research problem in the context of my own professional practice before situating it within sector wide issues regarding student recruitment and retention. The rationale establishes my research argument and identifies 'gaps in knowledge' that I seek to address. I acknowledge that HE is dynamic and the evidence provided in support of my argument represents the context at the point of embarking on this research. In the period of five years taken to complete this thesis, new government policy has been introduced and my institutional strategic plan has evolved; the potential impact of these changes is critiqued and reflected upon in Chapter 6: Conclusion.

### 1:2:1 The research problem in the context of my practice

I work in HE and in my role as a lecturer have a responsibility to support and enable the learning of my students. In August 2012, two Schools within my University merged. A guiding principle of the new School was to:

Place high value on the quality of learning and teaching and on opportunities for enriching the broader student experience with a principle aim being to prioritise the nurturing of critically reflective, multi-skilled, independent thinkers in applied vocational settings. (University, 2012a, p.2)

These are powerful and appropriate objectives for a university seeking to sustain and raise standards at a time when HE is becoming an increasingly competitive market place. Yet the Student Retention and Success Framework from my

University (University, 2012b, p.21) identified key issues that are barriers to effective outcomes:

- poor preparation for study.
- lack of study skills.
- lack of understanding of the level and type of skills required to study in HE.
- lack of ability to find information to build knowledge.

The lack of preparation for learning in HE is echoed by literature that examines the transition of students from Further Education (FE) to HE, indicating that this is not only a context specific concern (Leese, 2010; Whittle *et al.*, 2010). The issues identified by the student retention and success framework are instrumental, but the term 'nurturing' implies educational experiences that support the growth of the individual. To do this, pedagogic change needs to be aligned with opportunities for students to consider their own relationship with knowledge and its creation. Research suggests that we have little understanding of how students conceptualise learning, how they develop as academic learners and cultivate the skills needed for success (Gale and Parker, 2012). It is this gap in the knowledge that this research seeks to address and in so doing, provide insight into the challenges students encounter during the early stages of undergraduate study.

This research is based around finding out how students navigate learning at university and interpreting the descriptions from individual students to understand how the cognitive, affective and social demands on learning are perceived in relation to the academic context. An aspect of my research is to find out whether students have the required skills to learn within HE, looking beyond instrumental strategies and examining learning from a deeper, more personal perspective. My University Strategic Plan, Objective 1 (University, 2014d) (Figure 1), indicates the desire for students to become active participants in learning but aside from relying on National Student Survey (NSS) performance indicators, it is unclear how this manifests as meaningful to the students and their understanding of learning.

	Objective	Key performance indicators	
1	<b>A transformational learning experience: Students at the university will value their learning as active participants in learning communities, engaged in the co-production of knowledge across a broad range of professional and academic disciplines. (See: Chapter 1 Learning to make a difference)</b>	To improve our institutional score in the NSS for satisfaction with Teaching on the course, to 90 per cent by 2015. (Currently 86 per cent)	To reduce home non-continuation to 9 per cent by 2015, achieving a position at or below our HESA benchmark. (Currently 12.2 per cent)

Figure 1 University Strategic Plan (University, 2014d, p.8)

The objective raises a question about 'ownership' of learning during a transitional period of adjustment where entrants are adapting to new instructional methods and institutional structures, implying the need for shared ownership. New students are enrolling from an expanding demographic, having had diverse experiences of learning prior to university. It is important that HE attends to the problems encountered to ensure retention and reduce numbers electing non-continuation at the end of year 1. To achieve this, understanding what might constitute a learning barrier for an 18-year-old in transition to university and embedding support in pedagogic practice seems essential.

The Strategic Plan for my University proposes that:

Over the next three years there will be a structured move towards defining our pedagogy in terms of the processes of student learning rather than by the detail of teaching inputs. (University, 2014d, p.16)

Increasing interaction, face-to-face engagement, the development of learning communities and the use of digital technologies are processes that seek to transform the learning experience; commitment to these proposals are reviewed in Chapter 6: Conclusion. Currently when students face difficulty, they are referred to student support and study skills programmes. These should tap into student learning but they are peripheral to the day-to-day engagement that takes place during lecture contact time, sitting outside of the academic student/lecturer interaction. Recognition needs to be given to the way individuals position themselves as learners. I am concerned that change is process driven and imposed, rather than generated by a secure (research based) understanding of the needs of the learner.

The university support programmes delivered via the Academic Study Kit (ASK) can be considered as reactive interventions; they help a student 'do' or complete a task more effectively but they can be negatively conceptualised by reducing a problem into 'how to meet deadlines' or 'dealing with stress' (University, 2014a). This implicitly narrows the difficulty and does not address a potentially deeper issue of how to meet the challenge of what goes into learning in HE. The Student Union contributes significantly to social transition and integration but little is known about how students become a part of the academic learning community. This study shifts the research lens from evaluating the effectiveness of support programmes onto how students participate in the experience of learning.

### 1:2:2 The research problem in the sector wide context

Delivering the strategic plan is framed by political policy that determines the environment within which institutions need to function. If [we] accept HE has a responsibility to provide opportunities for students to develop both academically and personally, underpinning pedagogy must prioritise undergraduate student understanding of their own learning.

Critical transformation is about people who can produce new knowledge and go beyond the present and to be able to respond to a future that cannot now be imagined... What is required is the recognition of and capacity for higher education to work with student's enhancing capacity for critical self-reflection and critical action. (Brockbank and McGill, 1998, p.49)

By exploring students' experience of learning and how it proceeds in relation to year 1 study, this research focuses attention on the development of 'deep learning' (Moon, 2000, p.122) and how individuals cultivate transferable skills that enable them to succeed in HE and employment. My contention is that the source of difficulty is often an accumulation of many minor issues that stem from cognitive, affective and social dimensions in the learning experience (Illeris, 2007). It is wrong to assume that during the early stages of undergraduate study students have the capacity to simply 'get on with it'; there needs to be a mediating process where the skills of autonomy are developed. Part of understanding the learning challenges and barriers faced by students is in considering how they view knowledge.

University level students, and in particular those from non-traditional backgrounds need these ideas to be made explicit in order that they can progress and apply them in their academic work and not sit in a state of confusion for two or three years. (Moon, 2005, p.6)

It is important to develop an understanding of how students see themselves as academic learners and in response to this, examine the impact of the way ideas are explored and presented in academic contexts. Research shows that there are often specific cultural challenges facing students who come from backgrounds where there is little or no HE experience (Leese, 2010; Gale and Parker, 2012). Literature identifies issues relating to adaptation and integration among groups of students from non-traditional backgrounds but academia can be a daunting prospect regardless of demographic status. In my experience, all students have their own particular educational needs that cannot necessarily be defined by membership of a specific group, but concerns that emerge from widening participation (WP) research can act as a starting point, be expanded upon and have resonance when trying to understand what it feels like to learn at an entry stage to HE. The WP literature documents literacy, numeracy and separate cultural histories as obstacles that make adjustment challenging but I have found that difficulties are often shared by individuals from a range of backgrounds, which is why this research does not specifically focus on non-traditional students.

According to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2014), the number of full-time undergraduate entrants to university grew by 8% in 2013/14, the greatest proportion being from the 18-21-year-old age group, representing 30.3% of the English population. In UK universities, 67% of undergraduate students are from the 18-21 age group (HEA, 2010), making them arguably the most significant in terms of recruitment and retention, having considerable impact upon the financial position of universities. Population trends show that overall numbers in this age group are set to decline by 12% during the period 2011-2021 (HEA, 2010), effectively reducing the pool from which to draw applicants. The implication is that universities need to remain an attractive proposition for school leavers and they should look to recruit from groups and areas with non-traditional backgrounds in HE, supplementing numbers drawn from traditional backgrounds.

The Labour Government (1997-2010) was influential in driving forward the WP agenda repositioning HE as a right for all, rather than a privilege, and set a 50% participation target among young people in HE by 2010, according to the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), 1997). WP is when:

An organisation implements policies and engages in activities designed to ensure that all those with the potential to benefit from successful participation in H.E. have the opportunity to do so. (HEFCE, 2014, p.1)

The consequence has been a long-term period of change with universities re-assessing their role within communities and developing partnerships aimed at building aspiration and attracting individuals from non-traditional backgrounds towards HE. Regardless of the political, social or economic motivation behind the diversification of the undergraduate degree population, the data suggest potential for more students who may find learning difficult and it is important that universities are aware and respond to this. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) reports:

The application rates of 18-year-olds living in low participation areas have continued to increase, rising to 21% in England for the 15 January 2014 UCAS deadline. (HEFCE, 2014, p.36)

This continues the rising trend among students from disadvantaged areas which, although smaller than the 35% from traditional backgrounds, still represents a narrowing of the gap between WP and traditional groups. Longer term effects of wider educational reform, particularly curriculum, qualifications and the diversification of institutions providing HE have yet to emerge. However, with the removal of university control numbers for 2015-16 entry and the availability of a further 30,000 full-time undergraduate places in 2014-15 (HEFCE, 2014), there is room for an expansion in admissions. The implication is that universities find themselves in competition to attract an increasing number of applicants from WP backgrounds; with that come the challenges of retention and securing success.

Broadening the appeal of university to students from non-traditional backgrounds not only meets University Access Agreement objectives (University, 2014b), but

taps into a student base that expands the pool from which undergraduate students can be harvested. At the point of gaining research approval, in my institution the year 1 undergraduate population for the PE degree consisted of 47 out of 50 students within the 18-21 age group, with similar ratios continuing throughout this study. Yet these students seem to be overlooked in the literature examined in relation to issues of transition and learning in the early stages of HE in favour of investigating gender, ethnicity and mature access student experiences (Briggs *et al.*, 2012; Darmody and Flemming, 2009; Christie *et al.*, 2008; Hill and MacGregor, 1998). Whilst this provides transferable insight, given the significance of this age group it seems important to find out what it is like to be an 18-year-old coming to university and becoming a learner in HE.

The University at which this research is based is committed to fair access (University, 2012a) and has in place numerous structures and initiatives designed to aid recruitment, retention and support student success throughout all stages of their degree study. Statistical monitoring data given in the Access Agreement (University, 2014b) show that my University performs well in relation to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) performance indicators for the number of young full-time entrants from state schools and low participation neighbourhoods. Yet the data show that whilst the University (approximately 93.5%) is slightly above the locally adjusted benchmark (approximately 91%) and sector (England) (approximately 89%) averages for recruitment, the figures show a slightly higher percentage of non-continuation in HE following the year of entry for all full-time first degree entrants (approximately 9.5%) compared to the benchmark average (approximately 8.5%) and the sector (England) (approximately 8.25%). This means all students, regardless of background, are at risk of non-continuation.

If the purpose of HE is to provide access to obtaining new qualifications and skills and assist with career progression; understanding student learning must be a fundamental element in meeting this aim. My University has made substantial investment and undertaken significant work in developing initiatives and structures that support student success following enrolment. Research undertaken as part of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) '*What works?*' project and *Phase 2: What works? Student retention and success change programme (2012-15)*, found:

The key to boosting student retention and success lies not in any specific intervention, but stems from a set of key characteristics, underpinning principles and wider institutional culture, all intended to foster student belonging. (2012b, p.7)

Initiatives are intended for all students, but with additional funding specifically to address the needs of targeted groups. The relevance of the time frame for this research is that it explores a transitional point where the foundations for learning in HE are established. Leese (2010) highlights the first semester as a critical period where initial experiences often determine the ultimate success or failure of a student. I have highlighted the changing demographics of the student population and in the context of fees, increasing numbers of students combine work with study (Darmody and Fleming, 2009), spending longer periods 'off-campus', often only coming into university to attend lectures, underlining the importance of contact time. This is positioned in a context where 18-year-olds are learning to make a choice based on the freedom attached to becoming an adult. Although this research is concerned primarily with learning in the academic sphere, these competing factors have been acknowledged as they potentially affect student experiences of learning in different ways.

### **1:3 My disturbance**

My interest in exploring the student experience of learning came about through observing how different students cope with and respond to academic difficulties in diverse and often troubling ways. NSS, module evaluations and student voice meetings with course representatives provide 'official' routes for students to raise concerns regarding their academic experience and progress, but the significant number of students seeking information, advice and guidance ranging from problems with study skills to more worrying concerns regarding work-related anxiety and emerging mental health issues led me to consider how foregrounding 'formal' feedback was potentially camouflaging much deeper issues related to how students negotiate and adapt to learning in HE. There seemed to be no discernable pattern to when students elicited help and common problems were triggered at variable points throughout the year. I noticed that the institutional response was to do more via top-down programmes, without having knowledge of the specific nature or

situated-ness of the personal difficulties of students. Help for students beginning to experience difficulty was found outside the immediate academic learning environment, led by support staff rather than lecturers who have direct contact with and responsibility for promoting learning; it felt as if problems accessing learning were not a concern for academic staff.

I had been a lecturer, and more recently Course Leader at the University in which this research is based for four years at the time this study was approved, and continue in this role to date. I have witnessed a change in the demographic make-up of young students entering University with increasing numbers coming from a range of traditional and non-traditional backgrounds. This has been matched with a rapid expansion of the size of degree cohorts due to the growing popularity of sport based degree programmes. This research will focus specifically on the learning experiences of students undertaking the 3-year BA (Hons) Physical Education (PE) degree. I am an insider researcher; this will be examined further in the ethics section of Chapter 3: Methodology.

Contextually, my professional responsibilities mean I am interested in the success of all students who undertake the PE degree. Ensuring the delivery of a rich, engaging and successful degree programme depends upon understanding how students experience learning. The key issues identified in the Student Retention and Success Framework (University, 2012b, p.21) are beginning to manifest themselves in an increasing number of students either failing or working at a third-class degree level in a range of modules. When listening to the frustrations and concerns of colleagues, one lecturer commented that 'it is not so much about navigating learning, but more about wandering aimlessly'. Although this could be dismissed as a 'throw away' comment, it encapsulates in some way the reason why this research is important. New students' capacity to meet the challenges of learning in HE is changing (Whittle *et al.*, 2010). Universities and lecturers should notice, attend to the issues, and respond; but for change to be effective, it needs to be informed by research. One outcome of this research to increase the understanding of student experiences of learning among colleagues and help to realign ideas about pedagogy, developing practice that supports student transition and adaptation to HE.

Prior to working at University, I taught in schools for 18 years, holding several roles in a range of schools working with pupils studying Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications. This has given me significant insight into the experience of young people who are preparing to go to university. In my experience, one of the most noticeable changes students encounter when moving from school or FE into HE is the expectation that they should function as independent learners, and they are identified as adults who are accountable for their own development. Yet in the school environment, learning and progress is closely monitored and reported on a regular basis; interventions happen the moment a dip in learning is identified and support is embedded in classroom practice alongside additional withdrawal programmes. The pressure on schools to be successful and for pupils to meet targets is overtly communicated, but once within the university system, these pressures are essentially obscured from the students.

Aside from the practicalities of engaging with academic study, the most significant barrier must rest within the nature of learning itself. Research undertaken during stage 1 of the Doctorate has focused on the development of student learning, specifically, enquiry based learning and reflective practice. My data have shown that students are deeply concerned with their own learning and have the desire to improve but face difficulty in becoming independent critical learners. Entrants to University potentially have very little experience of this level of functioning, making it a priority in the early stages of undergraduate study, positioning understanding student experience of learning as a researchable problem. The context and methodology employed in this research has given the opportunity to listen to students talking about how they learn and construct an understanding of the elements and products of experience as they navigate learning in HE.

#### **1.4 Research question, aims and outcomes**

The research questions, aims and outcomes have been constructed in response to situating the problem in the rationale, my own disturbance and literature relating to theories of learning and issues of transition explored in Chapter 2: Literature Review.

**Research Question:**

What are year 1 undergraduate Physical Education students' experiences of learning in Higher Education?

**Sub questions:**

- How is learning described by year 1 undergraduate students?
- How are the cognitive, affective and social demands on learning perceived by students during the first year of study at university?
- What challenges and barriers are faced by students in becoming academic learners in Higher Education?

**Aim(s) of the investigation:**

1. To find out what it is like to be an 18-year-old and becoming a learner in HE.
2. To describe and interpret through the stories of individual students how learning is experienced during year 1 of undergraduate study.
3. To provide insight into and enhance understanding of students' experiences of learning during year 1 undergraduate study in HE.
4. To develop understanding of the means by which students are supported in the transition to and during the early stages of learning in HE.

**Outcomes**

1. Findings will inform my own and colleagues' understanding of practice that supports student transition to HE and work towards achieving my University Strategic Plan aim to 'nurture critically reflective, multi-skilled, independent thinkers' (University, 2012a, p.7).
2. Findings will contribute to understanding issues of retention and non-continuation.
3. Findings will inform further research working towards achieving my University Strategic Plan objective to provide:

‘A transformational learning experience: Students at the university will value their learning as active participants in learning communities, engaged in the co-production of knowledge’ (University, 2014d, p.8).

4. Findings will inform understanding and contribute to further research investigating sector wide issues of student experience in HE.

## **Chapter Two - Literature Review**

This research is concerned with finding out about year 1 undergraduate PE student experiences of learning in HE. It seeks to explore how learning may develop as students make the transitional adjustment from further into higher education and progress through the first year of undergraduate study as they navigate the challenges of becoming an HE student. Chapter 1 reported the foundation of my disturbance and situated the research question in my professional practice and wider HE issues of recruitment and retention. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literature that has contributed to my thinking about the problem; I explore contrasting, yet complementary theories of learning and relate these to how students potentially encounter transition and make sense of experience.

The literature review was conducted prior to data collection. Engaging with theory has facilitated understanding different dimensions of learning that signpost what form the likely claims of my participants might be (Smith *et al.*, 2013). However, to remain consistent with a phenomenological approach to research, it is essential to ground my thinking in the participant accounts (Heidegger, 2010). I was conscious that the further I delved into the literature at this point, the more it would influence possible assumptions which needed to be set to one side during analysis. For this reason, the review is necessarily brief and much deeper engagement with extant literature is made in Chapter 5: Discussion.

The literature review focuses on the concept of learning, drawing upon Illeris's (2007) 'Three dimensions of learning; content, incentive and interaction'. Illeris provides an integrated learning theory that addresses the interplay between *acquisition* and *interaction* processes as a theoretical framework. To explore how learning proceeds for an individual, theories of learning presented by Mezirow 'Instrumental and Communicative Learning' (1990), Deci and Ryan 'Self-determination theory' (1985) and Lave and Wenger 'Situated Learning' (1991) have been overlaid at each of the dimensional poles, respectively. Each theory is characterised by a sense of movement enabling insight into potential changes and

the development of learning as an individual navigates year 1 experience and moves towards becoming an academic learner.

From a preliminary search of the literature, themes of participation in knowledge creation, regulation of learning and co-operation within the social context indicate possible tensions that exist between Illeris's (2007) conceptual poles of learning. This raises questions about how individuals navigate learning in HE. Literature commonly reports the challenges faced by specific groups of learners defined by gender, ethnicity and as mature students, suggesting a gap in the existing knowledge base and the need for research that addresses the experience of learning among 18-21-year-old entrants to university.

Illeris defines learning as:

Any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing. (2007, p.3)

His definition is purposefully broad and exemplifies the complicated task of refining such an intricate concept into one universally accepted meaning. The concept of 'capacity change' suggests that learning may not always manifest itself immediately in outward expression, an important consideration when researching students in transition. The process of learning involves the interpretation of experience to guide future action (Habermas, 1984; Kolb, 1984; Wenger, 2009) but what is perceived and how sense is made of experience depend on existing frames of reference (Mezirow, 1990). Habits of expectation structure thinking and considerable disturbance can be felt when variance is encountered. The impact of an experience is relative to the depth of meaning we can make from it.

The nature of learning itself can be defined as the active construction of meaning by a learner building on and modifying meaning that they have arrived at in prior learning. (Moon, 2000, p.23)

To learn [we] need experience to demonstrate or put into action the meaning [we] have made, implying that learning requires the use of meaning (Usher, 2009; Moon, 2004; Mezirow, 1990). The active construction and modification of meaning

advances a definition of learning; exploring how individuals then work with meaning is significant. The duration of this research enables changes that occur to manifest and time for participants to articulate their interpretation of experience; identifying processing and regulation strategies that influence how students cope with the complexity of adapting to learning demands.

Vermunt and Vermetten (2004) propose a coherent system of related phenomena that can act as a starting point for accessing the stories of undergraduate students, which include:

Knowledge and beliefs about oneself as a learner, learning objectives, learning activities and strategies, learning tasks, learning and studying in general, and about the task division between students, teachers, and fellow students in learning processes. (2004, p.362)

The conceptualisation of learning generally progresses in line with educational stage, but transitional points, particularly when introduced to a new educational context, often result in 'a period in which students find that their ideas of knowledge and how to go about learning are no longer adequate' (Vermunt and Vermetten, 2004, p.371). This period of instability is when new undergraduates may find themselves at greatest risk of non-continuation. Ascertaining the potential difficulties students encounter in acclimatising to HE is of interest if change processes and intervention, including the diversification of pedagogic methods, are to meet the needs of students from an increasingly wide range of demographic backgrounds.

Learning among groups of individuals occurs at a different pace and to a greater or lesser extent. Factors such as interest, motivation and level of preparedness for study affect learning (Ainley, 2006). Understanding the possibilities and limitations that students place on their learning, the boundaries they create and how these may fluctuate or change as the students adjust to and become more familiar and adept at navigating HE are important if students are to become successful learners.

In the model 'Learning as competence development', Illeris (2007, p.28) (Figure 2) presents three dimensions by which student learning can be considered. Illeris makes specific reference to:

1. the outcomes of the learning.
  2. the mental processes that take place.
  3. the interaction process between individuals and their material and social environment.
- (2007, p.3)

Learning is a consequence of two different processes: '*interaction*' between the individual and his or her environment, and the psychological process of '*acquisition*'. For learning to be significant, the interaction (or experience) needs to be purposeful.

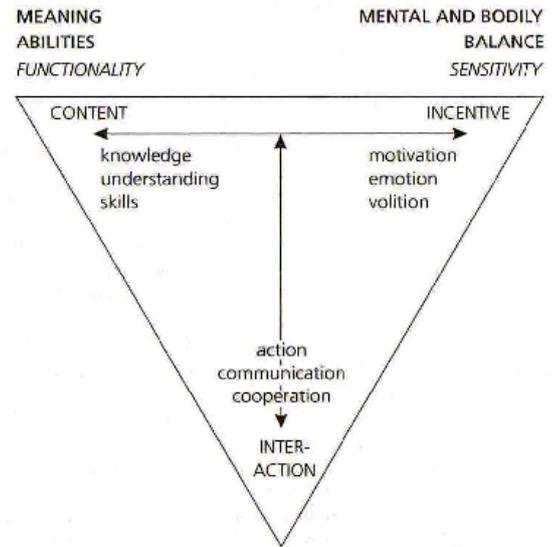


Figure 2: Learning as competence development (Illeris, 2007)

Acquisition refers to the assimilative and cumulative processes of cognition (Piaget, 1971) and often this is subject to individual volition or emotional interest. It is through the *content* dimension that 'we develop meaning and the abilities that enable us to tackle the practical challenges of life' (Illeris, 2007, p.26). The *incentive* dimension represents the features of 'being' that mobilise us to learn such as curiosity, uncertainty and ambition. *Interaction* denotes the social context for learning: on one level, the process of communication and co-operation and on the other, a broader need to integrate and function in society. Bourdieu (1990) describes the influence of cultural capital and habitus as determinants established at an early age that can influence an individual's ability to adapt to an environment where the structures for learning are very different from those that define their background. In transition literature, this is often considered in relation to the difficulties students from working class backgrounds encounter when entering university (Reay, 2004), but acquired dispositions are inherited by all new students and will influence learning in different ways.

Each dimension is not uniformly balanced and at any time, shifts in emotional well-being, the amount of prior knowledge and changes to the environment may present barriers to learning (Illeris, 2007). By accessing the accounts of undergraduates,

insight to how students recognise critical moments in their evolution as a learner can be traced, leading to consideration of how they work through difficulties and the results of that navigation. Learning is a delicate process and variably effective. By positioning a comparative theory at each of Illeris's three dimensions, it is possible to explore the development of student learning in relation to year 1 experience; each theory provides a model that acknowledges a sense of movement towards becoming what can be considered an effective learner in HE. It is important to note that I am not intending to test these theories; their usefulness rests in the lens they provide for exploring different dimensions of experience.

## **2:1 The content dimension of learning.**

At the *content* dimension, I have positioned Mezirow's work on instrumental and communicative learning (1990). Mezirow (1990) describes two ways of structuring meaning: *meaning schemes* and *meaning perspectives*. 'Meaning schemes are habitual, implicit rules for interpreting' (Mezirow, 1990, p.2), whereas meaning perspectives draw on higher order thinking, where interpretation is mediated through theories, presuppositions, conceptual maps and belief systems. The two approaches are distinct and could be viewed as examples of surface and deep learning (Moon, 2000). This research is predominantly concerned with how students develop meaning perspectives but the research context also involves student engagement in practical and vocational learning. Students are simultaneously learning how to *do* something and *understand* the broader impact of actions. Mezirow (1990) classifies these as *instrumental* and *communicative* learning, respectively.

Instrumental learning engages individuals in task oriented problem solving (Mezirow, 1990). It involves the assessment of actions using reflection as a procedural tool for interpreting evidence and adapting to meet goals. This is important for students entering university where their ability to manage the environment and perform to a high standard directly impacts upon their actual and perceived success. Communicative learning focuses on achieving coherence and understanding meaning, rather than improving performance (Mezirow, 1990). The development of meaning perspectives may involve the individual in challenging

deeply embedded assumptions that have been formed through years of both intentional and unintentional socialisation processes that constitute how an individual perceives themselves and their 'place' in the world in which they live.

Experience strengthens, extends, and refines our structures of meaning by reinforcing our expectations about how things are supposed to be. (Mezirow, 1990, p.4)

However, difficulties emerge when interpretation does not fit with pre-existing schemes. The individual may either retreat into a comfort zone or undertake a critical re-examination of existing frames of reference. The capability of an individual to deal with tensions in taken-for-granted assumptions, particularly where personal feelings and self-concept are involved, may require support structures and guidance, but successful navigation of the difficulty may result in transformation and new insight.

## **2:2 The incentive dimension of learning.**

At the *incentive* dimension, I have positioned Deci and Ryan's 'Self Determination Theory' (1985). Self-determination theory (SDT) is concerned with understanding the impetus for learning and asking why individuals develop in a certain way rather than what that development is. SDT focuses on the:

Dialectic between the active, growth-oriented human organism and social contexts that either support or undermine people's attempts to master and integrate their experiences into a coherent sense of self. (Vallerand and Ratelle, 2002, p.27)

In this research, SDT provides a lens for examining the affective stories associated with student experience, specifically the degree of interest, efficacy and volition associated with motivation and regulatory processes of learning. Research suggests that high quality learning and conceptual understanding is achieved when an individual is intrinsically motivated and able to self-regulate (Vallerand and Ratelle, 2002). The outcomes of these processes are increased confidence, feelings of competence, the ability to work autonomously and recognition of the relatedness of learning to personal goals and ambition. Yet transition to HE requires adjustment to a new educational and social setting where previous regulatory behaviour may

be challenged; adapting to unfamiliar external pressures can alter the 'locus of causality' forcing a period of extrinsically motivated learning (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Initial experiences of HE may be defined by a pre-occupation with fitting in, creating tensions between social pressures of transition and the expectations of learning.

Research that examined students' reasons for going to university recognised that 'developing knowledge and skills they could use in a career, broadening horizons and (becoming) more independent and self-confident' (McCune *et al.*, 2010, p.694) were motivating factors shared by all new entrants, but only among the 18-21 age group was an active social life and/or sport seen as a strong reason for entering university (2010). Extrinsic controls on motivational choices may act in opposition affecting the way students experience learning. Exploring how students navigate learning in HE requires consideration of students' active or passive engagement with the learning experience, their mastery of the internal and external environment and how they manifest or actualise learning potential.

An important problem for adaptation and development is the promotion of a shift from regulation by external factors to self-regulation by internal factors in a variety of behavioural domains. (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p.129)

However, the Strategic Plan (University, 2014d) highlights students' lack of preparation for study in HE as an issue. Prior learning experience may have been dominated by external pressure characterised by surface or strategic learning (Moon, 2000). Young students entering university would potentially have experience where their success as a learner is judged in relation to externally generated criteria, namely, the number of high grade qualifications achieved by their school or college. This does not mean students lack intrinsic motivation and the distinction between surface and deep learning is imprecise (Entwistle, 1997). Students may have been conditioned to work and learn within the external pressures of school in a way that inhibits their ability to adapt to the self-regulating expectations of the university environment. Understanding the stimulus for motivation may help to reveal learning attainment boundaries and expectations, prompting examination of the way pedagogic practice can support students in becoming self-regulating learners.

Internalisation is instrumental in achieving adaptation to a learning environment but it does not occur spontaneously and requires some form of mediating intervention if an individual is to achieve autonomy and function effectively within the demands of HE (Moon, 2005). Deci and Ryan identify a domain of internalisation which is:

The process through which an individual acquires an attitude, belief, or behavioural regulation and progressively transforms it into a personal value, goal or organisation. (1985, p.130)

Listening to the accounts of the early stages of undergraduate study can provide insight into the emotional experience of students. Specific behavioural characteristics represent stages of regulation that may be reflected in the student descriptions of their learning. Aside from the passive resistance of an unmotivated student, those who rely on external regulation are dependent on direction and extrinsic cues for learning. Extrinsically motivated responses often involve gaining peer or 'adult' approval manifested in behaviour most commonly observed in children, but the next stage, introjected regulation, persists into adulthood and can be triggered by anxiety. Introjected regulation, 'where people regulate their performance in anticipation of either disparaging or inflating self attributions about their abilities' (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p.136) is a form of self-evaluation that can have significant affective consequences. When an individual feels unsure, introjected behaviour is a way of taking control, of dealing with change and creating a self-concept which can inhibit rather than promote learning.

### **2:3 The interaction dimension of learning.**

The *interaction* dimension draws upon Lave and Wenger's 'Situated Learning Theory' (1991), where learning is located 'squarely in the process of co-participation, not in the heads of individuals' (Hanks, 1991, p.13). Meaning production is not seen as an individual pursuit; instead, it exists within the social interaction that takes place between groups of individuals (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This is contrary to traditional cognitive learning theories (Piaget, 1971; Kolb, 1984) but from my ontological and social constructionist perspective, accepts the significance of the social environment upon learning, specifically 'what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place' (Hanks, 1991, p.14). This

provides an important perspective for exploring how students navigate learning in HE. Although Lave and Wenger based their work on an analysis of apprenticeship, their work has been applied to various business and educational contexts (Machles, 2003; Jawitz, 2009; Stanley, 2013). This research takes place within a combined academic and vocational degree; learning is often practical in its nature and so resonates with Lave and Wenger's ideas. The student participates in learning alongside an 'expert' (lecturer); initial responsibility for learning is limited but there is an expectation that this will increase.

The Strategic Plan (University, 2014d) for the university where this research is taking place wants students to become co-producers of knowledge, implying a move towards greater interactive and collaborative practice. Situated learning presents a participation framework where the 'locus of learning' shifts from the individual to the community, where it is distributed among all co-participants and mediated by different perspectives (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In their first year at university, students will encounter multiple communities of practice. Listening to the accounts of student experience during this time will provide insight into their possible transformation as learners through active engagement with the learning context. Yet it is the wider processes of interaction, including pedagogic practice that can enable or restrict student participation. This raises questions of power, authority, accountability and the sharing of resources (Contu *et al.*, 2003) which, in turn, impact upon the successful navigation of learning in H.E.

Certain modes of co-participation may be embedded in the academic environment that characterise expected forms of interaction. If this is true, there may be issues when we consider a shifting demographic intake, yet fail to respond if there are changing needs and continue to repeat the same expectations/practice. Some students may adapt easily, but others might struggle, making it important to pay attention to the difficulties they express regarding the ability to participate in learning. Hanks states that 'the skillful learner acquires the ability to play various roles in various fields of participation' (1991, p.20). This includes the ability to anticipate, be adaptable and improvise in ways that are consistent with the academic demands being made and is dependent upon the lecturer's ability to manage participatory responsibility effectively in a way that promotes learning by the student. The notion

of mediated support is echoed in Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development which, in educational contexts, often takes the form of scaffolding pedagogy and problem solving abilities (Greenfield, 1984). This is important when considering the movement from instrumental to communicative learning, but Lave and Wenger (1991) take a different approach and place more emphasis on 'the changing relations between newcomers and old-timers in the context of a changing shared practice' (1991, p.49). Leese proposes that there should be a:

Shift in perception about appropriate student support in the early period of transition. Teaching staff need to be honest about their expectations of students as soon as possible to ensure that students feel empowered to succeed. (2010, p.248).

Lave and Wenger expand upon situated learning theory with the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) as a way of considering how individuals experience belonging to a community which they view as 'a crucial condition for learning' (1991, p.35). LPP is a dynamic concept that examines the factors that contribute to an individual's ability to connect and to grow within a community of practice. LPP allows exploration of the way students engage with learning as an interactive process where participants assume a variety of roles, develop a range of relationships and engage with learning under widely varying conditions (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This conceptual perspective fits with the intention of this research to understand how students experience learning. It looks beyond the reactive intervention of student support programmes and institutional policy that seem to dominate research into student transition and satisfaction in HE (Gale and Parker, 2012). Interaction goes beyond academic structures and processes and needs to be purposeful if 'deep learning' is to be achieved (Dewey, 1997; Moon, 2000). The accounts shared in this research will provide insight into how students experience learning, whether they feel supported and the impact experience has on those who fail to gain the necessary skills for participation, leading to possible alienation or non-continuation.

## 2:4 Theoretical Framework

I created the theoretical framework (Figure 3) to show the inter-relationship between aspects of learning. Tensions and parallels exist between the theories that overlay Illeris's (2007) 'Learning as competence development' model, but viewed in this way, the framework illustrates how different individuals may occupy distinct positions as they respond to various demands and adapt to the challenges of learning in HE. It is helpful in providing a more holistic interpretation of factors that influence the experience of learning and impact engagement.

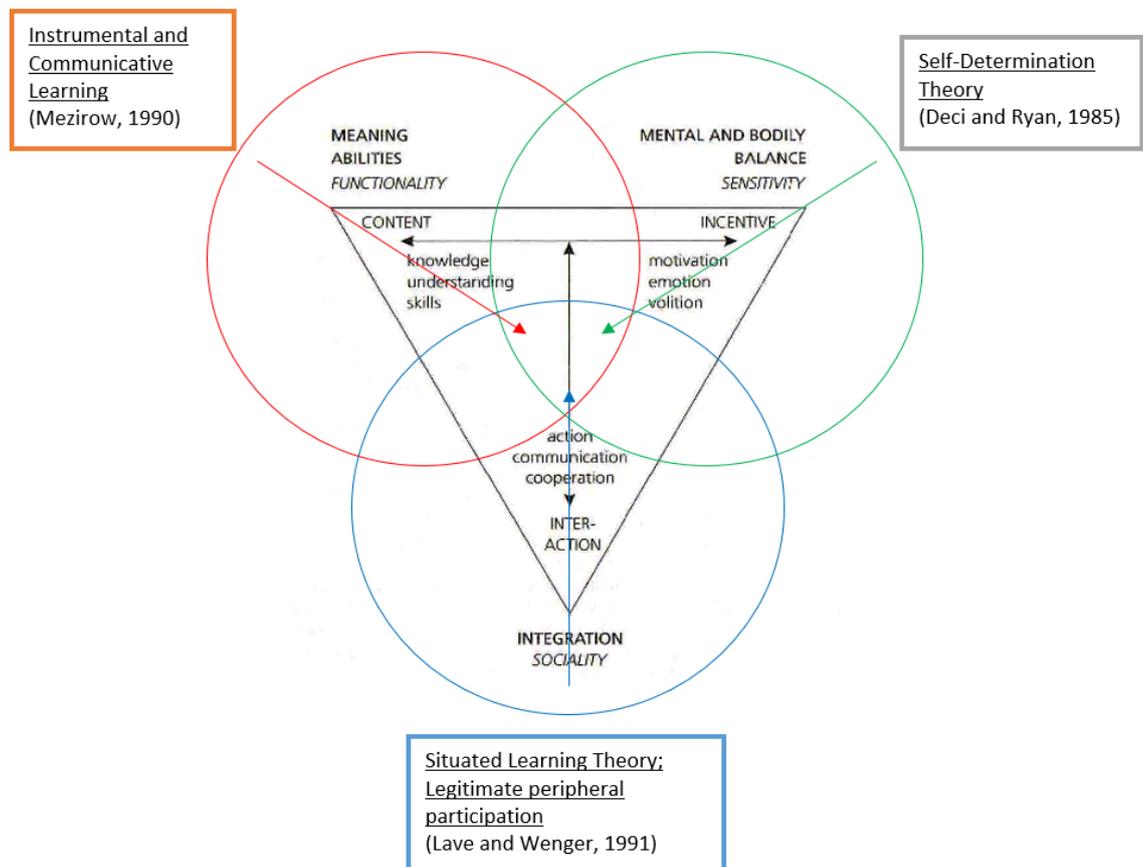


Figure 3: Theoretical framework: An expansion of Illeris's (2007) 'Learning as competence development' model

This research takes a phenomenological approach, whereby lived-experience is considered *particular* to each individual, within a given situation. The intention is to gain insight and understanding of the learning experience of students in relation to their first year of undergraduate study; how students navigate this is unpredictable.

Learning is a way of being in the social world, not a way of coming to know about it. Learners, like observers more generally, are engaged both in the contexts of their learning and in the broader social world within which these contexts are produced. Without this engagement, there is no learning, and where the proper engagement is sustained, learning will occur. (Hanks, 1991, p.24)

Three broad categories relating to transition emerge in the literature: induction, development and becoming (Gale and Parker, 2014; Quinn, 2010; Barnett, 2009). Induction and development are well accounted for in HE research, policy and practice, but *becoming* as an approach to transition remains more conceptual. There exists a gap in knowledge where adopting a 'becoming' approach may enable a more personal and flexible route to supporting student learning during the early stages of HE. The outcomes of this research have the potential to challenge thinking regarding policy and practice among university leaders and lecturing staff, initiating dialogue regarding how HE can adapt to the changing needs of students, rather than expecting students to adapt to established and traditional modes of working.

The literature review only touches upon the substantial research available; but it demonstrates the complexity of understanding learning, which remains a consistent challenge to students and educators alike. The theories explored in this literature review present a discussion of how learning may proceed and draw attention to associated issues of transition. The three selected theories share a sense of movement, reflecting my relativist ontology and phenomenological interest in the experience of 'being' and 'becoming' a learner in HE. Alternative theories were considered and contribute to the critical discussion of the findings in Chapter 5 of this thesis, for example: 'Domains of Learning' (Habermas, 1984), 'Social Cognitive Theory' (Bandura, 1995) and 'Cultural Reproduction' (Bourdieu, 1997). But IPA is not concerned with testing a theory; its focus rests firmly on enabling participants to express concerns and make claims on their terms. Therefore themes relating to the participants' idiographic experience of learning are not yet known, should not be anticipated by the researcher and consequently are not examined in the literature review. It is this degree of 'open-mindedness' and reflexive engagement with data that strengthens the contribution that can be made by IPA studies. Alternative theories broaden knowledge, but associated concepts such as power or class, may potentially inhibit insight, whereas the trio of theoretical lenses used in this literature

review enable thinking about the cognitive, affective and social dimensions of learning.

The following chapter, Methodology, will describe how IPA has been used to answer the research question, What are year one undergraduate physical education student experiences of learning in HE?

### **Chapter Three - Methodology**

In this chapter I describe my ontological and epistemological position and how these influenced the research design, specifically the use of IPA as my chosen approach to qualitative research. I examine the methodological implications of using Heideggerian phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiographic philosophies to inform an exploration into year 1 undergraduate physical education student experiences of learning in HE. The aims of this research involved finding out what it is like to be a learner, how learning is experienced and how students cope with the challenges of transition and go about learning in HE.

The chapter provides scrutiny of the methods employed to gather data and the iterative approach to analysis and interpretation used to answer the research question. Literature is drawn upon to provide a clear understanding of the methodology and the need to sustain a reflexive dialogue between the researcher, the data and the reader to present the research process and findings in a detailed and congruent manner. This chapter also presents the ethical considerations taken in carrying out my research and examines the tensions between being an 'insider researcher' and the challenge of securing 'trustworthiness' in qualitative research.

Stage one of the Doctorate programme has challenged me to consider my own position as a researcher and question the way I experience and understand the world as real and meaningful. Prior to employment at the University, I experienced eighteen years as a teacher in state education holding responsibilities including Head of Department and Assistant Head Teacher. Engaging with doctoral research has led me to reflect on the traditions and culture that contribute to my outlook on education compared with those held within my current place of work and in HE: how I view each child and now young adult as an individual; each possessing their own specific needs and personal histories that shape how they learn; leading me to question practice that seems to assume a uniform and normative approach to learning.

The research falls within an interpretive paradigm and takes an idiographic approach which endorses my view of individuality and experience being

conceptualised as unique and perspectival. Hermeneutic philosophy recognises that interpreting the 'lived-experience' of another requires acknowledgment by researchers of their involvement in the enquiry. Gadamer (2008) identifies the importance of 'fore-structuring' one's own historicity and positions this as a positive and purposeful move towards gaining a deeper understanding by first admitting our own presuppositions and pre-judgements.

The relationship I have to the subject matter is complex given my background and experience as a student, a learner, an educator in schools, a lecturer, a member of staff within the institution where my research is situated and as someone who cares about the welfare and success of my participants. Any prejudice that I bring to the research is acknowledged by the reflexivity of the hermeneutic circle and use of a clear decision trail. I am conscious that during the research, I am questioning student perceptions of 'being' and 'becoming', but they too may be questioning this and reveal different senses of 'being/becoming' during the interviews.

My Doctorate journey has led me to consider which research approach will best enable me to gain insight into the '*lived-experience*' of year 1 undergraduate physical education students. The following sections will explicate the philosophical and methodological foundations that have informed the choice of methods and provide coherence to the research design (Hayes and Fulton, 2014; Crotty, 2011; Koch, 1995).

### **3:1 Ontology**

This research sits within an interpretive paradigm where the attribution of meaning is a key factor in our understanding of phenomena. By contrast, a positivist ontology, traditionally associated with quantitative research, views reality as independent of human consciousness. Methodological approaches adopted through a positivist paradigm seek to explain and predict phenomena in an objective and measurable way where findings hold generalisable potential (Crotty, 2011; Pring, 2006). Such an approach may be appropriate if the research is intended to produce data upon which institutions might seek to base, and defend, policy and practice decisions. However, it is not the intention of this research to create a generalisable theory.

Reflecting on my personal involvement working with children and young adults, I recognise the complex, often chaotic and unpredictable nature of learning, and my interest lies in finding out how this is experienced at a personal level. I believe adopting a qualitative approach is compatible with obtaining the type of data that would provide the insight I am looking for, and findings may hold relevance to other, similar contexts.

Denzin and Lincoln regard all qualitative research as interpretive; 'it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied' (2005, p.22). Undertaking research through an interpretive paradigm demands sustained focus on the individual to understand the subjective world of human experience and, 'to retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within' (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, p.17). In this research, I look to understand how students experience learning in HE and recognise this will be unique to each individual, which is a reflection of my ontological belief that reality is representative of the sense we make of the world. Crotty states:

We need to recognise that different people may well inhabit quite different worlds...that constitute for them diverse ways of knowing, distinguishable sets of meanings, separate realities. (2011, p.64)

Heidegger (2010) emphasises the practical, embodied nature of lived-experience and through phenomenology presents a challenge to a positivist view of reality. Phenomenology is concerned with the manner in which the world comes to appearance *in* and *through* humans (Moran, 2000), but subscribing to either a critical realist or relativist ontology has proved challenging and difficult to resolve. My study is interested in how the research participants make sense of their experience; by transitioning to HE, they each encounter the same people, events, and places, but [I believe] they experience these in unique and subjective ways. This perspective resonates with Heidegger's (2010) understanding of co-constitution, where 'being-in-the-world' is indivisible, but also that our past belongs to our being.

It is its own past not only in such a way that its past, as it were, pushes itself along behind it, and that it possesses what is past as a property that is still objectively present and at times has an effect on it. (Heidegger, 2010, p.19)

Heidegger's conceptualisation of 'past' implies that the way individuals make sense of experience is informed by their background and personal histories. I found it difficult to accept a view that the 'university' would not exist outside of individual consciousness, and have grappled with realist–relativist perspectives throughout my doctorate study. The moment I understood my impediment lay with a willingness to appreciate other viewpoints and did not necessitate acquiescence, I felt able to articulate my own relativist perspective. Finding meaning becomes a unique interpretation made possible by the connection between self and the world [I] inhabit; it is idiographic and as such, I believe multiple realities exist. Heidegger (2010) regards 'Being' (*Dasein*), which he expands to 'Being-in-the-world' as the fundamental ontology, and it is this position that resolved my ontological anxiety. An individual is always a person-in-context, actively engaging with the already meaningful world (Larkin *et al.*, 2008), but this is a reciprocal construct where involvement with the world gives [me] meaning. 'Being' is both situated and relational and can only be properly understood through the questions asked, and interpretations made of our encounters with the world.

Disentangling the ontology of IPA is a concern echoed in literature (Larkin *et al.*, 2008). Willig acknowledges that because IPA seeks 'knowledge of what and how people think' (2013, p.96) about phenomena, it could fall within a realist perspective. I am also mindful of the 'false duality' found in distinguishing positivist from interpretivist approaches (Pring, 2006). The turning point comes with recognition of IPA's emphasis on understanding how participants *experience* phenomena, positioning it within a relativist ontology, which is compatible with my research question. In phenomenology, all conscious experiences are characterised by *aboutness* in that experience is always experience *of* something (Husserl, 1982) or that investigating human existence requires an understanding of our *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 2010). Both philosophical approaches are determined by a meaningful correlate (of/in) which suggests a relativist way of engaging with the world. In my research, I am interested in student experiences *of* learning.

IPA methodology consents to a relativist ontology by 'offering detailed, nuanced analysis of 'particular' instances of lived-experience' (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.37). The method for analysis in IPA preserves the participant voice, which corresponds with the value I place on each student being considered an individual. IPA aids reflection on practice by encouraging distancing, resolving possible tensions in the research between my relativist approach and views held by participants who may have encountered an objective, realist style of education. The research participants will share their own stories and therefore the research findings will represent multiple realities of HE.

### **3:2 Epistemology**

Epistemologically, I accept a social constructionist position where individual meaning is constructed and co-created through social interaction. I am mindful of possible ambiguities encountered when adopting an epistemological position (Willig, 2013) and the individual perspectives shared by my participants may suggest a constructivist view. However, social constructionism 'draws attention to the fact that human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically' (Willig, 2013, p.7). What the participants perceive is a reflection of their interpretation of that experience and this is influenced by personal backgrounds, where meaning and knowledge are generated through interaction with a world into which they are thrown. I wanted my data to provide access to experiential accounts that give insight into students' involvement with learning in the HE context; as such, my research question is commensurate with the type of questions found in IPA.

We ask questions about people's understandings, experiences and sense-making activities, and we situate these questions *within* specific contexts, rather than between them. (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.47)

Finding out about 'experience' is pivotal in securing my epistemological stance; it implies subjectivity, relatedness and context. Phenomenologically our *being-in-the-world* always points to others (Heidegger, 2010). This research does not investigate a cognitive theory of learning; it is concerned with the manner by which participants encounter learning which is situated in a social environment. The participants have

their own interests and concerns that influence their engagement; interpretation of experience has a personal orientation and this is recognised through the idiographic nature of IPA. Yet meaning is 'shaped by the conventions of language and other social processes' (Schwandt, 1994, p.127) and in exploring student experiences of learning, it is necessary to locate the participant within the learning community. Any concerns they have are shared with others; they are expected to adapt and integrate with others, and any meaning is made in accordance with their relation to others (Moran, 2000). As Heidegger (2010) suggests that even the absence of others is an essential factor in how [I] experience the world. In my research, the participants encounter a point of transition; separation from family and friends, possible feelings of loneliness and isolation, but at the same time, are cast into a communal environment and undertake a shared experience.

Being-in-the-world includes interaction, implying that understanding is, at least in part, socially mediated; a perspective that supports my social constructionist epistemology and has informed my methodological choice. The alignment of IPA with social constructionism is endorsed by Smith *et al.* (2013), albeit softer in nature than the connection found in narrative psychology or Foucauldian discourse analysis (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Willig, 2013). The research emphasis is upon gaining insight rather than the production of knowledge; findings are locally specific, reflecting the *particular* nature of IPA.

In *Being and Time* (2010), Heidegger is concerned with an exploration of what it is to be human, and how it is that humans encounter the world. Heideggerian phenomenology presents a philosophical perspective through which human existence (*Dasein*) and, therefore, experience can be understood, or more specifically, it provides the possibility of gaining insight. Moran states:

Human existence is not an entity which is simply there in the world, accessible from different points of view. Rather human existence is some specific person's existence; it has the character of 'specificity' or 'mineness'. (2000, p.197)

The intention was to get as close as possible to understanding what it is like to be a year 1 undergraduate learner in HE. IPA involves distancing between the researcher

and participant; aided by reflective practice, I have been able to interpret the 'mineness' within the data that characterises the participant experience of learning. In achieving this, my research findings provide insight that can inform practice and decision making that is essentially in the domain of academics, managers and leaders who may be, or feel detached, from the reality of *being* a student.

The following section examines the philosophical principles that underpin my research; specifically, how interpretive phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography inform the methodology and are consistent with achieving my research aims.

### **3:3 Theoretical Perspective**

#### 3:3:1 Phenomenology

This research is grounded in phenomenology, which is consistent with my aim to find out what it is like to be an 18-year-old and becoming an academic learner in HE. The purpose of phenomenology is to depict *phenomena* in the manner in which they appear, taking care to avoid fallacy and prejudice to find out what *our* experience of the world is *like*. In contrast to empirical hypothesising, there is no testing or assumptions to be made. There is:

A steady directing of attention to the things themselves... explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within. (Moran, 2000, p.4)

This is a guiding principle that underpins my research, which takes a Heideggerian interpretive phenomenological approach. Husserl (1964) and Heidegger (2010) agree that phenomenology is concerned with lived-experience, but the respective emphasis on *description* as opposed to *interpretation* represents a departure in philosophical thinking by Heidegger that resonates with my research question, and has implications for the research design. Husserl's descriptive phenomenology, through the process of bracketing and reduction, attempts to arrive at an objective understanding of the essential features of phenomena unrestricted by prejudice or the influence of culture (Dowling 2007; Koch, 1995; Moustakas, 1994). However,

Husserl's attention to first-person processes, where the gaze is upon personal perception and consciousness, is problematic when research is concerned with exploring the life-world of others and context (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Heidegger proposed that understanding lived-experience requires interpretation that is contextually situated and made meaningful through the various activities and relationships people are involved in (Hayes and Fulton, 2014; Smith *et al.*, 2013; Larkin *et al.*, 2006). He posits that even description involves some form of interpretation as an individual makes sense of experience (Heidegger, 2010; Moran, 2000). Heidegger (2010) presents the concept of inter-subjectivity to explain our relationship to the world, and that 'our being-in-the-world' is always perspectival, always temporal, and always *in-relation-to* something. The involved nature of existence is crucial in situating this research where cognitive, affective and social factors influence the perceptions of my participants. Heidegger seems to offer a holistic lens to understanding learning in HE.

Heidegger, saw that humans are primarily caught up in living their lives, wrapped up in moods and emotional commitments, in cares and worries, falling into temptation, projecting themselves into possibilities, seeking to make themselves whole. Cognition and intellectual activity emerged out of the engaged structures of everyday life where we are on top of things, we are 'up for it', able to cope. Intellection and cognition are founded modes, knowing is a derivative mode of the being-in of Dasein, ontologically founded on Being-in-the-world. (Moran, 2000, p.228)

The quotation from Moran is useful in illustrating the thread of my thinking, connecting ontological, epistemological and philosophical perspectives that shape the research design. Reference to 'everyday' experience is significant, as is understanding what may be happening when the participants can or cannot cope. For Heidegger, phenomenology holds the potential for new ways of 'seeing', essentially by setting aside philosophical theories to concentrate on the matters themselves. The route to understanding is through the interpretation of the participant accounts; the language they use and their manner of expression defines the insight available to me.

Although Heidegger does not explicate specific research methods, his thinking is underpinned by certain principles that have contributed to the development of IPA

methodology (Larkin *et al.*, 2008; Mackey, 2005). A fundamental aspect of Heidegger's analysis in *Being and Time* (2010) is the temporality of existence. Awareness of the connection between past, present and future brings coherence to understanding the meaning of participant experience as a single entity, that of Being in the present and thus, grounds the research in time (Mackey, 2005; Moran, 2000). Transition implies a temporal dimension; students arrive at university shaped by their personal histories, anticipating different possibilities for their futures, but living in a present that is unfamiliar. Seeking an understanding of how the participants navigate transition and adapt to university demands sensitivity to moments where time appears disrupted. IPA expects the researcher to be vigilant to those moments of disturbance that stand out in participant descriptions; attending to these augments an understanding of the experience of time and consequently, what it means to be a learner in HE.

It is also important to acknowledge the temporal dimensions of the research itself. Although concerned with the first-year experience, the accounts shared by participants are not bound by this time frame; personal reflection and imagination stretch time. Equally, it would seem impossible to capture every moment of the first year; interviews provide a lens to explore participant experience at three key points during the year. The data are representative of the participants' thoughts and feelings at that moment alone; the disclosure of meaning can only be found through interpretation (Heidegger, 2010).

Being-in-the-world presents a spatial dimension to understanding the participants' descriptions of experience. Individuals are indelibly located within the world which they inhabit; they are part of their own reality (Heidegger, 2010; Larkin *et al.*, 2008). *Space* is not defined in terms of geographical location; being situated-in-the-world denies the possibility of separating subject [person] and object [world] and meaning arises through individual encounters and interpretation of the world (Heidegger, 2010; Koch, 1995). Awareness of the 'person-in-context' is fundamental to this research; the participants describe experience which they are part of and they articulate this based on personal frames of reference (Larkin *et al.*, 2008; Mezirow, 2000). Additionally, *space* is an expression of proximity where what matters most is brought close to an individual, whilst matters of least concern appear more

distanced (Heidegger 2010; Moran, 2000). Listening to and representing the participant voice in this research was critical in informing my research design; certain aspects of experience are emphasised, whilst others remain subdued. The distancing of IPA was vital in ensuring my own proximal concerns did not obscure those of the participants. For example, personal frustrations with students failing to access tutorial support may have camouflaged the significance of interpersonal relationship and perceptions of self that underpin the issue. Distancing also enabled me to reflect and consider how colleagues might respond to the research findings.

IPA recognises the 'situated-ness' of the researcher and the potential for prejudice to obscure research outcomes (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Larkin *et al.*, 2008). It foregrounds themes that emerge directly through engagement with interview transcripts, ensuring interpretation focuses upon the participant and the phenomena experienced. Lesser concerns are not necessarily ignored, but IPA directs thinking in a manner that avoids the imposition of meaning or the temptation to spotlight the personal concerns of the researcher. IPA achieves sensitivity and responsiveness to the participant experience by encouraging the researcher to adopt a hermeneutic approach.

### 3:3:2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics represents the analytical dimension of phenomenology where meaning is accessed through the interpretation of text, attending to the obvious but penetrating hidden content that may reveal deeper meaning of phenomena (Smith *et al.*, 2013). The participant will share stories already grounded in an a priori world that co-constitutionally shapes their Being, but also directs how they participate and make sense of the world inhabited (Koch, 1995). Interpretation cannot be achieved in the absence of pre-suppositions (Heidegger, 2010) and I possess experience and assumptions that must be acknowledged to protect the authenticity of outcomes. IPA expects the researcher to maintain a clear decision trail; understanding the life-world of the participants must take precedence. Yet awareness and understanding of pre-conceptions may only occur once interpretation is underway, demanding reflexivity on behalf of the researcher.

The dialectic exchange in examining fore-structures is important in ensuring the findings get as close as possible to understanding the participant experience, but they may also reveal previously hidden assumptions, challenging taken-for-granted perceptions about transition and learning in HE. Original discoveries often become concealed by the discourse of tradition (Heidegger, 2010); a process called sedimentation (Husserl, 1931). Amid competing pressures in the work place, accepting the status quo is understandable; a way of unquestioning Being Heidegger characterises as 'falling' (Moran, 2000). Employing hermeneutics allows the researcher to confront complacency and avoid superficial insight. For example, an expository lecture theatre seems to be common practice among staff but the findings suggest this is not an effective mode of learning, despite the structural efficiencies. The accounts prompted reflection on my own duplicity and I questioned moments when I might be the harried lecturer who delivers and leaves.

Initial understanding is aided and conditioned by fore-structures or personal 'horizons' (Moran, 2000). Interpretation engages the researcher in a dialogue where horizons overlap; this 'fusion of horizons' is where new meaning or insight can be located. Horizons open up possibilities for perception; what stands out and what recedes, and how this changes as the researcher [or participant] shifts position (Vessey, 2009). Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' invites the researcher to explore data, to extend meaning beyond what is directly apparent precluding the inclination to project meaning onto a text (Gadamer, 1979). Interpretation in IPA is based in the textual data but it presents different levels of analysis, exploring meaning through descriptive, linguistic and conceptual interrogation to find the most comprehensive understanding of the lived-experience (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Smith, 2004). The meticulous attention to detail has informed my approach to data analysis.

The hermeneutic circle is 'concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole, at a series of levels' (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.28) from considering the word within a sentence, to an extract within an interview, or the interview as part of the entire research study. The process is iterative, involving a back-and-forth movement through the text, offering different perspectives and ways of thinking about the data. Entering and engaging with the interpretive circle should be prioritised over premature exiting of the iterative process.

A positive possibility of the most primordial knowledge is hidden in it which, however, is only grasped in a genuine way when interpretation has understood that its first, constant, and last task is not to let fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be given to it by chance ideas and popular conceptions, but to secure the scientific theme by developing these in terms of the things themselves. (Heidegger, 2010, p.148)

Heidegger reiterates the need for cautious, thorough, deliberation and reflexive engagement by the researcher (Dowling, 2007). The hermeneutic circle is an essential feature of IPA, where the project is to gain insight into a world that has already been understood by the participants, not to acquire new knowledge. It involves a 'double hermeneutic' (Smith *et al.*, 2013); the researcher is interpreting an account given by a participant, who is making sense of his or her experience. Simultaneously, the researcher is attempting to understand phenomena as they are experienced by the participant, but also to illuminate understanding via theoretical perspectives. Achieving a balance is problematic, but resolved by adopting an 'empathetic *and* questioning' hermeneutic approach (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.36). As a researcher, I am conscious of what is happening during interview dialogue, but am also aware of the constant process of interpretation participants are going through to make sense of their day-to-day interaction with learning at university. I am also mindful of the third-order interpretation being made by the reader of this thesis.

### 3:3:3 Idiography

The intention of this research is to gain insight in to the detail of individual students' experience of learning through description and interpretation, situating this research within an idiographic domain (Langdrige, 2007). Appropriating the concepts of 'falling' (Heidegger, 2010) and 'sedimentation' (Husserl, 1931) help to illustrate personal concern with the seeming perpetuation of institutional practice, based on either outdated, or unsubstantiated expectations regarding student learning behaviour. Informed by my experience in education, it is my belief that possibilities for change are most effective when based on a detailed understanding of the phenomena in question and I am apprehensive about the extent to which policy and practice is driven by system-led objectives over student-led needs. My interest lies with the lack of understanding regarding how students experience learning and navigate the complexity of transition to HE. Warnock (1987, cited in Smith, 2004,

p.42) indicates that 'delving deeper into the particular also takes us closer to the universal', meaning findings may prove useful in informing further research or the development of institutional practice. However, pursuing a nomothetic inquiry without a deep, prior understanding of phenomena would seem erroneous. Idiographic research challenges assumptions, indicates possible shortcomings in prevailing theoretical claims and directs thinking in a way that is grounded in the participant voice (Smith *et al.*, 2013).

The merit of idiography reaches beyond its potential as a preparatory base for further research. Warnock's connection between the *particular* and *universal* suggests that through the interrogation of individual participant accounts, it is possible to develop greater empathy for how people cope with the challenges and barriers encountered during experience. It is possible to observe how different aspects of experience may impact upon each other and in this research, where there are six participants, illustrate through IPA analysis points of convergence and divergence within the accounts (Smith *et al.*, 2013). IPA aims to capture 'the quality and texture of individual experience' (Willig, 2013, p.87) that may stimulate thinking about broader institutional practice.

On the one hand, experience is uniquely embodied, situated and perspectival. It is therefore amenable to an idiographic approach. On the other hand, it is also a worldly and relational phenomenon, which offers us a concept of the person which is not quite so discrete and contained as the typical understanding of an 'individual. (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.29)

This is an important point that confirms IPA as an appropriate methodology for answering my research question. Experience is always in-relation-to something and IPA offers access to the personally unique perspective of six year-1 undergraduate students' experience of learning in the shared and relational context of transition to HE.

### **3:4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Examination of my ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspective has established IPA as a suitable methodological approach. In defense of my choice, it

is useful to reflect upon the alternative methodologies considered but dismissed as either the underpinning philosophy or mode of analysis was less suited to the nature of this inquiry. Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an approach centred around action for change (Baum *et al.*, 2006; Bryant, 1996). It employs an iterative, cyclical model of critical enquiry that enables the researcher to work collaboratively with participants, in-situ, to transform practice.

In the action research process, reflection and action are held in dialectical tension, each informing the other through a process of planned change, monitoring, reflection and modification. (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p.206)

The inclusive, experiential and developmental properties of PAR are appealing and the opportunity to work in partnership with key stakeholders make it a powerful mechanism for change. Having used PAR methodology in my Master's dissertation (Teideman, 2006), I am conscious of the potential impact of this approach; however, whilst it includes an exploratory reconnaissance phase, the ability to facilitate PAR successfully is dependent upon having a certain understanding of the issues under scrutiny. This research is concerned with 'finding out'; to launch into PAR without considered prior insight into the phenomena in question would potentially dilute findings, resulting in action based on assumptions and the proposal of weak or unsustainable strategies for change. PAR's emphasis on re-aligning power structures draws on critical theory, adding to its unsuitability for meeting the objectives of this research (Baum *et al.*, 2006). Other interpretive methodologies were considered, specifically, Grounded Theory (GT) which invites the researcher to dissect elements of experience and their inter-relatedness to develop theory regarding the meaning of experience for a specific group of people in a given context (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). Although relevant, the scale and explanatory purpose of GT is inconsistent with my interest in the *particular* and personal meaning of experience.

IPA engages with 'exploring, describing, interpreting and situating' phenomena (Smith *et al.*; 2013, p.40), providing the means to finding out how the participants make sense of their learning experience. Adopting a phenomenological approach brings me as close as possible to the lived-experience of participants and to

preserve this, I have chosen methods that enable participants to talk about how they encounter learning, generating rich data transcripts for analysis.

Employing a double hermeneutic shifts analysis from the particular to the shared, and through levels of interpretation where presuppositions are tested as a corollary to developing meaning (Smith *et al.*; 2013; Willig, 2013). Part of the appeal of IPA is that it encourages a strong commitment to representing the voice of the students, and by conducting a series of interviews over the course of a year, I could revisit specific themes and events and listen to how these unfolded. A characteristic feature of IPA is how it enables experience to 'be expressed in its own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems' (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.32). As a researcher, this involved accepting a period of deliberate ignorance; letting the salient aspects of experience emanate from the participant accounts through inductive and reflexive analysis. This was not always easy when concerns might be resolved instantly; for example, I could have eased participant anxieties relating to writing the first essay by delivering a workshop but understood this would be a temporary and unsustainable reactive intervention that may potentially mask deeper concerns and obscure findings.

The idiographic nature of IPA corresponds with the detailed perspective of experience I desired. The process for analysis and writing exemplified by Smith *et al.* (2013) foregrounds a commitment to the particular within each participant account before undertaking a cross-case analysis of convergent and divergent themes. Only once I felt confident in the subjective representation of participant experience was I able to broaden the scope of interrogation to discuss findings in relation to extant literature and my theoretical framework (Figure 3, p.25). The size of the research sample group is important in determining the nature and detail of the meaning generated from analysis. IPA offers detailed and locally specific data, but analysis has raised questions and possible trends that can be used to inform understanding and contribute to further research investigating sector wide issues of student experience in HE.

The following section draws on work by Smith *et al.* (2013), who have translated insights from phenomenology, hermeneutic and idiographic philosophy into a series

of flexible, non-prescriptive, practical steps that can be used to guide and inform coherent IPA methods. I acknowledge critique that questions whether IPA is indeed a methodology or a qualitative research tool; the dissonance seems to stem from research that reports *using* or *doing* IPA to understand a transcript, foregrounding procedure above interpreting experience (Huff *et al.*, 2014; Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008). By presenting a coherent methodological framework, the ontological, epistemological and theoretical position taken in this research demonstrates the close alignment of IPA's philosophical commitments to the methods employed. In my view, this adds to trustworthiness of the research.

### **3:5 Research Methods**

To answer the research question, 'What are year 1 undergraduate students' experience of learning during the first year in Higher Education?', I have selected methods that are participant-centred, allowing me to gain insight into the lived-experience of individuals during the first year of undergraduate study. The stories they recall place structure on their personal understanding of cognitive, affective and social influences upon learning. By asking participants to describe their experiences of learning and any challenges or barriers they have faced gives access to a personal interpretation of what goes into becoming an academic learner in HE.

The methods can be justified by their ability to deliver the data necessary in accordance with the research methodology. There are two clear elements to this investigation: *semi-structured interviews* constituted the primary research method, supplemented by the optional use of *photo-elicitation* and/or *voice-pods*; elective supplementary methods gave participants flexibility in deciding how they might want to share their stories but without feeling compelled or burdened in their role as a participant.

#### **3:5:1 Semi-Structured Interviews.**

IPA uses transcripts from semi-structured interviews to explore in depth and detail the particulars of participants' 'lived-experience', specifically in this research, critical moments related to the academic learning context. Participants were given the

opportunity to speak openly and at length about issues and concerns on a one-to-one basis with time to reflect upon and expand their answers, eliciting 'rich data' (Smith *et al.*, 2013). An interview involves interaction between researcher and participant, where dialogue is part of the co-construction of the experience being described (Lowes and Prowse, 2001). I accept, but am mindful of the influence of reciprocal interpretation and to minimise prejudice during research, have acknowledged presuppositions and maintained transparency throughout the process of data collection and analysis. IPA encourages reflexivity as an essential component of the hermeneutic process and I have kept a journal throughout my research which I have drawn upon during the writing of this thesis (Appendix A).

Prior to each interview, I prepared a schedule of questions (Appendix B). The purpose of a question is to seek information; 'it addresses itself *to* something, *about* something *for* some purpose', which is consistent with my relativist ontology (Moran, 2000, p.236). To pose a question, we must first have some preconception regarding the subject matter and therefore a question can anticipate a possible answer. Similarly, the way in which a question is asked will direct the content given in the response. The preconceptions that underpin our questions are loaded with our own historicity and cultural assumptions; whilst necessary to formulate the question in the first place, this can have either an enabling or disabling effect on the access gained to the phenomena under examination (Heidegger, 2010). Interaction involves a process of interpretation, where ongoing dialogue between researcher and participant negate any claims that can be made in terms of the data being purely representative of the participant's subjective experience (Lowes and Prowse, 2001).

IPA questions are open, avoid direction, and are free of conjecture (Smith *et al.*, 2013). When questioning, Heidegger (2010) suggests that a good place to start is with how things are in our everyday encounters with them. My interview schedule begins with, '*Tell me about your experience of learning so far / since we last met at university?*' The question assumes the participants have experienced learning but aside from this, it remains open and they could respond from their personal perspective; the structure of the question allowed them to answer in relation to their 'ordinary' and everyday encounters with learning.

The data from this opening question were initially quite descriptive, possibly reflecting the 'inauthentic' way [we] experience most of our everyday lives (Heidegger, 2010). Nevertheless, it put the participants at ease, creating an atmosphere whereby they felt comfortable sharing more troublesome issues later in the interview. It was important not to discount the 'everyday', but my interest lay with exploring challenging aspects of their experience, times when personal concerns and issues were brought into sharp focus. Subsequent questions invited the participants to share the difficulties, barriers and critical moments they experienced and specifically, 'how they felt' about their learning, both in general and in relation to key points of potential stress or anxiety [such as the assessment/examination period]. This as our 'authentic' mode of being (Heidegger, 2010). Understanding how the participants relate to Being at these critical moments, and inviting them to share stories that had not been anticipated proved essential in meeting my thesis outcomes.

The interview process can be viewed as part of experience and, therefore, communicates meaning which develops as initial questions are modified, and prompt questions seek to drill-down and capture specific aspects of a response (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Lowes and Prowse, 2001). It is through an iterative, backward and forward, engagement with the data that layered interpretation advances understanding and enables further, deeper questioning to take place. Across the series of three interviews for each participant, common themes for questions were supported by prompts that responded to previous answers given by each individual, maintaining the idiographic approach taken.

Reflections on the interview process recognise the value of semi-structured interviewing; the schedule ensured consistency, keeping the focus on the research topic, but it also provided flexibility, allowing pursuit of the *particular* emerging from the stories shared by each participant (Langdrige, 2007). Using a structured interview design would impede the ability to explore ideas, whilst an unstructured approach risked narrative that was irrelevant to the research question (Lowes and Prowse, 2001). Smith *et al.* (2013) acknowledge the possibility of using focus groups for data collection which may aid expediency, but the interactional nature of group discourse alters the experiential narrative and risks introducing opinion and jostling

for status. During the interview, responding to requests for clarification required self-awareness on my behalf; my reflective journal was instrumental in foregrounding assumptions, and I felt able to rephrase or expand upon questions without imposing meaning ahead of the participant response. Thoughts about the interview process were recorded in my journal, illustrated in the following extract.

*Bob really struggled to articulate clearly a perception of himself as a learner. The interview included periods of silence while he thought about his response; allowing time, and accepting hesitation seemed important in allowing him to form his answer. He showed difficulty articulating certain concepts and seemed to grapple for language. It felt alien to not interject and be patient; as a teacher I am used to guiding student thinking and working in time frames where knowing when to intervene are second nature. I also come from a background where talking about [my] learning is common and realise this may be the first time Bob has been asked to consider his own perceptions of learning, hence the long pauses. Often Bob clarified an earlier statement when answering a subsequent question; this period of processing suggests he may reflect on how he makes sense of ideas presented and that returning to points of conceptual difficulty in the next interview, may provide greater insight (Bob Interview 1: Week 5).*

My preconceptions were brought into view and assisted with directing the next stage of data collection. Notes made following the second interview with Bob record how he seemed to anticipate some of the questions; the interaction from the first interview seemed to shift his perception of learning from being an outcome he aims to achieve when coaching others, to an activity he is purposefully engaged with. This development represents the co-participation taking place between researcher and participant; there was an increasing depth of conceptual understanding, adding to the richness of data gathered but also illustrating an additional dimension to Bob's changing sense of 'self' as a learner in HE.

### 3:5:2 Photo-elicitation

In photo-elicitation, the researcher introduces photographs into the interview context as a tool to stimulate description of experiences and to expand upon the dialogue generated by the semi-structured interview questions. The researcher selects images that either act as visual inventories, as depictions of past events, or that portray intimate dimensions of the social world (Harper, 2002). The symbolism

triggers feelings and memories which communicate a different aspect of experience that can complement data collected verbally (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Harper, 2002). I felt photo-elicitation might be a useful tool for engaging participants with articulating some of the more complex, or less familiar aspects of their learning experience. However, I was mindful that if I provided images, it would act in a similar way to asking a leading question; thus, I adapted the process, taking an inductive approach, making it commensurate with IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Clark-Ibanez, 2004). The participants were invited to take or select between 3 and 6 photographs that could relate to content, emotional or social aspects of their learning experience, or reflect their response to critical moments that had taken place during the interim period between scheduled interviews (Appendix C).

Three out of six participants opted to utilise photo-elicitation and shared images during the second interview only. There was a striking difference between the subject matter and associated dialogue that ensued. Bob presented an image of his desk taken during revision for semester one examinations; his concern centred around the stress and anxiety of possible failure. Fiona shared a collage of family and friends taken during the year before enrolment; it represented a time when she felt 'happy' raising tensions between her perception of 'self' and how well she was coping with the demands of separation and adapting to university life. Eddie had created a 30-minute long video intended to illustrate the trials of living off-campus, but the mid-point included his dance rehearsal; consciously or not, he began to share the transformative effect dance was having on him. For these participants, photo-elicitation acted as a powerful data collection method; they felt empowered to speak about what mattered most to them in a way that emphasised affective qualities that may have been more difficult to access through words alone. The use of images disclosed multiple meanings held within experience that may have remained dormant (Clark-Ibanez, 2004), providing insight into the complexity of transition.

### 3:5:3 Voice-pods

A voice-pod is a 2-minute (maximum) reflection on learning recorded by the participant on their mobile phone which is shared with the researcher via a secure

email account. Voice-pods are used to sustain research momentum and capture any critical moments, focusing on positive learning experiences as well as any difficulties they may have encountered and overcome (Appendix C). None of the research participants opted to use this supplementary method; they either forgot [Bob] or preferred to speak about their experience in the comfort of the research environment [Eddie; Fiona].

### **3:6 Participant Recruitment**

Research participants were selected according to the perspective they would be able to share about their experience of learning during the first year of undergraduate study in HE. (Smith *et al.*, 2013). I wanted to capture the most contemporary insight possible and therefore decided to recruit a purposive sample of six 18-21-year-old students within the first three weeks of enrolment and follow their progress as their first year unfolded. The research is intended to inform my own and colleagues' practice, generating locally specific data; thus, all participants were PE students, reflecting my own and the University School's principal subject area. The gender ratio was 50:50, proportionate to the cohort who started their undergraduate degree in October 2014; the only exclusion was age.

Homogeneity is important for IPA; the sample share similarities in terms of being direct entrants, context, and exposure to the first-year experience, enabling access to the phenomena in question and the development of meaningful insight. It was then possible to examine in detail patterns of convergence and divergence between participants, maintaining the idiographic focus consistent with IPA, but with the potential for transferability of findings to persons in comparable contexts (Smith *et al.*, 2013).

Participation was voluntary and students could withdraw from the research, without giving a reason or incurring consequences at any point, although none chose to do so. To reduce the pressure students may have felt to take part, a colleague who does not lecture year 1 PE undergraduates introduced the research and invited students to participate. During the recruitment process, the intentions of the research were shared and the requirements of participation explained (frequency of

interviews, bi-weekly voice-pods/photo-elicitation). Methods of data collection, storage and dissemination of research findings, structures for securing participant confidentiality, privacy and anonymity were also shared so that students could make an informed decision whether to participate or not. At this point, a Participant Information form (Appendix D) was distributed giving details of the intended research, allowing potential participants the opportunity to reflect on the proposed study before deciding to participate.

Students had a week to reflect upon the research proposal and ask questions addressed to my colleague, before declaring their interest in becoming a research participant, by returning the slip at the bottom of the information sheet in an un-named envelope, marked with their gender, to my colleague. Fifteen envelopes were returned; three of each gender were randomly selected by my colleague in view of the students and passed (un-opened) to me, meaning the identity of the participants was known only by me. The remaining envelopes were retained and stored securely in reserve should any participant have chosen to withdraw.

The primary concern of IPA is with 'a detailed account of individual experience' (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.51) and a sample of six participants is deemed appropriate for the development of rich analysis that meets IPA's commitment to the idiographic whilst illustrating meaningful points of convergence and divergence. Due to the complexity of phenomena, high quality IPA at doctorate level is achieved through the number of interviews held with each participant rather than by increasing the sample size, which would risk superficial findings. In this thesis, each participant was interviewed three times, totalling eighteen interviews, and meeting the recommendations made by Smith *et al.* (2013). This research has benefited from the longitudinal approach as it provides insight that is locally specific with transferable potential. However, further research could explore the experience of learning from multiple perspectives by engaging participants from a different location, or by extending the timeframe to access retrospective data from the sample group at graduation and beyond.

Once the sample group was identified, I emailed each participant individually confirming their selection and attached a Participant Consent Form (Appendix E).

Participants were instructed to read the consent form before printing a hard copy, signing it and returning it to me for secure storage in a lockable cabinet. The recruitment process was completed by the end of week four. Participants did not know who else was involved in the study and I understand they remain unaware.

I have compiled vignettes for each participant, using their research pseudonyms to provide the reader with a brief portrait of the sample group (Table 1). Although each participant meets the inclusion criteria, it is possible to recognise the diversity within the group, underlining the significance of attending to the particular and responding to every student as an individual.

<p><b>Alan</b> is an 18-year-old male of white British background. He grew up in north London in a middle-class family familiar with HE. He describes his family as 'more bankers and math oriented' and they have degrees in mathematics and statistics. Alan studied 'A' levels and BTEC at college. He originally wanted to become a police officer, however, his love of sport and experience at school led him to pursue a career in PE teaching. He attended an interview for the PE with QTS degree and was offered a place but failed his Professional Skills tests. This led him to select the 3-year Physical Education degree as an alternative. Alan attended the University summer school in the August before enrolment. He lives in halls of residence.</p>
<p><b>Bob</b> is an 18-year-old male of white British background. He grew up in Southampton and is the first in his family to attend university which he describes as 'the unknown'. He studied BTEC at college and is a keen basketball player. Bob applied late to University (June), encouraged by his mother on the off chance he might get a place. Bob was initially on the Sports Science degree but transferred during the second week of semester 1 on to the PE degree because he was not enjoying the mathematical emphasis and was attracted by the social science and practical learning content in the PE degree. He lives in halls of residence.</p>
<p><b>Clare</b> is a 19-year-old female of white British background. Clare had started a Drama degree at a different university but left after three months. Clare had been living off-campus, had found it difficult to socialise and was not engaging with the degree. Clare spent some time working in a shop before travelling to the USA and doing Camp America, where she realised she wanted to pursue her passion for sport and teaching, which led to her enrolment on to PE. Clare grew up in a middle-class family in a Kent town and is the first to attend university. Clare studied 'A' levels at her school sixth form and she lives in halls of residence.</p>
<p><b>Deb</b> is an 18-year-old female of Black ethnic background. Deb grew up in inner city Birmingham. She is from a single parent family and lives with her mother. Deb is the first in her immediate family to go to university. Although her father's side of the family have significant experience of HE, they are estranged and she has limited contact. Deb is conscious of the change in environment, moving from an urban city-scape to a semi-rural location. Deb studied 'A' levels at sixth form and has a strong background in dance. Deb lives in halls of residence.</p>
<p><b>Eddie</b> is an 18-year-old male of white British background. He grew up in an industrial city in north-east England in an area of deprivation. Eddie has a large family of eight siblings and is the first alongside his sister to go to university; however, she attends a local university, whilst he has chosen to study some distance from home. Eddie's father was wary about [him] going to university, having left school at 15 without any qualifications. Eddie studied BTEC at college and has dyslexia. He attended an interview for the PE with QTS degree and was offered a place but failed his Professional Skills tests. This led him to select the 3-year Physical Education degree as an alternative. He lives off-campus with three other students on different degree courses.</p>
<p><b>Fiona</b> is an 18-year-old female of white British background. Fiona grew up in a small town in rural Suffolk. Fiona's parents are divorced; she lives with her mother, brother, step-father and step-siblings who are the same age as her. There is limited experience of HE among her extended family but alongside Fiona, both her step-siblings have started university this year. She is also very close to her best friend who has gone travelling in Australia. Fiona is passionate about sport and is determined to become a Physical Education teacher. Fiona studied 'A' levels at her school sixth form. Fiona lives off-campus in a shared house.</p>

Table 1: Research participants: pseudonyms and vignettes

### **3:7 Ethics**

#### 3:7:1 Ethical Practice

Ethical considerations for this research were prepared in accordance with the British Educational Research (BERA) guidelines (2011), the University 'Research Ethics; Tier 1 Approval Protocol' (2011b) and the University Faculty 'Ethics Submission Guidelines' (2011/12). Further guidance was taken from the University Faculty 'Code of Good Practice in Research' (2011a), the School of Education 'Thinking about ethics for your research project in Education' (University, 2014e) and wider literature reading. My research idea was discussed with my Head of School and formal approval for my research plan was granted by the University. Direct quotations that have been drawn from my University documents have been subject to an online search. The results gave no identification of my University.

Having clear procedures for securing anonymity, privacy and confidentiality is essential and my commitment to maintaining a high level of integrity regarding these areas was made explicit to the participants (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Atkins and Wallace, 2012; Petre and Rugg, 2011). Data collected as part of this research have been treated in confidence and suitably anonymised. All identifiers have been removed; pseudonyms were used throughout the writing, and will remain for publication and dissemination processes. All identifiers of the context have been removed from information and consent forms and associated documents. The research took place in a university in the south of England where there are several institutions that deliver PE degrees; thus, reference to the subject area is not deemed an identifiable characteristic.

The privacy of both the participants and researcher was respected throughout the study. All questions were research directed and if a participant did not wish to answer or expand on a response, they were not expected to do so. The interviews took place in a neutral location at a time agreed by the participant. I was mindful that the first year at university can be challenging and I steered my participants away from telling anything that was not related to the research. Any names or references made by the participant to other individuals were not included in any transcript or

writing. The content of interviews was not discussed, either with students, colleagues or other individuals.

By giving consent, participants were aware that the data they provided would be used only for this research, but that findings may be shared either through seminars or future journal publications. All data have been used sensitively and with integrity. Each participant had the right to withdraw from the research at any point without prejudice. Had they decided to withdraw before the analysis, they also held the right to withdraw consent to use their data; at which point, it would have been destroyed. All data used in the research have been stored securely on a password protected computer that only I have access to. It will be retained for a period of one year after thesis submission, after which it will be destroyed. Each participant will be able to read the research before it is made available publicly.

I will highlight at this point that my principal role at the University is that of a lecturer and with that, I have a certain responsibility for the health and well-being of students who are studying on my course. The parameters of the research clearly focus on the experience of learning, but I was prepared to suspend an interview had I sensed a participant was uncomfortable, or expressed the desire to make a disclosure. The focus of this research held little potential for causing risk or harm; however, I was conscious that talking about a subject where the participant may be facing difficulty could cause stress or anxiety. I had no cause to suspend or seek guidance from my Doctorate supervisors regarding any ongoing ethical considerations.

### 3:7:2 Insider research

One of the objectives of the Doctoral programme is to research an area of professional practice either within or that directly relates to the institution in which the researcher is situated. This instantly raises concerns regarding the nature and challenges of conducting insider as opposed to outsider research. Insider research presents both advantages and disadvantages that require full consideration in the planning of the study and its continuation through to publication and dissemination of findings. The key advantage is that insider research affords the opportunity to positively influence change within one's own workplace; however, it also presents

dilemmas relating to methodology and the relationships that exist between the researcher and research participants (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). These extend further if the outcomes of the research include criticism of practice with potential areas of conflict arising between colleagues and in relation to established organisational structures. Before starting a research project, Atkins and Wallace highlight 'insider/outsider, role identity, boundary conflict, confidentiality, relationships, power relations and impartiality' (2012, p.48) as factors that should be addressed.

I am aware that by researching my own professional context, tensions exist between the multiple roles expected from my professional practice and that of a researcher. I am the Course Leader and regularly lecture students who became my research participants. This position has several implications for the research design, which I have addressed. Having dual roles (as a lecturer and researcher) within the research context predicates acknowledgment of the relationship that exists between lecturer/student and researcher/participant, respectively. As a lecturer, I have a position of authority which involves problematic issues of power and I am aware of the impact this may have on participants. As a result, I have ensured that the research process was open and transparent, underpinned by principles of trustworthiness, fairness and equity throughout.

Holstein and Gubrium (2003) highlight the need for researchers to be aware of their position within the research process and to consider that respondents, in turn, might also be wondering what the researcher's position is. To address this, I created and maintained as much distance as possible between my role as a lecturer and that of a researcher. I planned for research-oriented interaction to take place in a neutral environment in a building outside of the formal lecturing space. Interviews were held at a time that suited the participants and I dressed in 'regular' clothing (I normally wear sports clothing). Any communication during the interview process was research based and participants were made aware that should they wish to raise issues relating to my role as a course leader, lecturer or academic tutor that a separate appointment should be made following the university tutorial booking process.

Drake and Heath (2008) raise concerns that by agreeing to participate, research subjects may expect additional credit as a consequence of their involvement. All modules that I teach on are tutor team based; therefore, I ensured I was not responsible for module tutorial supervision or the marking of any of the participants' work. Neither did I represent the participants at university Exam Board, Course Board or any other procedural meeting concerning their academic progress; a colleague took on this role on my behalf and I 'declared an interest', as instructed by the General Examination and Assessment Regulations (GEAR) (University, 2014c). During the recruitment process, it was stipulated that taking part in the research would have no impact upon grades and that assessments would be made and overseen by lecturing staff other than myself. I reiterated my role as a researcher throughout the research to the participants and my colleagues.

Researching in an environment where relationships are already established can hold both advantages and disadvantages. Humphrey states:

Researching professional education from a position of an insider educator-researcher may be a particularly sensitive enterprise given that the audiences for such research can include prospective and current students, colleagues in one's home territory and elsewhere, and regulators in professional bodies and government circles. (2013, p.573)

I have established relationships with colleagues, and although the research does not directly require their involvement as participants, I relied on their assistance with recruitment and securing ethical practice in relation to assessment. I am aware that colleagues will be interested to know more about the research which will be of benefit once at the stage of dissemination and potential further action, but the findings may conflict with the views and opinions held by them, especially if they dispute long standing practices and beliefs. By taking a phenomenological approach, I am conscious of my interpretation of data being only one of many possible views regarding a situation, but the presentation of the research still needs to be handled respectfully and with sensitivity to others. Any action taken needed to be transparent and have a rational purpose.

One is necessarily positioned by prevailing political ideologies, as are one's research respondents, colleagues and friends. Thus, people's behaviour is

driven by political stratagem, and so the research can never be 'clean', 'neutral', 'objective'. (Drake and Heath, 2008, p.141)

The act of becoming a researcher in my own workplace altered the way I identify with colleagues and vice versa. Establishing distance between my professional role and that of a researcher effectively re-positioned me 'outside' of the day-to-day working professional group; I distinguished with both colleagues and participants when I was 'working' and when I was 'researching' and felt this was respected throughout the study. Emotionally, I was prepared to suppress any sensitivity I may have felt in relation to criticism from students or colleagues but found this was not necessary in this instance.

This research explored year 1 undergraduate experiences of learning, specifically focusing on the 18-21 age group. The researcher/participant relationship in this context has characteristics that I expected to evolve during the study. Issues of power and the motivation behind participation were of primary concern. The research backdrop is a period of transition and adjustment for the participants; for some, it was the first time they have lived away from home and aside from Clare, it was their first experience of HE. As their Course Leader, I have responsibility for supporting all students during the practicalities of orientation and induction in the first few days and weeks of the semester. During this time, I was conscious of participants forming an impression of me, possibly based on their experience of authority figures in school or college; some looked to me for pastoral care. I believe this is a significant time in the early stages of undergraduate study when the relationships that are formed can greatly influence the success or failure of an individual. My perspective is expanded upon in the rationale for this research and justifies researching my own students. Recognition of the duality of roles I hold further emphasises the need to create distance and that my position as a researcher was made clear to participants throughout the study.

Whilst participants were aware that they stood to make no accredited gains through participation, I was conscious that students may have felt inclined to take part to make a good impression. I minimised this by enlisting the help of a colleague during the recruitment process and participants were not made aware of my identity until

the sample group had been selected. Atkins and Wallace (2012) also raise the possibility that during the research period, the researcher and participants will develop a relationship that 'may result in the research participants being presented in an unrealistically favourable light at the reporting stage' (2012, p.52). In my opinion, this would be unethical and undermine the trustworthiness of the research. I accept that interpretation of the findings will be subjective due to my epistemological perspective and position as an insider researcher, but the systematic approach of IPA has ensured a credible and reliable research process. I am also confident in the supportive skill of my supervisors, who would highlight any issues had they arisen.

There are further issues regarding the nature of the stories shared during the interview process. I am conscious that participants may edit stories based on their impression of what I may want to hear and may feel reticence in sharing difficulties or making criticism which they feel may impact upon the student/lecturer relationship. This research sits in the interpretive paradigm which:

Strives to view situations through the eyes of participants, to catch their intentionality and their interpretations of frequently complex situations, their meaning systems and the dynamics of the interaction as it unfolds. (Cohen *et al.*, 2011, p.444)

When interpreting an account, it is important not to settle on the first or most satisfactory understanding. Stories and the language used to tell that story can have multiple meanings and thus, re-working and re-visiting the transcripts was essential. Equally, as the researcher I was aware of any potential bias I might bring to an analysis. Being explicit and respectful of the relationship between meaning and its interpretation by specific individuals, especially the research participants, are presented as solutions to bias (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

It is essential that the participants felt confident in the researcher/participant relationship, particularly the commitment to confidentiality. I needed to be a sufficiently trustworthy figure in the eyes of the participants for the duration of the research, but also in the continuation of my role as a lecturer to engage them in 'the kind of dialogue which would open a window' onto their experiences of learning

(Humphrey, 2013, p.574). It was imperative I remained neutral and did not allow my own ideas to cloud the research, acknowledging my own history and interest in the subject matter. The researcher/participant relationship may influence the nature of student stories, but it can be argued that this is an accepted feature of insider research. Mercer (2007) suggests that insider researchers are less likely to have an impact on the research environment as they blend more easily into the research setting where the research is being undertaken, but interviews still require an interaction between the researcher and participant. I have prior understanding of the research context and perhaps may be better placed to pick up hidden meaning when participants are describing their experience of learning. It was essential that I maintained reflexive engagement with data and that the research process remained transparent. Research will be shared with the University School and it is anticipated that findings will contribute to the development of teaching and learning strategy and improve practice. Participants have been made aware of how the findings may be used and can feel secure in the ethical handling of data and safeguards that underpin the research process and beyond.

### 3:7:3 Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

My research raises the issue of subjectivity and the exploration of unquantifiable experiences associated with qualitative research methodology. As an insider researcher, positivist concerns of objectivity and detachment are 'impossible and perhaps undesirable in human research' (van Heugten, 2004, p.207). Instead, it becomes the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the process is 'systematic, rigorous, credible and reliable' (Atkins and Wallace, 2012, p.51). It is not my intention to test any existing theories, nor is it my aim to develop a testable theory; instead, my phenomenological approach depends upon the presentation of conclusions that are firmly grounded in the data (Koch, 1993). As a social constructionist, I accept that interpretation may vary; meaning is particular to an individual, created through interaction and influenced by our preconceptions.

The themes emerging from the text are not always the same for researchers and readers because perfect agreement when analysing the same material would not be expected. (Koch, 1993, p.92)

Yet for qualitative research to be credible, the reader should be able to follow the decision trail taken by the researcher to come to the conclusions made.

To establish the trustworthiness and integrity of this research, I have drawn upon the criteria for qualitative inquiry, credibility, transferability and dependability, proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1989). Credibility demands reflexive awareness throughout the process; I have kept a research journal which documents interactions, my response to specific moments and records the ongoing research process. I have also ensured participants had the opportunity to review data, verify the accuracy and confirm the analysis is a true representation of their experiences.

Transferability demands that the researcher includes sufficient contextual information to enable readers to find the research meaningful and that the findings can fit into similar contexts (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). This research explores year 1 undergraduate PE student experiences of learning during a period of transition and adaptation to HE, targeting 18-21-year-old direct entrants. A rationale justifying the significance of this choice in relation to improving practice has been given, and the research documents the evolving learning relationship between the participants and context. IPA provided a secure structure for transcription and an iterative link has been maintained between data, analysis and discussion, allowing the reader to trace back details and follow developments in the participant experiences.

Critical interrogation of participant accounts takes the researcher beyond a descriptive presentation of phenomena and into the realm of implied meaning. Willig suggests that:

While higher levels of interpretation enrich the research by generating new insights and understanding, they also give rise to ethical issues around the imposition of meaning and giving/denying voice to the research participant'. (2013, p.63)

Reflexivity and consistent use of IPA guidance on the inductive process has minimised the impact my own views and opinions might have had on the data. IPA provides a systematic method for the interpretation of data and documents the decision trail involved in the analysis. The dependability of the research has been

secured through discussion of the theoretical and methodological choices made during the study (Koch, 1993). The use of a trio of theoretical lenses to question the data also provides a framework that shows how interpretations and conclusions have been drawn; these are 'Instrumental and communicative learning' (Mezirow, 1990), 'Self-determination theory' (Deci and Ryan, 1985), and 'Situated learning theory' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). In summary, 'signposts indicating research decisions and influences [are] present throughout the study and the entire study functions as an inquiry audit' (Koch, 1993, p.93). The aims of this study were:

1. To find out what it is like to be an 18-year-old and becoming a learner in Higher Education.
2. To describe and interpret through the stories of individual students how learning is experienced during year 1 of undergraduate study.
3. To provide insight into and enhance understanding of students' experiences of learning during year 1 undergraduate study in Higher Education.
4. To develop understanding of the means by which students are supported in the transition to and during the early stages of learning in Higher Education.

The research provides a constructed reality of participant experiences representative of specific points in time. I acknowledge that through IPA I bring my own preconceptions and experience to the data and as an insider researcher, I was a participant in the research process. Nonetheless, by recognising the ethical issues inherent in qualitative research I have committed to research that is rigorous and trustworthy.

### **3:8 Data Collection**

The aims of my research involve understanding *becoming* a learner, *transition*, and experience *during* year 1, which implied the need for a longitudinal approach where each participant was interviewed on a one-to-one basis at three points during the first year of study (week 5, week 15 and week 30). Taking this approach gave the possibility of capturing temporal dimensions of adaptation and change.

IPA is concerned with examining subjective experience of 'something' focusing on moments where ordinary 'everyday' experience becomes an experience of significance (Smith *et al.*, 2013). The timing of the research interviews divides the first year into periods where each participant contextually had experienced similar challenges associated with settling in, learning and assessment ensuring consistency in what the participants could speak about. I felt it was important to apprehend proximal concerns as close to the moment of experiencing as possible; before the participants had potentially resolved their dilemma or the feeling of 'what it is like' became clouded by memory. IPA intends to get close to the lived experience of others and each interview provides an awareness of the person-in-context, situating phenomena and eliciting a sense of being in the present. Employing a series of three interviews per participant facilitated understanding of temporal disruption, the choices they encountered and made in becoming a learner in HE, and how learning proceeded as each participant journeyed through the first year at university.

Interviews were held in a pre-booked room, in a quiet and neutral setting away from the learning environment; furniture was arranged informally and I had changed my clothing from my daily sportswear into smart casual dress. Symbols of everyday roles were removed to create a professional, yet welcoming research setting (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). These measures were useful in establishing and maintaining the researcher/participant relationship; I work in a bustling and noisy environment and felt it was imperative to negate any possibility of being interrupted or giving occasion for non-participants to question the activity of those involved. I felt able to attend closely to the words of the participants, to probe, clarify, and check understanding without time pressures, and give precedence to their experiential expertise (Smith *et al.*, 2013).

Each interview began with the same opening question, 'Can you tell me about your experience of learning?' with the addition of 'since we last met' for the second and third interviews. This was effective in establishing rapport; all participants spoke freely about what mattered most to them, drawing on photographs as prompts to help illustrate concerns if they chose to. Their answers allowed me to adapt the interview schedule in a flexible, personalised manner, incorporating their concerns

and responding to cues in an inductive way to delve into a particularly intriguing answer. At times, the participants needed reassurance that their answers were important, initially expressing worries about repetition or hesitation; but as the process developed, there was a clear sense of them relaxing, taking time to reflect, and becoming confident in returning to expand on previous answers. I took care not to interject when participants spoke about experience or events that had resonance with my own personal history as a student; I felt this was important in keeping the focus on the participant lifeworld (Smith *et al.*, 2013).

It was interesting to observe how with each successive interview, the participants started to become familiar with the process and type of questions being used; I was unsure of the impact their ability to anticipate might have on the data collected. The prompts used for each participant in subsequent interviews were planned in response to the data they had shared previously. Reflecting on this suggests an emerging, year-long dialogue about learning, framed within three interviews of between 1 and 2 hours' duration. The participants seemed to be reflecting on their interview experience and on learning; whether this meant they started to experience learning differently is an area for future research, but by the final interview, they settled quickly into giving answers of depth.

Interviews were recorded on a secure, password protected tablet that only I have access to. Audio recording captures the entire interview, making full and accurate transcription possible (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). I considered using video and whether analysis of body language may add a useful dimension to the data but felt the potential to inhibit, or distract was too great. For the same reason, I decided not to make field notes during the interview, preferring to reflect and record any contextual observations in my journal. IPA intends to interpret the meaning contained within the participant's account of experience and this is effectively and most commonly accessed using audio (Smith *et al.*, 2013). I experienced no problems or disruptions throughout the data collection process.

I transcribed the recordings during the period between scheduled interviews. Doing this myself was very time consuming but it involved listening carefully and engaging line-by-line with the data; this brought me closer to the text and I became conscious

of phrasing, hesitation, repetition of certain words, emphasis or tone. Transcription also provided a sense of the 'whole' and started to trigger early thoughts about what each participant was saying alongside the opportunity to recognise any personal connections and pre-suppositions. Transcribing began the iterative hermeneutic process; it allowed immersion in the text and therefore sensitivity to the idiographic nature of the participant accounts. I developed a relationship with the text and viewed the accounts as being from six individuals. Shared themes begin to emerge but the perspective on these themes were individually different: a result of their personal historicity, prior experience and meaning making abilities. Initial thoughts were noted in my journal and used to inform the planning of subsequent interview schedules, giving me the ability to pursue individual points of interest; but conscious of importing ideas, I refrained from engaging with structured analysis until I had completed the data collection process in full.

Once complete, I met each participant individually and provided them with a copy of their transcripts so that they could read, check and confirm the accuracy. Transcripts were saved and stored securely on a password protected computer that only I have access to. Images shared via photo-elicitation were labelled with the participant pseudonym, dated and stored in a secure, lockable cabinet available for use as a data source during analysis. The images contain identifiable features and are therefore not shown in this thesis and will not be published to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the study.

### **3:9 Data Analysis (IPA)**

The principles for conducting a phenomenological analysis have been developed into a practical research methodology by several writers (Willig, 2013; Langridge, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) and this analysis draws on guidance provided by Smith *et al.* (2013). IPA involves a systematic, step-by-step interrogation of transcripts 'moving from the particular to the shared, and from the descriptive to the interpretative' (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.79). The researcher sustains focus on the person-in-context, using an iterative and inductive cycle to gain insight into how participants make sense of experience. I had previously used IPA methodology during my final Stage 1 Doctorate assignment and was familiar with the analytic

process benefiting from opportunity to review, reflect upon, and improve my technique, especially my understanding of the different levels of interpretation possible through IPA (Smith, 2004).

In preparation for analysis, the transcripts had been formatted onto a numbered, line-by-line table, with wide margins where notes from each analytic step could be recorded. Using this structure enables the reader to trace the decision-making process and contextualise references to participant accounts by accessing the line numbers. Smith *et al.* (2013) acknowledge the functional benefit of clearly defined steps to help guide IPA; however, their recommendations are not prescriptive and they actively encourage the researcher to engage with text in a flexible and dynamic way. During analysis, I found myself moving back and forth through the text, changing my perspective by drilling down into specific sentences and then retreating to view the wider context as such analysis became less about process, and more about thinking creatively in a bid to capture the *particular* experience of each participant. To avoid ambiguity, I have described the process of analysis by adopting the steps outlined by Smith *et al.* (2013) and provide a worked example of transcript analysis to help illustrate the IPA method employed (Figure 4, page 66).

### 3:9:1 Step 1: Reading and re-reading

I began by listening to the whole interview; I felt immersing myself in the participant account would provide a renewed sense of the 'whole', which was important following the transcription phase. I became sensitive to the manner of expression; all participants were hugely enthusiastic, open, and wanting to share their stories of experience. I then read the transcript in full a couple of times before 'sleeping on it'. Time before starting formal analysis gave distance; it allowed content to 'settle' and pre-suppositions come to the fore and be acknowledged in my journal.

Before initial noting, I listed my most powerful recollections. Recording these helped to foreground pre-suppositions and set them aside, helping to maintain focus on the data (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Listing the recollections exposed the structural patterns in the narrative, highlighting where features that appear at different points in the data potentially knit together and any contradictions made. Often a participant would

clarify an earlier statement when answering a later question. General concepts were noted with 'stand out' specific examples; for example: Fiona demonstrates a shift in her perception of herself as a learner by contrasting the support and expected mode of working given at school with the idea of 'doing it yourself' as an independent learner at university. I became aware of the dynamic interplay between description, explanation and the significance of feelings within the participant accounts.

### 3:9:2 Step 2: Initial noting (Exploratory comments)

Initial noting engages the researcher in a comprehensive and detailed exploration of the interview transcript, compiling meticulous comments that examine the descriptive, linguistic and conceptual content held within the text (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Each provides a distinct way of engaging with the text, but should not be viewed in isolation; together they provide a series of lenses through which the researcher can push analysis and access 'thick' data that closely represent the participant's lifeworld (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Willig, 2013). I completed this part of the analysis using hard copy transcripts which made it possible to move fluidly through the text, make connections, notice emphasis and respond to contradictions (Appendix DS1). Figure 4 illustrates how I used colour to highlight words, phrases and sentences, whilst keeping notes in the right-hand margin; the result is a dialogue that questions the meaning of the text from my own, but more importantly, from the participant's perspective.

Descriptive comments focus on, and remain faithful to the explicit meaning of what matters to the participant. Consistent with phenomenology, the intention is to provide a literal description of phenomena such as 'relationships, processes, places, events, values and principles' (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.83) to find out what the experience of [these] phenomena are *like* for the participant. Comments recognise the situated and relational aspects of experience manifest through description, explanation and emotional referents. Capturing the participants' subjective experience without resorting to a superficial 're-telling' involved deeper questioning to find the nuance within the content. In Figure 4, Clare describes her lack of experience in certain subject areas.

<b>Key</b>
Right column
<b>Step 2: Initial noting (Exploratory comments)</b>
<b>Yellow</b> = Descriptive comments.
<b>Green</b> = <i>Linguistic comments</i> .
<b>Blue</b> = <i>Conceptual comments</i> .
Left column
<b>Step 3: Emergent themes</b>

Emergent Themes	Can you tell me about possibly being challenged to learn something new?	Exploratory Comments
238		
239		
240	OAA has been a big challenge for me because I	Lack of experience in OAA
241	thought I couldn't do hikes and camping and all that,	Repetition; swings between 'can't' and 'can'.
242	and it's kind of like you can. Also psychology I hated	Improving in psychology
243	but now I am getting to grips with it and it's becoming	Changing perception of 'self'; prior / current identity
244	you can do it. At first I was I don't want to go to	A shift in confidence (ability) to meet demands of university.
245	university because I don't think I am going to be able	Shift to a positive mindset
246	to do it whereas now I'm like yeah, I think you need to	Expands by describing positive thinking.
247	think that you can and then you will, whereas if you	Questions self; wrestling with overcoming mental barrier to learning.
248	think that you can't; that's what I used to think. If you	
249	think that you can't then you won't be able to do it	
250	whereas if you have a mentality that is saying no you	
251	can do it, you are more likely to try and to want to get	Idea of taking control
252	it. I think having a gap year, like in Drama I was	Previous inclination to find excuses for not doing work.
253	thinking I can't do it so I didn't, I didn't try. Like my	
254	essay they gave me I was I can't do it, I'm not going to	
255	do it. I had put every excuse like someone in my	
256	family was ill so that was my excuse for not doing it.	Sense of shame / embarrassment. Not only
257	That's not an excuse; you still need to do it; whereas	acknowledging her own transformation; but wanting to tell [others] me.
258	here I haven't put an excuse yet. I've had the essay	
259	and I'm right I am going to do it. I am going to say I	Being pro-active; motivating herself (driven)
260	can do it so I will do it and I've done it now and you	Has not made an excuse here (yet).
261	feel so relieved after you have done it. Like in	Describes her relief at having tackled the first essay.
262	psychology, I can't do it and then you are thinking;	Emotional tone; emphasizes 'relieved'.
263	someone in my house was saying I can't do it and I	
264	was you can. It's like someone else telling you that	The influence of 'others' on motivation to work as well as your own desire to complete it.
265	you can so right, ok, I can. It is not like you have to	
266	have the motivation in you but also having someone	Issues of questioning her own ability.
267	else telling you as well. Yeah, I can do it. I kept on	Realising the importance of others as instruments in personal transformation
268	going to my PE teachers as well 'I don't know if I can	
269	go to university' and they were what's stopping you?	Impact of a mentor (providing mental support).
270	Having the belief someone else has in you and also	Emerging clarity; success linked to belief.
271	the belief you have it's a big thing.	

**Figure 4: Worked example of transcript analysis (Clare: Interview 1)**

The content reveals assumptions where she doubts her ability; there are idiosyncratic patterns to her speech where she constantly shifts between a reactive and proactive train of thought. The influence of a mentor and peers is hinted at and there is profound emotive questioning. Attending closely to the things that constitute experience gave an entry point into the participant stories, but also ensured their centrality as I engaged with the more interpretative aspects of noting.

Language and content are closely entwined; attending to the use of 'pronoun, pauses, laughter, functional aspects of language, repetition, tone, [and] degree of fluency' (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.88) expose the way participants encounter and make sense of experience. I found linguistic comments most useful as a bridge between description and more abstract, conceptual interpretation. In Figure 4, Clare repeatedly juxtaposes 'I can't' with 'I can', which prompted thinking about issues of confidence and self-efficacy. Noticing metaphor was helpful in untangling meaning when participants found it difficult to express concerns.

Conceptual comments involve an interpretative interaction with the data where the researcher's gaze is directed towards finding the broader meaning of participant experience (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Interpretation is speculative, often demanding a return to descriptive and linguistic features in the text to clarify understanding of the participant's concern. Maintaining hermeneutic engagement with text ensured a clear thread to my thinking; I was conscious of my own historicity at this stage, where personal experience and knowledge of context operated as a conduit for examination, but only to question and understand the participant lifeworld. Abstraction brought temporal features of experience into view. I needed to pause and step away from the text to mull over ideas; I often found myself asking further questions to refine my thinking: What are they actually saying? Is there a contradiction here? Why are they repeating or emphasising certain statements and what is the emotional significance of this? It was useful to 'flip' a statement; in Figure 4, Clare seems to be speaking about empowerment, but this could also represent anxiety from feeling out of control.

Making exploratory notes was time consuming and complex; data had grown exponentially but this provisional stage of analysis had initiated the process needed to make sense of the participants, making sense of experience.

### 3:9:3 Step 3: Emergent Themes

The next stage of analysis involves the development of emergent themes that embody each section of the text (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Willig, 2013). At this point, Smith *et al.* (2013) remind us of the I and P in IPA; the method is 'interpretive' and 'phenomenological' and to make sense of the data, the researcher must at some point step away from the participant to take a more central role in organising and interpreting the analysis. This is part of the hermeneutic circle and the data come back together during the writing up stage. I took sections of the transcript and focused on the exploratory comments, searching for interrelationships, connections and patterns, but taking care to sustain a reflexive stance and remain true to the participant experience. Themes were recorded in the left-hand margin of the transcript. Each theme can be traced back through the analysis to the lines in the transcript itself. The hermeneutic circle (whole-part-whole) comes into play again as the emergent themes capture the critical essence of a feature in the comments but are situated within an understanding of the whole transcript.

The themes 'reflect a synergistic process of description and interpretation' (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.92), bringing together the words of the participant and resultant understanding made by the researcher. In Figure 4, Affirmation of a 'new' self draws upon the descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments that relate to Clare's account of learning something new.

### 3:9:4 Step 4: Super-ordinate Themes

Identifying super-ordinate themes begins to provide structure to the analysis by looking for connections and patterns between emergent themes to form organised clusters of coherent concepts (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Willig, 2013). I wrote each emergent theme onto a separate piece of card and used concept mapping to show key ideas and relationships between ideas (Novak, 1998). This method enabled the

movement and exploration of alternative connections before I felt satisfied that cluster groups captured the *particular* aspects of participant experience. The process was challenging and reflexivity was important; there were moments when clusters felt predictable, possibly signifying my assumptions. IPA is flexible; providing the principles are maintained, the researcher can engage with the text in a variety of ways. When I encountered difficulty analysing Clare's first interview, I put the transcript through a 'Wordle' document which triggered new thinking and interpretive possibilities (Appendix F). Returning to the data helped maintain focus on the participant and I found processes of abstraction, subsumption, polarisation and temporal contextualisation particularly helpful in refining cluster groups (Smith *et al.*, 2013). The descriptive labels given to super-ordinate themes from Clare's first interview (Appendix G) illustrate the influence of these processes:

- Opposing discourse of 'self'
- Independent application to work
- Desire to learn (feelings)
- Anticipating relationships

A table of super-ordinate themes for each interview provides a graphic representation of the development of ideas that can be traced back through emergent themes (cluster groups), sub-themes (initial notes) and line numbers on the relevant transcript (Appendix DS2). The tables provide a summary of the decision trail and enable the reader to refer back to the exact words of a participant.

The process of analysis was repeated for subsequent interviews and for each participant. Each new case required bracketing findings from the previous analysis to ensure my idiographic obligation. What started to emerge was the importance of detail; whilst the super-ordinate 'headlines' suggested similarity between participant accounts, the threads connecting themes were unique, creating individual finger prints. This realisation galvanised one of the driving forces behind my research in that by accepting nomothetic conclusions, [we] are in danger of following a 'one size fits all' response to the development of new structures, processes and approaches to working with students.

### 3:9:5 Step 5: Idiographic Master Themes (IMT)

Following my idiographic commitment, the next stage of analysis involved identifying Master Themes for each participant. I repeated the process of concept mapping, cross-examining patterns and connections between super-ordinate themes (Novak 1998). As I worked through each participant, I began to recognise ‘instances of higher order concepts’ (Smith *et al.*, p101) which might be shared across participants. It was important to suspend these using my reflective journal, placing on hold the search for theoretical concepts until I was in possession of a full analysis for every participant. Assigning *in vivo* quotations as IMT labels helped to capture the idiographic essence of the personal, and foreground the participant voice within the text; ‘I feel like I have been cut adrift’ represents one aspect of Clare’s experience.

A table for each participant shows a graphic representation of super-ordinate themes, nested within IMT’s (Appendix H). These provide a structural illustration where, viewed alongside the respective table of super-ordinate themes, the decision trail from detailed text in relevant transcript lines to abstract interpretation can be followed. The tables depict temporal aspects of experience and enable the reader to comprehend a process of adaptation and change particular to each individual. The IMT’s have been used to organise and present six accounts, one for each participant, in Chapter Four: Analysis of Findings. Excerpts from the idiographic stories are also referenced in Chapter Five: Discussion.

### 3:8:6 Step 6: Recurrent Master Themes

The final stage of analysis involved looking for patterns and connections across the participant accounts to identify and integrate recurrent master themes (RMT) for the whole sample group. Searching for recurrent themes was a critical moment in gaining insight that would answer the research question and is indicative of the ‘dual quality’ of IPA, where unique idiosyncratic details are underscored within a more holistic understanding of phenomena (Smith *et al.*, 2013, p.101). At this point, convergence and divergence between participant accounts became clear alongside possible abstraction to higher order theoretical concepts. The following extract from

my reflective journal illustrates my thinking about possible commonality and individuality between Clare and Alan's accounts:

*In Clare's extract (Figure 4) she seems to be seeking 'affirmation' but this is done in quite an introverted and reflective manner; she is telling herself that she 'can do' something, that she has changed and is capable. The language connects to a sense of empowerment and she privileges the idea of independent learning. However, Alan also presents the theme of affirmation; but for him the description, language (and tone) is very different. Alan is telling [me] what a good student he is; he paints a picture of what he perceives to be an ideal student / learner. He wants [me] to believe he is all these things (enthusiastic, conscientious, committed, organised). For Alan, the links extend to self-concept but the underlying sense is different from Clare. Whilst Clare is being reflexive is Alan being strategic? What does the detail reveal about the strategies students employ to cope with learning? (Reflections on recurrent themes: April 2016)*

Concept mapping was used to make sense of the connections between idiographic master themes. A complex web of possibilities emerged which I simplified by determining what constituted 'recurrent' enhancing the trustworthiness of my research findings (Smith *et al.*, 2013). I decided themes needed to be present in a minimum of five participant accounts; themes with fewer connections were discarded, whilst others were subsumed into more compelling instances. The presence of RMT's across the corpus is an indication of the broad nature of the theoretical concepts in question; further research could involve analysis of just one case, where the concepts addressed may become more discrete (Smith *et al.*, 2013; Willig, 2013). Willig (2013) suggests an alternative approach to integration where one case is analysed in detail, and then subsequent cases add to or elaborate the original themes. Elaboration may have proved a pragmatic approach given the volume of data I had collected; but I felt this approach may have hindered my sensitivity to, and ability to represent, the individual participant voice as effectively.

Because the participants are a purposive sample, the RMT's represent data collected from a group who have shared the same broad experience and when asked to describe and share their stories, will potentially be drawing on similar events and situations, but which have idiographic meaning (Willig, 2013). The integrative process produced four RMT's (Appendix I) that correspond to specific

theoretical concepts and dimensions, but remain grounded in the data and can be traced back to transcript lines when viewed alongside tables of Idiographic Master Themes and Super-Ordinate Themes for each participant.

Originating from a fine-grained analysis of transcript text, IPA has pushed interpretation into a realm where findings can be cross-examined (Chapter Four: Analysis of Findings). Over-laying the recurrent themes onto my theoretical framework provided a lens for viewing, and interrogating findings in relation to extant literature that has informed Chapter Five; Discussion.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings**

In this chapter, I present the findings from my IPA analysis of the data collected. The analysis includes transcript extracts from the three interviews conducted with each individual participant, providing the reader with an account of the data and a sense of how the participant experiences learning during the first undergraduate year in HE. This is accompanied with an interpretation of the text to describe and explore the meaning held within the data.

The analysis initially takes an idiographic approach where the participant is given primacy presenting themes within case (Smith *et al.*, 2013). Idiographic master themes (IMT) (Appendix H) have been identified, giving clarity to the evidence base, and focus attention on the most significant aspects of each individual participant experience. Throughout the writing process, the impact of the hermeneutic circle became increasingly evident, moving from description to deeper levels of interpretation. Constant movement between whole participant accounts, including re-listening to interview recordings to detailed examination of transcript extracts has provided a close reading of what each participant has said and preserved their voices in the accounts given.

Each idiographic account will present:

- A short introduction to the participant experience.
- A summary table of IMT's, providing the reader with a concise overview of the changes that took place over the year.
- A detailed analysis and interpretation of transcript evidence.

A full, worked copy of each interview transcript and table of super-ordinate themes for every participant can be found in Appendix DS1 and DS2, demonstrating each stage in the analysis process and connecting the reader back to lines in the transcripts where the words of the participants can be found. Transcript location is shown in brackets following the text, giving the interview number followed by the line number, for example, [1:23]. Six accounts are presented, each under the pseudonym of the participant.

The way IMT's connect and interweave confirms the uniquely situated and perspectival manner by which each participant has gone about navigating learning at university. To answer the research question, a cross-case analysis was completed to elicit a series of RMT's. This stage shifts the analytic lens to consider how particular phenomena have been experienced across the sample group, who share a similar context, reflecting my social constructionist epistemology. The chapter describes patterns of convergence and divergence, drawing out the relational aspects of the participants' involvement with learning.

The chapter concludes by assigning labels to RMT's (Appendix I) where the following theoretical concepts, Self, Becoming, Belonging and Motivation have been identified, placing the findings in a wider context that will be addressed in relation to extant literature in Chapter 5: Discussion.

#### 4:1 Idiographic Accounts

##### 4:1:1 Alan

Alan offers a complex account of his experience of learning where a series of super-ordinate themes connect in multifarious ways. His experience is principally concerned with defining himself as a competent learner, able to achieve successful outcomes which are facilitated through a utilitarian approach to relationships. Alan uses the metaphor '*a roller coaster ride*' [3:3] to describe his experience.

<i>Alan</i> <b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	Super-Ordinate Theme		
	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
<i>Showing My Confidence</i>	Seeking a sense of self	Situating self through attitude and confidence	Seeking status and superiority
<i>My life in my hands</i>	Functional adaptation	Independent learning	Taking control of learning
<i>The last hurdle</i>	Focusing on task completion	Strategic pursuit of grades	Owning [his] degree success
<i>Building bridges</i>	Expeditious forging of relationships	Feeling accepted	Building bridges (strategic alignment to others)

Table 2: Alan idiographic master themes

#### 4:1:1:1 Showing My Confidence

In his first interview, Alan provides insight into his background, which is significant in understanding and positioning the changes that take place during the year. He expresses a closeness to his family who he retains as a source of support and is determined to make them proud; but there is a sense he feels somewhat of an outsider. Family members have achieved academic success in HE [1:32-34] and sport sets him apart; he views this as non-academic and seeks affirmation and authentication, themes which continue throughout the year.

Alan describes himself as confident, outgoing [1:192] and positive [2:103; 3:75]. Initially presented as recognition of the ideal self, this is how Alan wants to be perceived and he regards these qualities as desirable. However, there is a duality in his 'self-concept' with a distinct divide between the strength of his practical abilities and his feelings regarding academic weakness. Alan is unwilling to risk ridicule by asking a question in a lecture theatre [1:129-132], which is in opposition to the physical confidence he feels in a practical environment [1:180-181]. Alan seems anxious about his ability, possibly accentuated by his failure to pass the professional skills tests needed for a place on the teacher training degree and describes his move to university as a new beginning [1:169-171].

Alan immediately employs strategies such as setting up folders [1:102] and printing out presentations [1:249] to organise his learning and cope with what lies ahead, interpreting this behaviour as the route to understanding [1:256-257]. However, describing how he understands is distinguished by emotions rather than cognition; he substitutes learning terminology such as 'knowledge' and 'skills' with 'confidence' and 'attitude' as the key factors in securing his success. When given a collaborative task, he is concerned with '*How am I going to be able to show my confidence*' [2:132-133] rather than the intellectual contribution he can make. Instead of adopting strategies that would help Alan to learn how to learn, confidence acts as a mediating factor between self-esteem, self-concept and the way he positions himself within different university communities. It signifies a sense of growing competence but may also represent continued feelings of self-doubt.

'I feel that as a learner now I have evolved and I feel more confident with everything else. Whereas at the start I was holding back to see where everyone else was, to see what the lecturers were like and now I know where they are and where I am, I think that I can overcome all my confidence and that' [2:117-123].

An assumption can be made that increased confidence levels act as a contributing factor to achieving greater success, but Alan may simply make himself feel better by emphasising his perceived growth in confidence. Developing relationships hold potential for academic gain [2:81] and the extract above implies that during semester one, Alan was undertaking a form of reconnaissance, finding out where he fitted within the social and academic learning environment.

When asked to imagine how his learning might develop, Alan's response again situates his learning within an emotive dimension [2:490-496]. Developing a positive attitude allows him to function effectively within the different academic sub-cultures. Learning to the best of his ability [2:173; 2:183; 2:309; 2:468] is a mantra that features throughout the second interview that is both motivational and affirming, offsetting perceived academic weakness with practical success [2:16]. Achieving high grades has a considerable impact on Alan.

'I have never actually seen a 1<sup>st</sup> or a 2:1, I never understood what they are [2:325-326]. Now that I have has made me think that I am the same ability as them' [2:329-330].

The 'them' Alan is referring to are his PE teachers; inspirational role models who occupy a position towards which he aspires. The extract also serves as personal validation and it is this sense of needing to find himself that poses a dilemma regarding how Alan copes with learning. He presents an egocentric view of his degree experience [2:95-96, 2:219] that justifies strategically exploiting relationships for personal gain, yet he prefers to learn in isolation where he believes he achieves better grades [2:198-202]. Alan consciously separates himself from others to gain full control over academic tasks. By interview three, this strategic behaviour dominates his approach but it takes an altruistic twist.

'If you are in a group you have always got to take into consideration people's decisions of what they want to do before you get your point across. I think

that is a good thing that I do being in a group' [3:435-439] ... 'I learn more independently because it is my decision but as a group I will still try my best and do everything to 100% and try and get the best grade that they will get as well' [3:454-457].

Alan's self-concept is inextricably linked to how he perceives himself and imagines he is perceived by others. His possible frustrations of having to 'carry' others in group work soften with the realisation that collaborative working is a required mode of learning. This is achieved through the construction of an interpersonal hierarchy.

'Now I feel like I am at the front and I am performing with everyone and I feel like, again, a leader. People are looking up to me now whereas in the first couple of weeks I was more looking up to some other people' [3:140-143].

Becoming a leader affords Alan status and through his success, he gains a sense of being admired [3:130-133]. His feeling of superiority is demonstrated when he likens himself to being a lecturer [3:17] but he is keen to differentiate between confidence and conceit [3:295-297], showing awareness that what he is sharing may be misconstrued. His assumed position brings responsibility and Alan sees himself as a role model not only to his peers but for the next group of 'freshers' [3:826-840].

#### 4:1:1:2 My Life in My Hands

When asked to share his understanding of the term 'academic learner', Alan uses percentages to calculate variables that constitute self-concept [3:652], allowing space for his practical ability to compensate for the academic weakness he feels and casts himself as someone who is good at everything [3:648].

'Being an academic learner in Higher Education now is me as a whole. Being more mature and more confident and outgoing has made me more of an academic learner at university than it was at school or college' [3:668-672].

Alan substitutes study skills with qualities associated with the mobilisation of the self as a learner. Mind-set [3:655] and trying his best [3:185-186; 3:658] are attitudinal concepts where emotion and volition are linked to the way an individual interacts with their environment. There is little indication of improving cognitive learning skills,

suggesting their development is less important or being overlooked by Alan. Organisation skills help him to function in a manner that represents to him what a good student should be doing and maintaining a practical approach to how he goes about learning reflects his incentive.

‘I feel like I am scheduling things, post-it noting everything and using my phone to remind me of other things like an hour before. I feel like I am more in control of my learning’ [3:170-174].

Alan imagined university learning would entail continual assessment and constant deadlines. In contrast to his experience in school however, Alan notices how he is required to adapt to the type of support given by lecturers, saying ‘*it is more you are getting walked up to a deadline*’ [1:142-143]. The responsibility for managing workload rests with him [3:719-723] and he becomes conscious of revising his tendency to cram to taking more time over learning.

‘I think at university level now, I have slowed myself down a lot and am taking in things a lot easier and quicker’ [2:357-359].

Alan prefers independent learning; however, his understanding of this as a concept is problematic. Independence is perceived as working alone and he reports spending time in his room reviewing lecture notes, reading and undertaking non-contact tasks. Whilst this is admirable, independence is associated with isolation; although by the end of the year he is demonstrating some appreciation of collaborative learning. Alan also refers to a form of knowledge-banking which gives insight into his understanding of the lecturers’ role and how he positions himself as a passive recipient of knowledge.

‘It is hard to pinpoint how I have understood the content. But, I think again, it is back to the way I have revised and the way I have put the content in myself. Being able to listen to the lecturer put the knowledge into me and then being able to do my own reading and be independent has made me understand the content a lot more’ [2:395-401].

The emphasis on instrumental learning suggests a disconnection between Alan’s experience and his potential movement towards deep learning. Becoming independent also features extensively in terms of personal development. University

affords Alan with the opportunity to grow up and achieve the authentication he seeks. In contrast to the external cues he depends upon for his academic learning, personal independence is being experienced through more autonomous choices based on internal values. During interview two, Alan shyly admits to feeling like a man [2:515] and by the end of the year states:

‘Now I feel like I have got my own pathway and my own life in my hands now’ [3:119-120] ... ‘I feel like I am taking my life into my own hands. I feel like I have grown up so much these past couple of months’ [3:124-126].

The ability to make choices requires self-authorship; Alan demonstrates security of self where he can make decisions that will impact on his future. Alan has created distance from the pressure felt in respect of his family’s academic success; however, he remains sensitive to how he feels he is perceived by others and acts accordingly.

#### 4:1:1:3 The Last Hurdle

Examining how Alan interacts with the learning environment and the tensions that exist between external stimuli and personally felt pressures give an insight into how Alan is adapting to HE. Understanding why and where he directs energy illuminates how he purposefully goes about and regulates his learning behaviour. Graduation is a necessary requirement in achieving his career aspirations and goal-directed comments dominate Alan’s transcripts.

‘You’ve got to get through university to get your end career goal. It does feel like the last hurdle, university, so just putting my mind to the last bit of learning that I’ve got to do and get my goal in the end that’s what it’s going to take [1:235-240].

Alan’s perspective at this early stage is broadly upon completing his degree [1:291-293], superseded later by learning and grade outcomes [2:144-146]. The end goal remains significant but he has had the opportunity to test himself against others and establish an understanding of the performance expectations set by the university. Although Alan sustains attention on his objective, he is conscious of being on a journey, referring to completing a mission [3:54], and his ability to be self-correcting becomes increasingly apparent in the growing competence he feels as a learner.

Being here now and getting those sort of grades made me think can I do this in that module or the next module. Always trying to think can I actually succeed in this module with a 1<sup>st</sup> or a 2:1 or a 2:2 and just try to get the best grade that I can get. Being able to get a 1<sup>st</sup> has made me think I can do anything if I set my mind to it [3:254-260].

Alan exhibits movement towards greater autonomy and self-regulation but he is dependent on extrinsic motivators such as knowing lecturers' standards [3:70-73]. Alan sets targets based on an internalised sense of external expectations. He demonstrates growing self-efficacy, by reporting a change in his application during lecture theatre based learning and becoming more confident and interested in the content [3:589-594]. However, the pressure he feels to meet externally imposed expectations, specifically grades, represents a situational control which if left unattended can result in compensatory or non-self-determined behaviour. Competition emerges as a motivational theme and due to its social nature can also be considered a situational control [3:555-557], but Alan views competition as a beneficial and a necessary part of being a sports person.

'Well a lot of things that motivated me were people getting good grades in their essays, it motivates me to step my game up' [3:313-316].

Alan accepts that some people do not want to compete but his experience as a competitor may be a valuable source of emotive strength where he can find the resilience needed elsewhere in his degree [3:897-901].

There is ambiguity in the mechanisms that orient Alan's learning behaviour. Aspects of motivation that appear in Alan's transcripts are inextricably linked to his perceptions of 'self'; the saliency of rewards is manifest in references to gaining control both over his learning and his life. There is a sense that through articulation he is empowering himself but alternatively, this may suggest that he is also experiencing feelings of being out of control, grappling with the learning challenges that lie ahead [3:326-329]. To become self-determined, an individual requires freedom to follow one's interests, to explore and enjoy learning, but whilst the reward of gaining his degree remains such a powerful motivational force, it is doubtful whether Alan will experience the opportunity to learn unselfconsciously.

#### 4:1:1:4 Building Bridges

Building friendships early in the university experience is critical in providing Alan with a sense of security. Forming social groups is an immediate concern but he seems surprised with the speed at which he has achieved this.

‘I thought oh no I am not going to know no-one, but now a couple of weeks in I’ve found my mates, I’ve found my flat mates, I know my lecturers. I’ve spoken to my lecturers individually, I’m getting to know people around campus and it’s making me feel more at home sort of thing’ [1:20-26].

As Alan grows in confidence, he can be seen actively expanding his interpersonal network, which impacts on his ability to respond to academic learning challenges. Alan is conscious of how different groups nourish him and uses a metaphor of a bridge to illustrate how he navigates his way through the alternate social communities that influence his student experience. Being accepted and having interchangeable pockets of support is instrumental in providing Alan with the freedom to prioritise his learning and privilege his outcomes above others.

‘My PE teacher said to me, if you want to go to university you have got to make that bridge and you have got to have that bridge that you can cross and say to yourself ‘this is the path where I am going to be doing my work’ and then if you want to relax and take a chill go back over the bridge and spend time with them. I think you have got to make that barrier [3:368-375] ... There are friends out there that are going to be always work, work, work; but there are going to be people out there that are just no work, I am here to drink and have a good time. But there will always be people in the middle that can balance that and I feel like I have made those two bridges’ [3:382-388].

Alan situates himself on a central island with different paths that connect him to a range of groups. The imagery he provides suggests he has developed the capacity to traverse these bridges in an intentional manner; effectively making choices about who he associates with to meet specific social, emotional or cognitive needs. This is a very strategic use of relationships and marks a significant shift since the first interview, where the focus was on developing friendships to building a network of communities that provide alternative contexts for engagement with learning and ways of being in the social world.

‘You need to know what is available to you and being able to have bridges with peers, bridges with lecturers, and bridges with people in [canteen name]. The more relationships you have at university the easier; the more confident you would feel about your university degree’ [3:509-515].

There are subtle differences regarding how Alan positions his engagement. He admires and aspires to be like the senior students and so has ingratiated himself into their world.

‘I feel like I am trailing behind them, I am with them. I feel like I could turn to them whenever and say, oh what modules did you pick?’ [3:492-494].

By cue seeking, he is gaining insider knowledge and a possible advantage over his peers through the access he has gained to the older students’ experience. This relationship is significant not simply for the practical help he gets in meeting learning challenges, but the status the connection affords [3:272-274]. Alan is using his internal compass to guide interactions; he feels it is important to be noticed and he actively seeks relationships with lecturers as a method of coping with large-scale learning in a lecture theatre which he finds impersonal and isolating [1:108-109]. Alan has consistently recognised lecturers as enablers of learning but in the third interview, he uses a parental analogy to describe how he perceives their role [3:231-232]. In the context of the dialogue, the suggestion is that he feels nurtured rather than dependent, but the family metaphor suggests a privileged closeness to lecturers that sets him apart from his peers, further substantiating claims to a social position.

Although Alan seems content to focus on his own attainment, he is sensitive to a collective sense of belonging. Despite the potentially calculated manner with which he views relationships, course cohesion is important [3:210-212] and he consistently speaks about feeling at home and belonging to a family [3:215-216], reflecting his pride in being a university student and optimism for what the future holds [3:817-821].

#### 4:1:2 Bob

Initial reading of Bob’s transcripts could suggest little changes for him during the first year. He seldom speaks directly about learning and beyond completing his degree and graduating, minimal reference is made to grades or learning outcomes. However, closer reading of the text shows that Bob’s learning is deeply connected to his self-concept and he displays awareness of emotional and social aspects of experience.

Long pauses before Bob responds to a question suggest that these interviews are the first (and only) opportunities he has either taken or engaged with during the year to reflect upon his learning and experience.

<i>Bob</i>	Super-Ordinate Theme		
	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
<b><i>Idiographic Master Theme</i></b>			
<i>I would say I am the same</i>	Conflicted view of self (practical v academic)	Safeguarding [his] sense of self	Personally secure (academically cautious)
<i>It’s a big, big thing if I actually get to do it</i>	Growing up	Learning to learn	Interactive or independent learning
<i>I want to make them proud</i>	Interest and enjoyment	Grappling with grades and goals	Inter-personal learning and self-efficacy
<i>I call this place home</i>	Social settling and forming friendships	Developing collegiality	Social membership and co-operation

Table 3: Bob idiographic master themes

#### 4:1:2:1 I would say I am the same

Bob’s transcripts provide insight into the challenges of transition, based on an internalised conception of ‘self’ which is both threatened and enriched by the demands of adapting to HE. Descriptions oscillate between how Bob experiences learning for himself and concern for how he may be perceived by others amid the social process of meaning making. Bob felt unprepared for university but viewed it as an opportunity that should be taken when young [1:47-51]. He is adamant that he is unchanged by the experience [2:268; 3:76-77], holding a fixed self-concept

built on his practical prowess; however, this is juxtaposed with insecurities regarding academic study.

'I didn't feel ready academically... I felt like I wasn't really the brightest. I got the grades to come to university but I just scraped it in a way. So, I was a bit like oh I'm coming here and everyone else is going to be head and shoulders above me and I'm going to be the one that struggles' [1:61-66].

Bob thrives socially but a natural inclination to compare himself to peers prompts feelings of helplessness. Endearing personality traits make integration easier and by accepting that he is 'less able', he potentially removes some of the pressure felt to compete in the academic domain. Bob compensates for his perceived deficiency by privileging the practical domain where he can preserve his sense of 'self', but he also allows this to act as a barrier to making progress in unfamiliar situations [1:152-155].

In a practical environment, Bob experiences feelings of high self-esteem and efficacy; by 'doing' an activity, the objective becomes more tangible. When the objective is obscured in a formal lecture theatre setting, Bob tends to avoid rather than confront difficulty.

'If it doesn't make sense; I am not going to lie, I am literally, I get a bit 'oh God, I have no idea what is going on' and I feel a little bit like, not bothered in a way' [2:115-116].

Bob may lack the study skills necessary for engagement but his willingness to dismiss a significant proportion of his modular learning is of concern. A critical change occurs when the opportunity to study theory and then to actively test his understanding in a laboratory setting prompts the realisation that similar connections can be made elsewhere, having considerable impact on his confidence and the progress felt [2:92-94].

Despite sensing a change in his capacity to learn, Bob seems unable to resolve the idea that what is understood via a physical medium may hold equal value to what is learned by others more easily in a lecture theatre. Context defines how Bob feels about his learning and when speaking about his work at a children's sports camp,

his trajectory is much more apparent [3:136-143]. Experiencing feelings of competence outside of the competing pressures felt within the university seems a vital part of his transition. Bob struggled with the unknown but he is conscious of how this has equipped him for what lay ahead [3:353-354]. Bob has learned to manage his workload [3:38-49] and finds increasingly effective ways of functioning; he becomes aware of a change in work ethic, feels greater control over his learning [3:362-365] and can imagine the future [3:383-385], yet enduring self-doubt means he still anticipates failure [3:354-356].

A critical moment, to which Bob returns repeatedly, is his gymnastic performance where his practical self-concept is tested and results in a transforming experience.

'I have never been so scared in my life; I have never. I got up there and my legs were shaking. That was a really big stand out point for me in my first semester and once it was out of the way I was so relieved. When I was about to perform I just felt so sick, my legs were shaking and I felt sick; horrible' [2:31-36].

Performing publicly placed Bob outside of his comfort zone; however, he shows courage, possibly bolstered by self-deprecating humour [3:187-190] and reflecting on this experience, he recognises that his anxieties are shared [3:15-16]. Yet the positive outcomes felt by Bob are not visible in the way he copes with other learning challenges. This may be due to lack of opportunity or the challenge of disentangling the complexity of meaning held within experience. In either case, his optimism remains tempered as he anticipates the year ahead.

'I feel like my learning is going to develop... I have got a few more essays to write which is going to be going off and doing more research about stuff. I am looking forward to moving into a house, I am 100% looking forward to my modules next year. Where we got to choose them is really nice. Yeah, I am definitely looking forward to next year and seeing what challenges it brings to me. I am anxious about the workload, but that is what you need to do' [3:472-484].

In contrast to Bob's academic concerns, university has enabled a sense of personal independence which he has embraced [3:229-236]. There is a clear indication that Bob now regards himself as an adult and his ability to cope with living away from

home encourages belief in his capacity to meet the learning demands that await him in year 2 [3:242-243].

#### 4:1:2:2 It's a big, big thing if I actually get to do it

Bob anticipated the need to work autonomously at university [1:21-30] but his perception of independent learning as a 'lone' endeavour exacerbates the difficulties encountered. Learning seems laboured and it is unclear why he assumes that isolating himself is the most effective way to cope with a problem. He struggles to absorb information conveyed during a lecture and needs to review content to close gaps in knowledge [3:19-30].

'When I got back to my room I'd go on student central and I'd look at it in a different way from what he was saying as well and I would just compare them and it would all click a bit more' [1:212-216].

Bob's ingenuity ameliorates helplessness and better organisation and time management enables him to negotiate different academic demands, a crucial factor in successful transition. Developing referencing and research techniques provide a sense of becoming an academic learner [3:376-385] but there is an impression that Bob has stumbled into this way of working. During the second interview, Bob shared an image showing his first assessment period revision schedule [2:7-10]. When asked if it helped, he replied:

'No. I failed. I was absolutely gutted. I revised everything that wasn't in the exam. Typical' [2:12-13].

Despite being succinct, the extract is revealing: Bob has been proactive; the notes displayed suggest he cares about being successful and his disappointment is clear. Yet his approach stems from what he feels might be purposeful rather than via guidance from lecturing staff. After failing, Bob adopts a more structured approach to learning; he begins to pace himself and write essays incrementally [3:67-69], employing a method of working experienced during practical lectures [2:165-167], but this seems to be based on a process of trial and error.

Bob does not 'cue-seek' or forge relationships with lecturers. He avoids asking questions, feeling overwhelmed in a large lecture space, and does not request tutorials [2:222-224]. The main influence carried by staff rests on whether he is engaged and feels as if they take an interest in him, the result being a greater willingness to work and to try to impress them [3:294-303]. Yet he appreciates feedback [3:345-351], especially written on paper which he returns to during periods of self-study.

Bob can be considered as coasting. Work completion rather than grade outcomes is the priority [2:22-23] and he relies on his flatmates for direction in knowing where to pitch work or prepare for assessments [3:204-208]. It is possible that Bob's background in team sports helped him to develop interpersonal skills, although he does not recognise this as a personal strength. There is a sense of collegiality and willingness to share. Bob appreciates the alternative perspectives provided by others; he feels secure in the value of his contribution and his effectiveness as a learner benefits from a feeling of mutual support.

'When we learn together, I quite like that because you are looking at someone else's point of view, like their perspective of things. So, it is not just mine, and then I can look at it from their point of view and be actually, maybe I am wrong. But if I say something and then someone is I think it might be that then I would be yeah, it might be that. I prefer working with people because I feel like it is not just me and I am not just relying on what I have learned, I can rely on what other people have learned as well. Then we can put the two together. I find it a lot better that way' [3:278-290].

Bob's readiness to be 'wrong' suggests he has a tacit level of criticality which if nurtured through reflective practice could impact upon how he perceives and goes about learning more broadly. Despite his struggles, Bob is alert to apathy and determined to capitalise on his opportunity [3:161-168]. He is most effusive when talking about the impact physically experiencing theoretical concepts has on his understanding.

'It is a big, big thing for me if I actually get to do it... then I can literally visualise myself doing that again' [3:213-218].

'Visualisation' is vital in lifting Bob's confidence and developing belief in his ability. What is striking is that Bob feels competent to apply knowledge beyond university boundaries where he enjoys the creative freedom to experiment without fear of comparison or failure [2:230-245]. In telling his experience, Bob becomes conscious of how he has changed as an individual; the ability to appreciate alternative perspectives, whether these are sought through shared study sessions or the result of personal intuition, provide insight into how Bob has developed as a learner during the year, which may be more meaningful than he realises.

#### 4:1:2:3 I want to make them proud

Bob's interviews provide rich evidence of the pleasure felt from being immersed in the university experience. Bob's interest in learning is both personally and situationally positioned. He enjoys practical based lectures [1:134-137] and after experiencing learning about motor skills in a laboratory, demonstrates his desire to know and understand new things [1:211-213]. Bob's enthusiasm may be explained by his transfer from a degree which he was finding difficult to one befitting his self-concept; he is motivated and finds a sense of fulfilment when he is learning by 'doing' and this continues to impact on his learning throughout the year [2:149-152]. By contrast:

'In a lecture theatre, I would say I am not as motivated because I don't really enjoy learning there. But if it is practically then I am really up for it because I chose it; I love to get involved' [2:139-142].

Use of the word 'choice' is important. Bob has also chosen his degree course fully aware that learning would entail periods spent in a lecture theatre, yet he does not regard this as having been his 'choice' and therefore appears less self-determined in that situation. Work associated with core modules is accommodated through a sense of obligation [3:38; 3:483-484]. Having started university with almost naïve autonomy, as the year progresses controls over learning become increasingly introjected, implying some loss of intrinsic engagement with an activity based on the satisfaction felt simply from taking part [1:246-252]. Being surrounded by peers who have a clear ambition may have augmented the assimilation of goals and influenced Bob's perspective on learning. Tensions exist between feelings of competence, the

challenge of adjusting to being in a world where peers seem as good if not better than him, and the shift towards meeting external goals. When talking about homesickness, Bob is open about his anxiety and how he resisted the impulse to withdraw.

‘I did get really homesick, I was a bit like no, what am I doing? Then I thought ahead, I thought at the end of it, for what I want to do, for a future I need a degree under my belt so I definitely need to do it’ [1:110-114].

Bob finds resilience by drawing on personal ambitions that hold emotive content. His family acts as a significant motivating force and making them proud resonates throughout successive interviews [1:234-237; 2:187-188; 3:388-391].

‘It’s a bit cheesy but I want to make them proud.’ [3:89-90] ... ‘Mum and Dad are like ‘you’re the first person to go to university’ so I want to do them proud’ [3:148-150].

Gaining value for money presents an additional reason for wanting to do well [3:82-86] but the influence of family is much more profound, providing a ‘buffer zone’ during the complex negotiations involved with adapting to HE. Bob finds a secure sense of self within the family unit and their constant support gives him the freedom to explore and develop an understanding of the university environment and enables him to re-energise and cope with the anxieties he feels about his aptitude for meeting learning demands.

The environment influences Bob’s self-confidence, and feeling valued and ‘known’ impacts upon his learning. Autocratic modes of delivery in a large lecture theatre are amotivating [2:73], promoting feelings of isolation and disengagement. By contrast;

‘When I am in a smaller class, I learn a lot more... it feels like the lecturer is paying a lot more attention to you. As well, it is all about the personality of the lecturer. If they are really motivating you are like yeah; but if they have one tone of voice it is oh God’ [3:330-336].

Peer relationships have the most meaningful influence on how Bob copes with difficulty [2:210-212; 2:128-129]. Where he imagines failure, confidence and self-

determination evolves through collaboration [2:169-174]. Inter-dependence promotes self-efficacy and sharing a problem seems to enhance personal capacity to learn. Bob is also conscious of an element of competition, but he views this in an unthreatening manner, an inevitable aspect of sports participation. Being perceived as physically better than peers drives his application in a practical setting [3:258-261] but he is quick to recognise the importance of collegiate success, a perspective Bob attributes to his experience as a team player. Essay writing reveals an alternative side to competition focused upon personal development and improving study skills [3:261-265]. There is a pattern where intrinsically felt difficulty is addressed through the influence of external motivators [3:163-168] and self-talk is used empower and cope with challenges [3:429-434].

Whilst Bob describes having loved [3:462] the first year at university, his feelings seem aligned to realising a sense of belonging and a more coherent sense of self. The loss of autonomous behaviour due to assimilating the ambitions of peers is potentially inevitable; or is perhaps a consequence of knowing that from the second year onwards, his work will 'count' and the pressure of grades may impede his ability to engage simply for the pleasure of learning something new.

#### 4:1:2:4 I call this place home

Bob's transcripts emphasise acceptance and participation; belonging to a social community seems to influence feelings of security and emotional well-being. Being included and feeling 'part of' matters, and opportunities for mutual engagement have an influence on Bob's learning. However, whilst Bob appreciates the benefit of collaborative learning, his immediate concern is the need to feel happy, which he struggles with during the first weeks of university.

Having never lived away from home, the transition is uncomfortable and a sense of not belonging impacts emotionally upon Bob and he questions whether his decision to go to university is the right one [1:40-42]. Bob experiences a profound sense of dislocation and the associated feelings of doubt, inadequacy and isolation render him vulnerable and at risk of withdrawal. When asked during the final interview to share a 'stand out' moment from his experience of year 1, Bob is quick to answer.

‘Leaving home. You have probably heard that quite a bit but definitely, for me, leaving home. I was always with my Mum and Dad all the time and I am a proper family person as well so it was a bit disappointing leaving home. I didn’t realise it would be as hard as it was or as challenging being away from Mum and Dad. To actually have to do stuff for myself and not seeing them all the time. So, that is probably the big stand out thing for me this year’ [3:405-413].

Bob found himself grappling with emotional disturbance where homesickness is exacerbated by immersion in an unfamiliar environment [1:334-338]. These feelings are temporal and he comments on the kindness of lecturing staff who have helped him to settle in. Bob’s rapid adaptation must in part be a consequence of his willingness to embrace change. Induction week activities are instrumental in removing barriers to social belonging [1:90-93] but only when acceptance is achieved can Bob start utilising networks to enhance his learning experience. Having a collective purpose makes group membership meaningful [1:312-313]; yet the benefit of belonging extends beyond learning support and is important in securing emotional resilience.

‘I feel as well, where it is nice having people in your flat that are doing the same course as you, if you are feeling you are having difficulty you can talk to them about it. Everyone is nice so if you have got something troubling you even if it is not work related, you can just go and talk to them. They will all bring you back up again, it’s nice, it is definitely a nice environment’ [3:102-109].

Participating in student life allows Bob to enter a learning community where talking about an academic problem enables the exchange of viewpoints to find a meaningful solution [2:213-217]. He enjoys the reciprocal nature of collaboration, but this seems to go deeper than being a forum for interaction; having a shared objective and common interests reinforces the connection between members of the group.

‘I thought it was going to be hard work, which I know it is going to be, so I am alright with that. Obviously, the life of university is good; everyone says university is the best time of your life so I was really excited for that, like you make lifelong friends here’ [1:15-19].

Academic demands are acknowledged but so is the significance of relationships. By participating, Bob receives affirmation of his competence; his contribution is valued and this helps to develop a positive sense of 'self' [3:286-290]. Bob consistently advocates the team [3:265-267] but when the learning community is expanded to include lecturers, he struggles with his perception of how this relationship works. He feels that lecturing staff are approachable [1:267-268] but there is a tension between wanting to seek help and preserving the status quo among his cohort [1:256-259]. Friendships are critical and Bob is not prepared to risk alienation. The first-year experience has exceeded Bob's expectations to the extent that he now designates university as 'home' [3:437-440].

'I like it here, it is quite nice and peaceful. Making friends adds to that; you feel like you know everyone... I have seen my flat mates every day for the past six months and I will go back and wake up and I can't go out of my door and see everyone. It is definitely going to be quite hard to deal with because I love all my flat mates, they are all cool people. And I am aware of like, the university is happy, it is a happy place. Like everyone is like proper happy, so it is nice, it rubs off. I love it, it is so good' [3:444-454].

By referring to 'home', his sense of belonging reaches beyond social acceptance. It recognises the importance of 'place' and suggests an emotional bond which, for Bob, has been a transformative experience.

#### 4:1:3 Clare

Clare seems consumed by the desire to learn and be successful. She portrays herself as an autonomously functioning learner, but her emphasis on 'self-teaching' and the feeling of being 'cut adrift' suggest the transition to HE has been problematic, leading to extensive questioning of her learning experience. Clare wrestles with the point of serious application to her work when grades hold no value; she sees herself as hard working and effort should be recognised, but she is annoyed and frustrated when peers she perceives as lazy, gain equal or greater reward.

She expresses self-doubt, craving feedback and positive reinforcement to justify the sacrifices she is making. Clare suggests the existence of a hidden agenda, where

lecturing staff are formulating judgements about students that will influence outcomes when the work counts towards the final degree mark. Clare summarises her year by referring to the television programme ‘The Jump’, where individuals compete in a ski-jump. The metaphor suggests year 1 is the training required to launch confidently into year 2, and hopefully land further ahead than your peers.

<i>Clare</i> <b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	Super-Ordinate Theme		
	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
<i>Who marked theirs?</i>	Opposing discourse of self	Defining self through academic effort and success	Academic fortification of self
<i>I feel like I have been cut adrift</i>	Independent application to work	Coping with learning alone	Adapting by self-teaching
<i>This year I think is kind of a test</i>	Desire to learn	Rationalising the value of [her] efforts	Clutching at what counts
Subsumed	Anticipating relationships	<i>Questioning experience of learning</i>	<i>Questioning experience of learning</i>

Table 4: Clare idiographic master themes

4:1:3:1 Who marked theirs?

Clare’s ambition is challenged by two opposing discourses: the importance of hard work and whether year 1 genuinely does ‘count’ in terms of degree outcomes. Clare is quick to notice that her peers exhibit different patterns of engagement and divergent motivations [1:157-158]. Speaking in relation to the first essay, Clare describes working incrementally, finding references and with diligent application. She is surprised and incredulous that peers would leave it to the last minute, which fuels her perception of being different; her work ethic sets her apart and she experiences feelings of socially not belonging.

Clare is willing to sacrifice social engagement to meet her objective of being academically ‘better’ than her peers. Clare hints at the idea of an effort/success equation, that hard work should ultimately reap benefits, yet some people seem to achieve higher grades without really having to try. This belief is quite destructive in terms of her self-concept; it reveals her fragility but also her doubts about the integrity of lecturers. Despite Clare’s oscillating views, she is unwilling to place a

ceiling on her learning potential; achieving it entails a shift in perceived self-competence, illustrated in Figure:4 (p.66), which reveals a systematic process of self-affirmation.

The insistent use of 'I can't/I can' suggests lack of confidence, but Clare is seeking to empower herself [1:240-271]. There is movement from self-doubt to positive thinking, reiterating her commitment and desire to learn. Her words tumble forth in such a way that it is difficult to imagine that she is sharing these views to impress me as the researcher. Clare is relating a personal journey of discovery, noticing how she has changed and disclosing a sense of efficacy by acknowledging how she has met challenges and achieved success.

Making a 'good impression' is a driving force behind her strong work ethic; particularly in how she is perceived by lecturing staff, who she views as holding power to influence her future [3:154-158]. Clare describes herself as independent [1:290] and serious [1:291] about her learning; a perspective informed by her prior university experience where she gained insight and a sense of maturity that set her apart from peers whose main concern is socialising.

'Say we've got work, I'm like are you going out tonight and they will be going out instead of doing the work that is due for the next day. They will be oh I will wake up in the morning but they just don't do it or they will just skip things and I don't want to. I want to learn and to know it. I think they are still at the stage where they think it is going to be spoon fed to them but then they will finally realise it is not going to be and they will s\*\*t themselves' [1:193-202].

Clare's view partly relates to gaining value for money but she cannot fathom why others disengage with the entire purpose of being at university. Observing peers progressing without the expected panic contributes to her sense of marginalisation and feeling lacklustre [2:40-57]. Clare's compliance as a learner is gradually eroded by lack of recognition or an obvious reward, initiating her questioning; she is experiencing disaffection and is perplexed why others fail to complete non-contact work, but clings to hope that her efforts will not be in vain.

Clare claims to enjoy working with others [1:294-300] but describes working as an individual within a collective space, only finding reassurance and motivation from the company of peers. This characterises her sense of belonging to the academic community but not necessarily feeling part of a social group. By interview three, she has surprised herself by forging closer collaborative working skills but declines to engage unless she has the confidence to make an informed contribution [3:375-390]. Clare presumes that confidence and leadership are characteristic of 'PE people' and are qualities she possesses. However, her perception is at variance with her behaviour; openly she presents as confident and knowing, but inwardly remains riddled by self-doubt and concern that she may appear as overpowering [3:435]. Clare also feels unable to approach lecturers.

'I haven't been to a lecturer; it is a bit daunting isn't it. You feel like you are the dumb kid that is asking for help. I think there is a stigma around it a little bit, you don't want to say yeah, I went and asked such and such. You feel as though you don't want to bother them because some of them are like, don't email me... I get a lot of emails so try and do x, y and z. So, it's like, ok, we won't email you' [3:186-195].

Clare wants guidance but terminology such as 'stigma' and 'dumb kid' suggest that asking for help is a weakness and detrimental to the impression others may hold of her. This is a curious position to adopt, given her desire to make progress. There is an underlying sense that Clare feels she should be gaining higher grades and insinuates inconsistencies in marking and expectations.

'I think I am quite competitive so I will know within myself whether I have done well or not. Like my essay for example, I wasn't happy with it and asking other people what they got; although they got the same amount of grade it was I wanted to do better and I knew I could have done better. That annoyed me so that motivates me to do better next time. Then it also kind of demotivates me, you think wait, how? Who marked theirs? You think of things like that as well, and on reading other peoples who got a higher grade than me, it is like how? I don't know' [3:446-457].

Clare craves affirmation and provides this for herself, expressing delight at how well she has done [3:26-27]. She has resisted peer pressure to socialise and yearns for positive reinforcement in her learning [3:240-241]. Superficially, she seems resilient and capable but underneath possibly lonely and vulnerable.

#### 4:1:3:2 I feel like I have been cut adrift

Clare's brief experience at an alternative university may explain the apparent ease with which she seems to make the transition to HE. She appreciates the need for independent working, organisation and time-management [1:125-130]. Clare appears buoyant and relishes the perceived shift in status that university learning affords, trusting that her industrious nature will be rewarded. Despite problems her perspective prevails, by the end of the year when considering what it means to become an academic learner, she replies:

'It is not spoon fed to you all the time, you are learning from yourself and others and you understand that the more you do the more you will get out of it... It's like what other outside reading can I do that will aid me in this, or what can I do in this? I think university is where you become an academic learner. If you put the work in but if you don't then I don't think you are becoming any type of learner, you are just becoming someone that just sits there' [3:525-540].

Clare appears self-reliant, ambitious, and effort remains a key characteristic necessary for learning. The final sentence acts as a caveat, echoing continued frustrations with [some] peers. Clare has established a systematic approach to managing her study [2:153-158], structuring revision and methodically reducing notes to be 'on top' of things [2:320]. Learning seems to be a laborious process and she consciously compares herself with others, implying competition may be a source of motivation but also cause anxiety [3:43-50]. However, to fully engage in the meaning making process requires negotiation, yet she consciously avoids booking tutorials, suggesting her isolation may be self-imposed. Her transcripts reveal an interesting distinction between the concept of independent learning and being self-taught; she feels abandoned and describes operating in a way that distorts the idea of independence, reducing it to an almost suffocating burden of autodidacticism.

'Extremely self-taught I think, more so this semester as I think we have had less lectures so it is like, ok so we are meant to teach ourselves certain things which for certain parts I think is quite annoying. You are so used to having a bit more guidance but when you have not as much it is a bit do we do this; do we do that? Then you don't want to ask... I feel like I have been cut adrift' [3:3-11].

Adapting to this mode of working is overwhelming and Clare struggles to maintain a strong work ethic without sanctions for disengagement. Clare describes feeling guilty [3:90-92] if she is not working, but the idea that year 1 does not count nags at her, and she is learning to accommodate her inclination to do too much or too little. Initially, student central is regarded as a source of support, but subsequent interviews suggest its ephemeral nature may not be entirely helpful.

‘It’s like wait... what have I got to do for tomorrow and it is all up in the air. Like it is all on student central, it doesn’t feel like it is there because I haven’t got it in front of me. So, I have had to get myself a planner and write this is due then; that makes me get into shape and think right you have got to do that, and that and like ticking things off. I am like right, done, done, done; otherwise I am like no I can’t do it’ [2:142-151].

Clare sees herself as learning best physically, and her understanding advances when pedagogy facilitates her ability to connect theoretical and practical concepts but it also serves as a source of frustration; when others are catching up, she senses becoming bored and disengaged. At its most fundamental level, practical lectures involve instrumental learning but they also hold potential as a context for ‘bridging the gap’ towards more communicative modes of understanding. A practical environment enables Clare to explore, enjoy and take ownership of her learning in a space where she feels confident and there is familiarity through prior experience [1:371-381]. Clare becomes aware of the technical language used and can apply this to theoretical concepts [2:224-229]. Relating theory to practical is more challenging and requires imagination but she appreciates the rationale underpinning different methods of instruction [3:480-486]. Clare is aware that others may struggle, where she is gaining insight, and recommends that connections are made more explicitly to learners [3:227-230].

At school, Clare anticipated being told what to do [2:190-200]; now her method of coping is through self-teaching but she suspects her efforts are not reciprocated in equal measure by lecturing staff, resulting in feeling disenfranchised. This is most keenly felt in a lecture theatre setting.

‘In a lecture it is just big and you don’t really get to speak, like you are sitting next to your friends and it’s just so huge and people are more easily

distracted and you get bored and then other people will get distracted and so you will just stop and it's like to and fro [2:399-404]... you don't really get a grasp of who is learning or who is not... you feel too embarrassed to put your hands up, or you feel too embarrassed to say 'I don't get that'. I think a lot of people feel that so they just sit there in silence the whole time and even if they ask a question it is just silence' [2:414-424].

The pedagogic approach seems to be creating a barrier to learning and is a contributing factor in defining the self-concept students develop through the practices in which they engage. Clare feels excluded from the academic interaction taking place. Large, anonymous teaching groups seem to generate a virtual chasm between staff, who are perceived as unapproachable and distanced from the reality of the student experience, adding to the marginalisation felt by Clare. Clare rationalises this as a means of developing her autonomy. Her strategy for resolving difficulty is to attempt to find resources independently. If that fails, she may ask a peer and although she states she would approach a lecturer for help, she has not done so, establishing a pattern of behaviour that lasts throughout the year [2:177-190].

Clare seems of the opinion that without overt accountability measures, lecturing staff are not invested in her success and she is reticent at approaching someone who she perceives as aloof and lacking concern. Clare gradually becomes aware of the benefits of collaboration; small support groups provide reassurance, build confidence [2:330-342] and she has learned to welcome the opinions of others, but refers to this in relation to answering personal difficulties, suggesting that interaction with peers is a route to advancing her own agency.

'Once I have understood it on my own, then I will talk to someone else and go over it, and that helps me. Either teaching someone else it or them teaching me. Like, discussing it, having a debate about it, that helps me and it starts 'clicking'. You are bringing all the information you know about it out and it is like right, yeah, yeah, yeah. But I can't talk to them before I have learned something...I have got to be at the stage where I know most of it and now I need to talk. I feel I need to do my own independent revision before I talk' [3:365-390].

This can be construed as a slightly mercenary approach; collaboration seems to be satisfying her learning needs in the perceived absence of a supportive lecturer.

However, the language suggests Clare lacks confidence, needing a foundation understanding before she feels able to contribute. This may also reflect her wish to present a good impression.

The way other students approach university has challenged not only Clare's self-concept but also her sense of belonging. In the first interview, Clare felt daunted but is filled with hope and excitement at the prospect of meeting like-minded people [1:3-12]. She describes not belonging at her previous university and so her experience during Fresher's week was crucial in alleviating any fears [1:83-92]. To witness the change from early declarations of 'living the dream' [1:108] and university being 'so cool' [1:459] to a sense of social exclusion due to sporting cliques [2:61-63] is of concern. Clare makes observations about barriers to learning and lists a series of factors that influence disengagement; homesickness, repetitious content and social distractions. These are accumulative and she sees them as having a snowballing effect which she illustrates using a diet metaphor, describing the impact others have on non-participation [3:296-302]. Clare seems to cope by immersing herself in work, which may explain some of the issues Clare is wrestling with, in terms of how she perceives herself becoming a learner, aligned with how she experiences others, particularly where the academic context and social communities intersect so closely.

#### 4:1:3:3 This year I think is kind of a test

Clare's tendency to question her experience initially involved rationalising certain aspects of her learning but as the year progresses, her questioning becomes more pronounced. Clare's main concern relates to the accountability of lecturers. There is a noticeable discrepancy between the quality of interaction taking place in a practical environment, where staff make personal judgements about her learning and progress, compared to a lecture theatre setting. Clare wants to feel equality of investment in her learning; whilst she is making every effort to engage with her studies, she is dismissive of the perceived attitude of some lecturing staff, prompting questions about value for money.

'In practical you are getting something from it; they can see you doing it and they can see if you get it or you don't. Whereas in a lecture, they don't know if you get it or you don't. It seems like they don't really care, they have ticked off their boxes of saying what they need to say, that's it, goodbye, done; finish ten minutes early, yeah, I get ten-minutes tea break or whatever. That's how it feels; and it feels like you are paying £9,000 to sit in a lecture hall and it doesn't feel you are getting your money's worth. It just feels like I could have missed this lecture and read up on it because I am just reading what he says' [2:427-454].

An inconsistent lecture schedule and lack of guidance lead her to state 'we don't learn anything' [3:17]. The value of attending lectures is positioned against the constant message that year 1 does not count towards the final degree mark; a viewpoint not accepted by her that she fights hard to resist. Clare is proud that she is working independently but feels this should not absolve the lecturers of their responsibilities.

'This time you are paying for your education and it is like, ok you have taught us for an hour and that is it. If you tell us what you want us to do then brilliant but if he is not even there to say read this paper and analyse this, I don't know, it is just a bit yeah, read this book, but it is a pretty large book' [3:66-73].

Clare is irritated and frustrated by poor quality or lack of feedback received in some modules and from selected tutors. She has aligned herself with what she understands to be the correct way to go about learning in HE and has bought in to the university, both literally via fees and conceptually. Clare is willing to engage with university learning and subscribes to the 'rules' of engagement; thus, when these are not adhered to, the disturbance is considerable. Clare accepts that she has moved beyond a 'spoon-fed' approach but she needs the security of being told that work is correct, particularly when there may be multiple solutions to a problem [3:172-179]. This may appear as a contradiction, given her reservations for approaching lecturers; but her reticence may be exacerbated by the type of feedback she has been exposed to.

'I got my feedback for my essay which I didn't really like; not the feedback but the way it was given. It was given on a, you know when they haven't written it down and they have just spoken about it; and I don't know why but it felt like they hadn't really cared to look at it, like they had kind of read it and given feedback but not actually annotated it. Because you had

made the effort to do it and then it doesn't really feel like you have got the feedback you wanted' [2:13-23].

Clare attempts to rationalise her experience suggesting cohort size and insignificance of year 1 as an explanation for the lack of personalisation [3:240 - 248]. Associated with this is the frustration Clare feels when she completes a test and receives a summative grade but has no understanding of how she came to either the right or wrong answer.

'I understand that they want you to figure it out and that you should learn for yourself, but sometimes, if they just would tell you then that would be solidified in my mind and I will remember it. There are positives and negatives to each but there are no positives to them not giving you any feedback after you have done it. It is like, oh you got 47%, well done you passed and that is it. Done' [3:254-261].

Only knowing a specific percentage grade is not sufficient to help her improve and the modular system seems to be failing to reward students who want to close gaps in understanding. Clare regards all learning as important and having a role to play in her moving forward but unless she selects an associated module in the coming year, her efforts seem inconsequential. Rather than supporting progress, the degree structure seems to be causing a gradual attrition of the 'ownership' she seeks. Clare's uncertainty sets in motion a deeper consideration of the reason for being at university. Clare is wrestling with the financial gains friends from home are making and is concerned about debt alongside feeling increasingly lacklustre.

'I ...feel more lazy. Because I don't have to wake up; like sometimes you don't have a lecture until 3pm so you think oh, I will just stay in bed and I don't like it... I am paying nine grand a year and I am just in bed when I could be doing something. I feel like should I get a job?... You are spending three years at university to spend twenty-seven grand and people earn twenty grand a year like average don't they so then when you leave they have already got sixty grand and you are minus that' [2:71-85].

Her state of being is brought into sharp focus with the unexpected death of a fellow student, leading her to consider the temporality of life and the need to do something meaningful. Despite wrestling with the 'what counts' conundrum, her experience is not, as the analysis might suggest, entirely negative. Dance is highlighted as a

positive experience; this is based on three key indicators that she values. Clare enjoys dance; her effort is matched by the lecturing input and success is rewarded with good grades but more importantly, with an invitation to join the university Dance Company. Clare's transition into university has been defined by the sense she makes of experience and how this impacts on her self-perception and the choices made. Clare's resilience and sense of purpose is tested to such an extreme that she may well have been on the cusp of withdrawing. Clare's questioning leads her to suggest that year 1 has a hidden motive.

'This year; I think it is kind of a test in a way to see if you are motivated yourself enough. Like yeah, it doesn't count so you could just think oh 'whatever, forget it', but then other people are like no, actually I do want to do well and I do want to do well' [2:265-270].

Clare demonstrates a strong sense of self determination, openly stating that she 'wants to learn' and 'wants to know' [1:198]. Her work ethic, diligence and intrinsic need to learn seem to prevail and act as the foundation from which she can reject the idea that year 1 does not count.

#### 4:1:4 Deb

Throughout the interviews, Deb refers to the process of adaptation; she is keenly aware of her own 'self' within different environments and communities and is conscious of changing roles, depending on the situation. Finding how she 'fits' into university involves the undoing of previously held conceptions of 'self' to respond to events that either support or impede learning. Becoming a university student and becoming a learner are influenced by aspects of social integration and interaction, which defines Deb's transitional journey in year 1.

Deb often clarifies a statement with phrases such as 'I hope so' [2:207] or 'I probably should' [2:113], suggesting insecurity as she wrestles with developing new ways of learning and understanding her experience within HE. This clarification is absent from her final interview and signifies confidence in being herself.

<i>Deb</i>	Super-Ordinate Theme		
	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
<b><i>Idiographic Master Theme</i></b>			
<i>It's not what the day brings, it's how you bring it</i>	Expanding familiar self	Different self in different situations	Comfortable being herself
<i>Other people give me reassurance</i>	Adapting to independent expectations	Independent study /learning together	Learning as an adopted attitude
Subsumed	Positive thinking	<i>Subsumed</i>	Trying and being [her] best
<i>I do feel, I was going to say loved here</i>	Adapting to learning and living away from home	Negotiating social and academic relationships	Feeling at home

Table 5: Deb idiographic master themes

4:1:4:1 It's not what the day brings; it's how you bring it

Deb arrived at university aware of how her inner-city background distinguished her from most of her peers. Rather than seeing this as a barrier, Deb embraces the opportunity to experience new activities which are out of her comfort zone [1:173]. She equates this with facing her demons [1:180], suggesting some concern over her ability but she views her degree as an entire package and wants to expand her horizons, appreciating the holistic development that will come about by accepting every opportunity as a challenge that must be met equally.

Deb is unsettled by the divergent learning methods observed among others. Peers take copious notes, contradicting her belief that listening is the correct way to attend to information [1:235-255]. Deb seems to be enacting her image of an effective learner and implies this is the norm which others should also adhere to. At this point, she describes understanding as being able to remember something for an extended period, but the complexity of transition is challenging feelings of competence; she struggles to sustain focus and keep up with weekly demands. Efforts to gain confidence heighten awareness of her strength in certain contexts. She retains a preference for familiar activities, possibly compensating for the weakness felt elsewhere but she continues to strive to enjoy new challenges, reflecting her work ethic and broader ambition to achieve well across the degree.

'If I am doing something I like to do it well. I like to finish it off and I don't want to just do bits of it. So, if I was to just do the dance and the gymnastics modules and just go full on, on that, that is not completing the task well because you are not doing it full round. So, that is why I need to aim as well to do the psychology. I like to not just kick stuff out... even if I am probably not enjoying it I would somehow make myself do it. I think it is because I am thinking of the end result... I think having a target towards something makes me even more focused' [1:321-335].

Deb is motivated by her career goal and an awareness of how she goes about learning reveals a person who is self-determined, and self-regulating. Her interest in the subject content is clear but low confidence prompts anxieties about her progress and she doubts the quality of her work. Stress is directly felt by the pressure she places on herself, but also indirectly through the panic displayed by students who have left assignments until the last-minute, initiating a conscious comparison with others which triggers feelings of paranoia and a manic need to do more [2:247-251; 2:322-333]; an emotional response that may not be considered healthy.

Deb's sensitivity to others manifests in a tendency to refrain from dialogue during lectures. Although she acknowledges this as a lack of confidence, it is possibly more representative of introversion; being 'shy' is a characteristic not necessarily associated with a PE stereotype and she admires those who feel able to contribute.

'I don't really put my hand up as much as I probably should. Like when someone is asking a question with me I am answering it in my head... I am not saying I know it but I will answer it. But I won't be one to be I know it or just shout it out, like in the lecture you see people just shout out what they are saying; I don't know if I could do that, but then I think it's just confidence. I'm just not like that, it's not good really I should be more confident and over time I will probably be able to just do it' [1:374-385].

Deb's optimism for increased confidence is only partially fulfilled by the end of year 1 and she still prefers to answer questions 'in her head' [3:56-65]; worries about how she may be perceived among her peers outweigh the potential gains associated with impressing the lecturer. However, her statement '*It is not what the day brings; it is how you bring it*' [2:487-488] suggests a growing sense of agency [3:219-225]. Deb does not feel threatened by any sense of competition and is ready to assume different roles within the group. However, she is frustrated when peers blur the

boundaries between social activity and academic learning. In a lecture, Deb's priority rests firmly on the learning at hand and she finds it difficult to confront the off-task behaviour of peers.

'Sometimes it is hard because if you are with people who you do really get along with and they are not as focused. It is hard because you are obviously not as focused when you are in your living room so when you are coming in to a lecture, you have the sense that you need to be serious now but it has still got that 'chilledness' about it, which is annoying because you want everyone to just be on board. That's when the chit-chatting starts' [3:318-326].

Deb differentiates between 'study', which she prefers to do on her own, and 'learning', where she enjoys interaction but she feels uncomfortable working with unfamiliar people [2:128-138]. Her concerns are eased in a practical environment; she finds comfort in collective demonstration, as opposed to individual questioning or discussion in a lecture theatre. Context seems to be the distinguishing factor that impacts upon Deb's feelings of efficacy.

'In a practical it is kind of, we all do our own things. Like today we were doing dribbling and he said go up to someone and high five them or chest bounce them, I felt more confident doing that, than if I was to say, go into a lecture and talk to some random person about psychology. I would rather physically contact someone in practical than do that. I wasn't self-conscious because everyone is doing it, I felt like I wasn't the only one standing out. Where as in the lecture if he says a question and points at you, then that is just on me and that is more pressure' [2:416-429].

The most significant change during the year is the confidence Deb has found in simply being 'herself'. Having initially felt pressure to conform socially, she becomes secure in her own way of being; no longer concerned with changing who she is to please others.

'At the beginning, I was adapting to become, not more outgoing but I think it is the opposite way round; I was trying to adapt and now I have given up. Not like 'given up' but everyone knows me as me now; whereas before with all the hype and energy, you are just trying to conform to their behaviour a bit... but now I just do my own thing' [2:36-45].

Debs is not offended by being nicknamed 'Grandma' [2:497] and views learning as the principle objective of attending university. Interaction has added to her enjoyment and she understands that successful adaptation requires social integration [3:506-515]. Time is passing quickly and Deb is conscious of how she has 'grown up' and entered the next phase in her life [3:431-438]. She recognises university as part of a longer journey but is not aware of this until discussing it during the interview. Having time and space to reflect has enhanced Deb's engagement with the richness of her university experience.

#### 4:1:4:2 Other people give me reassurance

Deb's initial experiences of university are different from her expectations; she is used to tightly structured modes of working and seems to find what she interprets as a '*chilled back*' [1:8] environment unnerving. Deb anticipated essay writing and examinations [1:75] but the non-contact work comes as a surprise, initially failing to connect with its purpose for extending and deepening knowledge.

'So, it is not what I expected; its laid back in the sense that you do what you have to do by yourself; which I understand, it's us as independent but even in A level we had the teacher to like 'baby' us in a way. So, they have always warned us, oh when you go to university we won't be doing this and that for you... but until you actually come here it actually kicks in and... you have to learn to quickly adapt to the environment' [1:35-47].

Deb views independent learning as an isolated activity and accepts this as a required mode of working which fits with her preconceptions of university.

'I would say independent learning is you are doing it completely by yourself, no one is telling you what to do and you are doing it because you want to do it. You are not doing it because someone is forcing you to do it; it is just completely up to you' [1:464-469].

However, she prefers to work with others; collaboration acts as a source of reassurance and is motivating but she admits to struggling with the absence of someone telling her what to do [1:263-273]. Learning in a rote fashion is not appropriate for success in HE and without regular testing demands self-regulation. Deb appears comfortable listening in a lecture theatre and writing notes after a

period of reflection [1:203-210] but increased workload necessitates better organisation, time management and the development of more appropriate study skills. Deb describes her new approach as 'expanded'; seeking depth of understanding through journal research rather than generic online searches [2:3-15], demonstrating how she is engaging differently with learning.

Deb works incrementally to complete assignments in areas of perceived academic weakness and commits to the challenge of learning new sports [2:95], neglecting aspects of learning she feels most comfortable with [2:270-283]. Realising her oversight impacts on how Deb goes about learning and by the end of the year, she has evolved a systematic process for the resolution of difficulty [3:106-111] by examining what she can achieve independently, followed by consulting peers with whom she openly shares her notes and finally, seeking the advice of lecturing staff.

'That is what they are there for. There is no point me struggling about a problem when they can help me, because they are going to be marking my work so it makes more sense to get feedback off them. I realised that when I was going through a problem in my essay, I was just struggling and I had tried everything that I could do but then the only thing I didn't do was to go for a tutorial. So, I thought I need to book one and then I had two and it just helped more. I wish I had known that... what they say in that short amount of time can give you the information you need' [3:132-150].

Her words acknowledge an expectation that staff should help but she also reprimands herself for not approaching lecturers sooner. Deb is aware of how different pedagogic methods either support or hinder learning, explaining how pointless the lectures seem when time is spent racing through a PowerPoint presentation, where the principle concern is content coverage rather than with generating a deep understanding of fewer key concepts. Deb tries to rationalise the monotony by proposing the format constrains the lecturer and it is her responsibility to adapt to the mode of instruction [2:442-449]. Deb mitigates the lecturer of any obligation to find alternative and engaging modes of delivery but suggests that learning would be improved if words were directed towards the students rather than a slide and included some re-capping [2:369-382, 3:238-249]. It would seem there is a cleft between what the lecturer may think they are successfully imparting to students and the reality of what the students are genuinely learning.

By contrast, experience in a practical environment is more positive. Peers seem more invested in their learning and Deb is conscious of a change in collective energy.

'In the practical I think students are more aware. Like you can see the difference in their faces. Say, when we do games... everyone was all energetic and people want to do it. If they want to do it then they are going to put more effort into it. It is such a different environment and we all learnt something... it was more fun really. Even the teacher [name], he wasn't talking as much but we were still learning and he gave us more time for us to practice' [2:393-405].

The opportunity to practise under the scrutiny of the lecturer is important. The lecturer can observe and check understanding, mindful of the progress being made by students and be able to intervene, accordingly [2:406-413]. Practical is a way to relieve stress and comes as a welcome break to cerebral activity, making Deb more alert. Learning in a lecture theatre only becomes more meaningful when there is a deliberate and mediated '*blending*' of theory and practical [2:171-181].

The development of collaborative working is a notable aspect of transition that alters how Deb goes about learning. In interview one, she is conscious of the pleasure found in working with others; it provides encouragement but she is essentially trying to function independently and in an isolated manner.

'I like to talk to other people. I don't like to just learn by myself; like with my roommate we are always helping each other out, together. But when it comes to the work we will do it separately but I like reassurance if I am doing it ok... they are probably doing it wrong as well, but in my head it's like we are doing it wrong together. Whereas if I did it by myself then I don't know, I like to talk about it with people and then go into it' [1: 210-220].

As Deb becomes more involved socially, the benefits of collaboration extend beyond the comfort others bring. Deb finds the value of articulating learning and seems to experience fun through sharing [2:287-302]. By the end of her first year, Deb has become secure in her self-concept and is developing a sense of agency that leads her to revise her understanding of independent learning, considering it to be an adopted '*attitude*' that guides how she goes about learning [3:78-88]. Deb knows

when she has understood a concept when it becomes embedded and she can apply it to future situations. When asked about what it means to become an academic learner, her response is also expressed in terms of attitude; there is no reference to research, advanced study skills or high quality writing.

'I've got it in my head but I can't really express it, [pause]. By taking everything on board in a sense that you are not just; it is not just about your grades it is about how you come across as well like your motivation, your confidence in it. I think it is an all rounded perspective... you have got to have the right attitude to be an academic learner. You can't have poor effort or attitude because you are not going to get progress in your learning, you are just going to stay the same. I hope I have become an academic learner; I think I have, yeah. I would probably class myself as a beginner one' [3:448-459].

Deb is sensing change in her learning behaviour, but without opportunities to make connections and to apply her understanding, there remain doubts about the depth and longevity of her scholarship.

#### 4:1:4:3 I do feel, I was going to say loved here

Deb's transition and adjustment to learning in HE seems to be closely aligned to a sense of belonging. Moving to university represents a new phase in Deb's life but she is mindful of the impact it has on her family.

'When I first came and she [mother] left me and I was in that dorm by myself, that's when it kind of hit me type of thing. But even then I just rang her up straight away and put her on the phone in the car. And it's weird now because we would be talking all the time and now it's like once every four days. That's still a lot but I am used to it being every second. It's just about us both adapting to the situation' [1:125-136].

Deb is more concerned with how her mother may be coping with her absence rather than struggling with any personal feelings of homesickness, yet her most strongly felt difficulty during the induction period involves social change and living in Halls of Residence (Halls). She is aware of the diversity and is conscious of the need to become reacquainted once the superficiality of Freshers' Week is over.

'The challenge would be with my roommates; I know it is probably weird to say but I do love them all but we are all so different. Obviously, at the first week, Freshers, everyone was yeah let's go out, but after that dies down it was kind of like we did know each other but we had to really get to know each other... it's difficult to try and include everyone, but you do. There are divisions as well which I don't like and I am always trying to mix it together. But we are really all different in our flat; I don't know how they put us together, is it randomly, I don't know how they do it, it's mad' [1:139-153].

Deb shows compassion and kindness, possibly sensing that others may also be finding the environment strange. She wants to find acceptance and include others equally, but is anxious about neglecting work in favour of spending time with flat mates, engaging in idle 'chit chat' and imitating what they do for fear of missing out [1:347-360]. Deb is not comfortable compromising her behaviour to 'fit in' and suggests the need for opportunities to mix with students from other degree courses. There is a sense she may be feeling alien to the prevailing culture and environment but this changes as the routine of attending lectures brings her into contact with members of her direct degree cohort.

Deb enjoys the camaraderie of learning collaboratively which extends beyond the classroom. Flatmates continue to generate annoyances [2:215-218; 2:354-360] but an alliance is forming and the bond positively influences her confidence and efficacy. Deb no longer needs to engage with unappealing activities and her '*group*' give her the freedom to be herself [2:510-514]. Deb feels a sense of having grown up and has become more self-reliant. Collegiate and social relationships become defined and her reference to '*family*' displays fondness for her peers.

'It is still like everyone is getting along but... you seem to be talking just about the lecture when you are in the lecture. It's just a different vibe, it's a nice vibe; it is like a PE course vibe. They are your friends but then when you go out to do other stuff it is more your friends vibe. They are both like families but in weird ways... That is what I enjoy about coming to university because everyone is on the same course and we all have the exact same interests, basically PE and its nice' [3:302-315].

Deb also says, 'This is my home' [3:497] and in an unguarded moment, reference to feeling '*loved*' illustrates her passage towards finding 'belonging' at university.

'Belonging here? I do feel, I was going to say loved here; like from the flat, in the beginning they were strangers and you don't know if you feel like you belong. Then when you get to know them, 24/7, you do feel like, even when you go away for the weekend they are like, oh we will miss you and I miss them when they go away' [3:518-524].

#### 4:1:5 Eddie

Listening to Eddie's interviews in succession revealed a deeply reflective tone to the way he articulates experience. Transition challenges Eddie to adapt to a new set of circumstances; issues of dislocation, anxiety and self-esteem combined with low social confidence prompt a re-evaluation of his personal frames of reference. Dance has had a profound impact upon Eddie and permeates his transcripts; it provides a context through which he experiences transformation, affecting how he understands both himself and his learning.

Eddie provides a video of his journey to university [2:14-38]. The challenge of living off-campus is a recurring theme and at a superficial level, the video demonstrates what he perceives as being the biggest barrier to his learning; but it also signposts certain aspects of his deeper transitional journey. Despite careful editing, the video runs for 30 minutes, illustrating his commitment to achieving tasks to a high standard and his propensity to go above and beyond expectations.

Eddie's commentary underlines how issues of time management and organisation are amplified for students living off-campus, in turn suggesting a level of dedication not necessarily shared among peers living in Halls. He is in a minority among his cohort, fostering a sense of difference and positioning as an outsider. Eddie becomes bashful but enormously proud when the film reaches the dance rehearsal. His decision to include the dance is significant; it has little relation to the travel issue. Eddie has found a physical and social space where he feels acceptance and is confident in his ability as a learner.

<i>Eddie</i> <b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	Super-Ordinate Theme		
	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
<i>Finding my future self</i>	Developing an academic sense of self	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Maturing confidence and self-efficacy
<i>I've got the skills to deal with the challenges</i>	Independent v collaborative learning	Coping with academic learning (strategy and risk taking)	Re-conceptualising independent learning
<i>Finding out what you got for what you did</i>	Personal and professional advancement	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Going 'over-the-top'
<i>A socially binding course</i>	Social acceptance (being an outsider)	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Social acceptance (being an insider)

Table 6: Eddie idiographic master themes

#### 4:1:5:1 Finding my future self

Eddie's experience of learning is framed by an evolution of his academic and social self-concept. In the final interview, he makes a candid reference to the personal journey he has undergone, illuminating the sense of private change felt but also how he expects university to continue to shape his future.

'I am looking forward to finding my route, the route that I want to take. So, we have kind of done it a little bit by picking modules but just finding my route and then not so much sticking with my route but taking it all in, finding myself in terms of my future self, of what I want to do' [3:556-562].

The confident tone of Eddie's words sits in contrast to the opening lines of his first interview, which are revealing in terms of his perceived academic competence upon entry to HE [1:3-12]. Eddie is conscious of his vocational background and appears to be preparing himself for the challenge ahead, which necessitates re-structuring ideas about his own capability. He needs to develop his study skills, specifically writing and referencing; thus, attends closely to the advice given by lecturers, retaining this to help guide how he goes about a task, but his tone is positive and determined [1:88-93, 100-102, 111-116]. Transition to university seems to be accompanied with a re-evaluation of how he should behave as a learner and he is willing to sacrifice the social 'fun side' of university and voluntarily isolate himself to concentrate on study [1:167-176]. By accepting this position, Eddie is potentially

alienating himself from peers and access to collaborative modes of learning, which he prefers. He enjoys the opportunity to articulate learning, finding reassurance through discussion; thus, it seems odd that he feels the need to forfeit this.

Eddie is less cautious with his module choices, purposefully selecting options that see him functioning outside of his comfort zone [2:124-129]. Early feelings of isolation were perhaps necessary for him to be open to dance; he had failed selection for the university hockey team and was living away from most of his cohort. Confronted by such significant disequilibrium, dance provides the emotionally, intellectually and socially supportive environment in which to construct a new sense of 'self'. Including dance in his 'journey' video underlines the pride he feels in his success, but he is also surprised by the impact dance is having on how he experiences university [2:3-8]. Eddie has realised that year 1 is a period where the foundations for learning in the following years are laid; exploring different areas of study will allow him to make informed choices in the future. This is a different outlook from the prevailing message that year 1 does not count towards the final degree mark and he finds it difficult to resolve the decision by some to not engage with the opportunity to learn. Eddie draws on this to underline his commitment, indirectly sharing both how he perceives himself and how he wants to be perceived.

'I feel frustrated by people in Halls who don't go to lectures, especially for petty reasons. Sometimes they can't help it but if it's like they can't be bothered to get out of bed it just frustrates me. Especially on a Monday morning when we had Dance, and the lecturer would say 'where is so-and-so?' And they say, 'oh we couldn't get him out of bed' and then there is me, I got up at seven and had a half an hour walk, just to get to this lecture. Maybe because I really enjoy dance it really encouraged me to go but they should still put the effort into it. Especially as they are only down the road, it's not hard is it' [2:63-76].

Eddie consistently describes himself as a practical learner, differentiating the ease with which he learns in a practical setting with the difficulties experienced in a more formal lecture theatre [1:344-345; 2:180-190]. Kinaesthetic experience seems pivotal and he uses 'actions speak louder than words' [2:313-314] as a metaphor to explain the unaffectedness of learning when physically engaged compared to the drudgery of reviewing lecture notes.

Eddie shows resourcefulness in approaching tasks, gradually adapting to the different kinds of learning in HE and feels he has made progress. Critical writing skills develop under tutorial guidance and via feedback, although he avoids addressing certain lecturers for fear of asking a stupid question [2:281]. Increasing self-efficacy helps him to cope with the anxiety previously felt when faced with a challenge but he is equally aware of a tendency to slack if something lacks interest. Eddie recognises his propensity for over-analysis but this also enables him to reinterpret problematic tasks; he likes to be different and consciously attends to his preferred 'visual' learning style.

'If it is a really big challenge I would probably start over thinking it a bit. But then to resolve that I would do something else, like in terms of revision for psychology I am not one to just put notes in a book, I am one where, if I take it back to my visual learning, I make diagrams and even pictures sometimes which we have learnt back in 'A' level, that helps' [2:244-250] ...'I try to resolve things by doing it in a different way which some people probably think is weird but I like to be different in my learning' [2:252-255].

The balance of practical and formal academic lectures is regarded as beneficial and the 'gap' between his perceived ability to succeed in these two modes of study coalesce. Eddie finds it easier to make connections when content is delivered in a manner that engages different learning preferences and promotes interaction [3:372-391]. The inclusion of practical methods to exemplify theoretical content has allowed Eddie to access learning in a way that has resonance; he may also feel greater affinity with the lecturer and he is conscious of forming bonds that give him the courage to seek help when needed [3:43-54]. He begins to demonstrate empathy for others, where previously it might have been frustration, accepting that people learn in different ways and slight distractions in a lecture theatre are no longer limiting his ability to engage. The desire to accomplish work to a high standard encourages resilience and his ability to adapt has a positive impact on his confidence and sense of 'self'.

'My confidence has increased dramatically; more than I thought it would. Both as a learner, and as an individual myself. There is some stuff that I never thought I would be doing; dance being the biggest one... I didn't have a second thought when I got the email from [Dance Company Lead Lecturer] inviting me to join. Not a second thought, I just wanted to do it. Whereas before I would have had second thoughts, have a little

argument in my head. But definitely, as a person now I think my confidence has increased; I am talking to more people and I am more social now than I was which I quite like' [3:182-196].

Eddie admits to having been stuck in Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) mode but appreciates what he can learn by interacting with people, and dance provides the context for forging a network of supportive relationships, where learning becomes a participatory activity [3:489-500]. Positive feedback and approval from others affirm his self-concept and the reflective space afforded through interview participation seems to help how he goes about resolving difficulty [3:266-284]. He is aware of how he feels due to increased confidence and the impact this has had on both his academic and social development. His optimism and search for his 'future self' suggests that any change experienced during the first year is only the beginning for Eddie.

#### 4:1:5:2 I've got the skills to deal with the challenges

Eddie imagined HE learning would involve a large lecture theatre with an emphasis on note taking and auditory methods. There is a sense of relief as he realises collaboration is encouraged, that group work constitutes a significant proportion of the degree structure [2:265-273] and formal lectures are not as daunting as expected, with humour playing a part in making the experience fun and accessible. Eddie anticipated greater autonomy but held a misconception that independent learning should be devoid of social interaction. He is resistant to the idea of support, suggesting any input from others devalues the authenticity of work produced, conflicting with his image of being an undergraduate.

'Independent learning, that's sitting down in front of a computer or even practical, taking everything in and then going over it again with yourself and then transforming that onto a word document or a long jump demonstration or whatever it needs to be. Learning with support... it's getting that information from someone else, that information from someone else gets transported onto a word document or an action. So, getting support learning it's their words not mine, it's their long jump not mine' [1:433-447].

Later Eddie reflects upon his words and berates himself for being '*ignorant*' [2:474-482] but they represent what he thought and felt at that moment in time. Tensions exist between how Eddie believes he needs to function to take independent ownership of his work, yet he voices a preference for interaction despite his social awkwardness [1:256-270]. Eddie uses extrinsic indicators to target gaps in knowledge and guide progress; understanding is situated in his capacity to meet outcomes, potentially fuelling his inclination to always do more. Being alert to assessment criteria prompts intentional use of tutorials and Eddie demonstrates a strategic use of online module guidance.

'Say in athletics, I know we are being assessed on our technique of a shot putt not the distance that you achieved. So, I realised that and then I started working on technique' [2:502-506] ...'With the module outlines I know what is expected in most lectures. I wouldn't look at it before every single lecture, but I know what is expected of the lecture. Tutorials as well, especially OAA (Outdoor and Adventurous Activities), we have gone in thinking we have done everything but have realised that we haven't because we had a tutorial' [2:512-518].

There is consistent evidence of his strong work ethic and he is insistent about always trying his best [2:201-204]. Despite this added pressure, Eddie feels positive about his learning. He seeks challenge and is willing to take risks encouraged by his perspective regarding the purpose of year 1; a liberating viewpoint that leads him to experiment in perceived areas of weakness without the threat of lower grades impacting on his degree classification. The choices he makes and his ability to reflect on the outcomes have led to a deeper understanding of his potential.

Success authenticates Eddie as a learner and he understands how effective study methods in dance can translate into approaches that will support his development elsewhere. He is analytical in how he conceives a problem, breaking a task down into constituent parts [2:413-422], replicating the choreographic process. Dance also acts as a catalyst for unprompted reflection [2:428-430]; he repeatedly views performance recordings to keep improving but this may also serve as a source of reassurance, looking back to build confidence so that he can succeed in the future.

Dance provides a medium for building relationships among peers and with lecturing staff. The bond Eddie describes has a profound effect on how he feels and goes about learning, and the changes that began to emerge, mid-semester one, expand and embed across wider aspects of his experience.

'In dance in the first semester I wasn't going up to [lecturers' names] or anything, but as it came towards the end and we had the performance coming up I started talking to them more and then we would start to have a nice bond. That is where [University Dance Company] came from as well which was a boost afterwards. Going to semester two, I did gymnastics so I would talk to [lecturer name] sharing with him more on what I could improve. Even with the theory based subjects, I was going to see [lecturer name] and see what I could do. So, it's not until now that I am talking about it that I guess I am conscious that I have become more confident in talking more' [3:56-71].

Eddie is aware of how he is changing and experiences learning, which he describes as having 'deepened' [2:291] but he continues to position himself as a practical and visual learner. The opportunity to embed movement patterns through practice is a method of learning he enjoys, whereas content received in an auditory setting goes no further than a series of notes which he finds difficult to process cognitively. He uses a metaphor of lightening never striking the same place twice [2:583-601] to describe the unpredictable pleasure of practical learning, whilst lecture theatre pedagogy is experienced as monotonous and repetitive.

Learning in a practical environment provides a sense of physical efficacy to expand his practical repertoire, pursue emerging interests and discover what else he may be capable of. The mode of instruction and overt enthusiasm from the lecturer supports this pursuit [2:339-346]. By contrast, Eddie's experience in a lecture theatre is very different.

'I think especially with the psychology, in terms of numbers in the lecture theatre. There could be two hundred in there. It is not very comfortable, you have got so many people around you and little things can distract me like someone tapping a pen or something' [2:366-372] ... 'So then, that means I have missed something because I have turned to look at some group laughing in the back or something... it always seems to be the bigger numbers means bigger distractions, or more distractions' [2:378-385].

Inability to learn in this setting is exaggerated by a sense of anonymity and absence of a relationship with the lecturer. Eddie copes through his developing sense of efficacy and seems to trust his personal capability to master the demands of learning. He interprets difficulty as a challenge that can be overcome through effort and application, supported by re-conceptualising independent learning to include input from others.

‘Independent learning is taking it on yourself but not being scared to ask for help. So, I will take on the task and if I feel like I need that extra bit of help I will go and see a lecturer, especially with the practical performances where maybe I am not knowledgeable enough. So, independent learning is taking it on but not being scared to go and see someone... then, when you have got knowledge you can go back as an independent learner. So, you are kind of dipping into being independent and asking for feedback and stuff like that. I feel like an independent learner; I’ve got the skills to deal with the challenges’ [3:75-90].

Eddie’s description includes a sense of ownership, responsibility and effective utility of support. He follows a deliberate sequence of action when approaching a task and has noticed how he has become more measured in his approach [3:456-462]. He alludes to theory learning as a form of banking pedagogy [3:116-118], suggesting information delivered in a lecture theatre (psychology) would be fed into him. To counter the difficulties faced by this approach, he has developed bespoke study skills to reinterpret content in a manner which he finds most accessible. His progress is enabled when practical pedagogy is utilised in the lecture theatre, bringing ‘dry’ theory to life in a way that makes sense to Eddie.

‘I see the distinction [theory/practical] as getting closer together, whether that is down to the module content or the way they are teaching it I am not sure. But I know with the Human Movement one there were more demonstrations of a certain movement or critical features. So, that gave me some sort of visual content like I would get from a practical lecture’ [3:372-380].

Eddie is also benefiting from a sense of collegiality among his peers and is conscious of a growth in maturity and professionalism. Lecture theatre distractions become ‘*limited*’ [3:199-200; 3:403-411] and he understands that the idiosyncrasies of others may be representative of how they best go about learning. Eddie’s appreciation of difference may also be a consequence of greater social integration

where he gains from the reciprocity and reassurances of collaborative working [3:288-298; 3:335-342], providing access to different ideas and viewpoints which complement his reflective nature. When asked about becoming an academic learner, his response is as much about transformation in understanding him 'self' as it is about the development of effective study skills and habits.

'I guess I take that as being resourceful, knowing what is available to you. Being literate in the way you learn as well. Knowing yourself, so knowing how you learn and taking that on to your subject... for example, taking an auditory type of learning and translating it in to a visual. So as an academic learner making sure you have got all those resources and knowing them; knowing that you have them online, knowing that you have your peers, your housemates. As an academic learner, find what you are good at, use that to improve what you are not good at and using resources that you have identified to help you learn too' [3:439-451].

Because Eddie has resolved the issue of whether year 1 genuinely 'counts' or not, he is able to set aside concerns regarding the value of grades and consider outcomes from a reflexive position. He has learned to exploit resources and by re-conceptualising independent learning, profits from interacting with others.

#### 4:1:5:3 Finding out what you got for what you did

During the first interview, when asked how he feels about his learning, Eddie responds by discussing a long-term goal; he associates university with the opportunity to access a better future for himself.

'I know that learning is the way for me to get somewhere in life. Whilst other people in my family have done different routes I was one of those where I knew learning was my route to get somewhere. I have a clear goal... to move to Australia, that's like my main goal, and to teach or work over there... I just know that I want to get there in some way or form and learning was the easiest route for me I feel' [1:288-301].

Projection is possibly a mechanism for resolving feelings of dislocation and the setback of not meeting the entry requirements for his first-choice degree but as Eddie settles in, experience shapes what he perceives as valuable and important, influencing his learning behaviour. He compensates for early difficulties with socialisation by immersing himself in study; he is self-determined, finds lectures

interesting [1:130] and is excited to learn. A defining moment occurs with Eddie's discovery of dance. He remains self-determined but during the second interview, there is a noticeable absence of goal directed behaviour; attention seems directed towards the development of 'self'.

The sheer enjoyment, challenge and feeling of accomplishment seems to be driving an intuitive fascination with dance. He finds the physicality satisfying, prompting a revision of how he engages his body not simply as a tool for achieving sporting outcomes, but as an instrument for personal expression.

'I just really enjoy it. I never thought I would do it. Especially before; I never did it in school. We are doing contemporary dance and you don't realise how much effort you have to put in to it. We had to do like a throwing action and you have to imagine that you have got a ball in your hand and you are throwing it; if you don't then it just looks like a flop. I think people just think it is a flowing type thing but it takes a lot of effort. Especially with lifts and catches; I have spoken to someone back from school who is doing a dance course and they won't even think about doing lifts and catches in their first year. So, when I speak to them and show them the video they are like 'oh, wow'. We are PE students, not dance students and they are quite impressed by it. And the lecturers are brilliant. It is just the small things, like [lecturers name] will send me an email and it will say, p.s. really good dance' [2:78-95].

Through dance Eddie seems able to embrace the present, and motivation assumes two perspectives; intrinsically led by interest, enjoyment and the desire to improve, juxtaposed with the need for extrinsic recognition of his learning. Eddie struggles to articulate how he knows he has understood content without turning towards external indicators [3:223-229] and seems to oscillate between degrees of integrated regulation where feedback is essential in affirming success [3:238-247]. Grades authenticate his learning and provide a gauge for evaluating effort.

'Within university I think it is the possible outcome and finding out what you got for what you did. All that work you have put in is definitely a type of motivation. Just knowing what you could get and then when you get a grade that is better it just lifts you up too. That has happened a few times so that motivates me. Plus, the social aspects of it as well... if you work hard then you can play hard afterwards' [3:211-220].

Eddie is driven by feeling capable and makes regular reference to his tendency to go '*over the top*' [3:254; 3:434; 3:459] particularly where he can transfer skills; dance performance skills aid gymnastic composition and his prior knowledge and interest in media is utilised where the assessment tasks allow. Competition is a motivating influence that Eddie reluctantly admits to; he wants his work to be better than peers but he is uncomfortable with this confession, sensing it may seem disloyal.

'When you are in a team and there are other groups as well, OAA being quite a big one; because I knew I had the media side behind me so I knew that I wanted to, it sounds horrible but, for it to be better than everyone else's in a way. Then when everyone started putting their videos on YouTube I was being really competitive and started comparing them, which does sound quite horrible. But yeah, there is a competitive side. I feel competitive with myself. I think the feeling I had when I got results and then picking my modules, I know I was picking them saying I got this so what can I do to improve it in year 2' [3:344-357].

Despite the freedom experienced during year 1, as Eddie approaches year 2, grades become a factor in the choices made and he reiterates the need to keep improving, to become better and keep moving forward [3:362-367].

#### 4:1:5:4 A socially binding course

Eddie exhibits strong allegiance towards his degree cohort and the way they experience learning together. Having attended the interview for the four-year Physical Education with qualified teacher status (QTS) degree, he had initially felt uncomfortable enrolling alongside people he recognised and feared being judged as less able. Associated anxiety may have contributed to his early social withdrawal but belonging to the Dance Company provides status and membership of an elite sub-group within the broader university community. Eddie is proud of his ability to navigate between discrete groups of students, which he illustrates using the metaphor of 'migration' but he shows greatest affection for his immediate peers.

'As a group, we have become a lot closer, especially now in the lectures... it is one of those courses where it is like a socially binding course. Not like being stuck in a classroom where you are only sat next to three people or whatever. You are in a practical, nice environment with people with similar levels of experience' [3:600-607].

Eddie's movement from being an 'outsider' to becoming an 'insider' is not easy; finding acceptance and forming place attachment occur simultaneously with changes in self-concept and the ability to make sense of his learning experience.

Eddie was excited by the prospect of leaving home, but as the first to go away to university was sensitive to family anxieties. However, this is tempered with a strong sense of pride in his achievement and he credits his background for his determination and resilience [2:201-213]. When asked how he felt starting university, his anticipation is clear.

'I was really excited but then the other half of me was really scared... as soon as I found out I didn't get into Halls I was a bit wary. It wasn't until I got onto the Facebook page and started talking to members of staff as well as other people in my situation it got much easier. It even got to the point when I was rung up again and I was asked if I wanted to go into Halls. I declined it because I was so like mind-set of living in a house. The first week I really enjoyed; I am not really a go out person so I am not one of those who went out every night for Freshers' week but I still really enjoyed it. Getting to meet some new people, new friends, which many people have told me they will last you for the rest of your life and it's nice to know that' [1:62-76].

Eddie's decision to live off-campus is possibly driven by a constructed image of becoming a 'grown-up' and could be viewed as an expedient route to achieving independence. Despite the frustrations of his commute, Eddie finds living in a house enjoyable and benefits from the opportunity to articulate learning in an informal manner and relax with housemates [1:228; 1:273]. Yet he is conscious of the distance from home; it is not easy for Eddie to access the support network provided by his family and the isolation is amplified by weekends alone, making homesickness more pronounced.

Eddie felt well supported and prepared for university by college staff; he speaks fondly of a teacher who acted as a mentor prior to university [1:25-39] and the absence of an adult guide possibly exacerbates his sense of displacement. He is appreciative of the effort made by lecturers to make him feel at ease [1:66] and it is one lecturer's use of comedy during teaching that makes learning 'bearable' [1:384]. This is possibly an unfortunate choice of word but it reflects the loneliness being

experienced. Eddie views his shyness as a barrier that needs work and attention [1:395-396], knowing that it will impact on his learning, but in the early stages of university he has not quite figured out how or had the confidence to do something proactive.

Dance provides the context through which Eddie experiences a vital source of security, allowing him to forge emotional bonds and find social acceptance. Dance impacts upon Eddie's developing sense of self, rooted in the relationships and physical space within which he operates; he gains a sense of collegiality and the collaborative effort changes how he perceives the commitment among peers [2:388-396]. Most of the students engaging with dance derive from Eddie's first choice of degree course and being acknowledged by members of this cohort may be significant in terms of building his self-esteem.

'Socially, there have been quite a few people in my dance who have really enjoyed it and I think they would want to carry it on as well, they've talked about [Dance Company] and stuff so I have kind of migrated with them a bit as well. Whereas before, I didn't get into Halls so I didn't get to socialise with them as much but the lectures have allowed me to, even from a different course because sometimes the lectures are mixed' [2:132-141].

The Dance Company engages Eddie with wider university activities through workshops and performances. The opportunity to represent the university in this ambassadorial role cements his commitment; he feels invested in and so, in turn, invests in the university. The language and tone of his words are extremely positive and the comparison to a youthful, boy band conjures an image of excitement and vitality.

'At first I didn't think I would have fitted in so well, but then stuff along the way has helped build up my confidence, being in [Dance Company] is probably the biggest one. Socially as a crew, we are really close now and I think, like I've had feedback from a performance and people will be like you didn't think we would be put together, it is a real 'One Direction' boyband moment; like I can't believe how well we get along already [3:305-313] ...I feel like I belong, and as a peer group I definitely feel like I belong in the PE course itself. But I also feel like I belong in other areas as well and that is due to [Dance Company name]' [3:503-513].

Growing confidence and finding a secure ‘place’ within the university community [3:489-500] augments his sense of belonging and attachment to the wider institution. In terms of adapting to HE, Eddie credits this to the independence he feels and his enjoyment of university living and learning.

#### 4:1:6 Fiona

Fiona’s transcripts are rich in emotional content, where perceptions of self oscillate between low confidence and a negative self-image to a resilient and self-determined attitude to work. Fiona admits to struggling socially, but is not prepared to sacrifice her sense of self to gain acceptance and clings tightly to the security of home. Fiona sees herself as one person within a community of individuals; work is a singular endeavour being undertaken by herself, for herself.

Fiona uses ‘battle’ terminology (defeat, conquer and struggle) to describe her experience. Firmly positioning as a physical learner, she rejects the possibility of having academic potential and embraces her choice of degree course as being perfectly aligned to her skills, needs and ambitions.

<i>Fiona</i>	Super-Ordinate Theme		
<b><i>Idiographic Master Theme</i></b>	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
<i>I am not your typical netballer</i>	Singular sense of self (being different)	Vulnerable and conflicted self	Seeking to resolve past and present perceptions of self
<i>Become by yourself</i>	Unprepared for independent study	Adapting to modes of teaching and learning	Solitary learner within a community of learners
<i>Knuckle-down and push on through</i>	Achieving long-term career goals	Focus on passing Year 1	Taking ownership of [her] learning
<i>The best choice I have ever made; but I just can't wait to go home</i>	Coping with social and situated isolation	<i>Subsumed</i>	Functional belonging

Table 7: Fiona idiographic master themes

#### 4:1:6:1 I am not your typical netballer

Fiona's experience of joining the university netball team provides insight into her self-concept and signposts characteristics that permeate her approach to learning, how she copes with difficulty and adapts to HE.

'I am not your typical netballer; I am short. I don't look like a netballer. Netballers are tall and skinny and can jump as high as they can whereas I am just not like that... the girls are very different from me. They are all about what they look like, what they wear, what boys they are with and I am so opposite that. I don't care what I look like, this is how I am, and you are not going to affect me' [110-120].

Fiona discriminates herself from a stereotypical perception of a 'netballer'. There is an obdurate defiance towards pressure to conform and she resists the compulsion to engage with the social drinking culture [1:120-139]. Whilst Fiona seems strong and principled, her persistence seeking affirmation from the netball team echoes the complexity of her wider university experience [2:103-122]. The team performs better when she is on court, but she claims to not be upset if she is not included; she is willing to prove her worth, yet she is vulnerable to the opinions held of her by others. Fiona consistently describes herself as a practical learner [1:198-201; 3:42-44] firmly positioning as non-academic [1:212-217]. The physical and vocational emphasis of her selected degree represents a context within which she can make sense of her learning and it is inconceivable that she would study an alternative subject [2:207-218]. Fiona has admiration for her sibling who enjoys 'intellectual' success [2:391-403] but her path has been set and she is helpless in altering its course.

Fiona presents an embedded self-concept, constructed prior to university and a persona she understands. It is immutable and potentially the root of difficulty she faces in coping with theoretical learning. Fiona assumes that all 'PE people' find academic learning difficult [3:148-149], aligning herself with characteristics she perceives are common among her peers, yet contradicting her restated claims to being different, illustrated in her gymnastic experience.

'I watched everyone do their performance and they were just so serious but throughout my performance I smiled the whole way through. I went to [lecturer] at the end, I am so sorry for my smile; I don't know where it came from, and he was that's alright, I sat through it and smiled along. So, I enjoyed it because I knew I had done it for myself. I had struggled with gymnastics so much because there are so many people in my class that were amazing. I am not very dare-devilish, so things I will have a go at, but most things I am a bit pathetic' [3:219-230].

Fiona compensates for lack of expertise by endearing herself to the lecturer, constructing a role where she is the likable amateur. Low self-esteem and fluctuating confidence mean Fiona is constantly wrestling with psychological barriers [3:558-571]. Fiona is conscious that learning partly depends on social integration and is astonished by the positive reaction among her peers when she has the courage to initiate a task [2:318-334] but is blighted by personal insecurity. When asked to describe any new learning skills, she pinpoints communication, a soft or employability skill rather than a conventional study skill.

'Well, I usually talk a lot and I still talk a lot now. But I have had to adapt to meeting so many new people... so I would say communication. I usually struggle with socialising; I don't have very much self-confidence so communication has been quite hard...A lot of people have found their group but I feel like I am still finding who I know and who I don't because I am very quiet in big groups. I don't want to change myself because I am at university. But I have had a lot of struggles getting to know people...I have had a little bit of bullying because people perceive me to be very 'geeky'. But I will take that. It gets to me because I know I am not very clever, I am mid. If I don't go to lectures I wouldn't know anything' [3:236-269].

Fiona presents a contradictory self-concept; she is talkative yet quiet. Bullying tests her resilience and when asked how she copes with difficulty, she tends to begin with a negative saying that she goes into melt-down [3:163-176] before finding a positive, usually relating to her ability to adapt and achieve. Fiona's belief in her competence is tempered with doubt; she uses words such as 'I think I did alright' [3:16-21] to confirm that her efforts have been acknowledged. Fiona describes feeling scared, daunted and nervous at the prospect of starting university [1:68-71] and manages uncertainty by withdrawing.

'I don't feel like we get opportunities to say what we know but I am 'oh I will just listen to everyone else' and I am ok just sitting here listening. I will speak up when I know something but because there is so many of us I am sort of like, oh nobody cares what I think; I will just be in the background. Sometimes when I am a bit unsure of things I just close-up and let everyone else do what they want to do. It is so easy to do in a group of fifty to just sit in the corner and pretend you are writing' [1:304-317].

Fiona creates the illusion of engagement and despite suggesting she would like to contribute, class size and the idea that her views lack credence mitigate detachment. Although she has met many lovely people the absence of companionship adds to her sense of isolation [2:142-154]. When asked about critical moments, the response is 'building my confidence' [2:63]. Bolstered by gaining a 2:1 in dance and possibly tired of feeling stifled, she uses a metaphor of breaking free from her shell [2:84] and when others threaten her potential to achieve worthy grades, she finds the strength to take control [3: 503-518], adopting a mercenary stance towards university focused on maximising personal gain [2:124-138]. Emotions define how Fiona engages with learning; she fears being singled out in a large lecture theatre but within her direct cohort she begins to demonstrate the courage to voice her opinions.

'We had this lecture about primary education and I literally was flying; like I had all these comments and I was going for it and I sort of sat back and was like, did I just say all of that? Normally I will just sit there and listen to everyone else. Speaking for myself and having that confidence is new. If the lecturer doesn't agree with me then that is their opinion and this is my opinion. I like listening to other people and then I think well maybe people will like to listen to what I have to say because I had a very different school life' [2:232-244].

Fiona is proud of her contribution yet there is a defensive tone that she justifies by reiterating her 'difference'. Fiona is conscious of the incremental steps she is taking [2:444-450]; the voice in her head (demon) is lessening [3:208-210] and gradually, ideas about how she feels she is perceived are changing. Fiona begins to positively look ahead [3:770-790], anticipating her confidence will improve through the opportunity to select modules where she will encounter people with similar interests [3:278-290]. Good grades authenticate her as a learner, but confidence is so

significant that it becomes the metaphor used for 'understanding'; if Fiona feels she can articulate a subject, then it has been embedded as knowledge.

'When I can just talk about it for hours. If you say 'talk about netball', I can talk about netball for hours. It is like when I have the confidence, like I have the confidence now because I know about myself...So, if I have the confidence to talk... I can write an essay about it [3:391-401].

Understanding is recognised through an emotional signifier. There is absence of doubt in this description, illustrating how emotionally invested Fiona is in learning, but equally negative feelings create barriers; these are experienced both internally and via external sources. Being interested in subject content is important and Fiona finds it easier to engage and make sense of learning that is familiar; she is conscious of her comfort zone and accepts that this is simply the way it is [3:430-435]. Fiona is also aware of the danger of becoming over-confident and is concerned with how this may be perceived as arrogance [3: 450-455].

Contradictions in self-image exacerbate tensions between Fiona's academic and social self-concept. The transcripts give the impression that Fiona enrolled at university with a secure sense of self; she appears content with the assumption that she has common sense whilst siblings possess academic brilliance [1:226], and she is certain that her degree will enable her to fulfil long-term ambitions. Fiona consistently asserts her refusal to change to fit in, but she is vulnerable to judgements made of (and by) her based on first impressions.

'I have bad self-confidence within my 'self' because of image. I worry a lot about what people think about me and I know I shouldn't. It bugs me so much because when I came to university, I was look, I need to be confident and at first I was so quiet, I didn't want to say much because I was worried; everyone was new and first impressions count so much. If someone doesn't give you a first good impression it's not like I judge them but I think well, they haven't given me the time of day... generally you think of sport and you think of a bit of cockiness, a bit of confidence. I can be a bit cocky in my sports but I find people overwhelm me and my confidence decreases. I have had a bit of bullying and sarcastic comments about me behind my back. It is a confidence 'decreaser'. It is a shame because I don't judge them until they have got something for me to think about' [3:349-371].

The quotation provides insight into how Fiona experiences her 'self' within the university environment. There is incongruity between her portrayal of sports people as confident and outgoing [3:272-278] and her being quiet and feeling overwhelmed. She chastises her self-doubt, determining to 'defeat' difficulties and not be a 'wimp' [2:67-80]. Whilst her advice to her 'fresher self' is to not worry about what other people may think [2:597], there is a sense that she is trying to re-capture a time before university where she recognised the qualities associated with sports people within herself. Reconciling past and present is manifest through contrary feelings of efficacy which govern her learning behaviour.

#### 4:1:6:2 Become by yourself

Lack of family insight [1:55-60] and limited school guidance [1:41-47] meant aside from anticipating a challenge, Fiona felt unprepared for learning in HE. The balance of practical and theoretical lectures ease her uncertainty [1:487-496] but she is ill-equipped for independent study and finds non-contact work overwhelming [1:183-191]. Fiona copes by immersing herself in reading [1:210], initially accepting that all information has purpose [1:320-325]. The pressure of completing the first set of assignments accentuates what genuinely constitutes hard work and she admits to giving in to distractions; her response is to continue reading excessively [2:192-194] and improve her time management [2:253-265].

When Fiona faces difficulty, she takes a breather, possibly makes a tutorial, but instinctively turns to her family, who provide a critical support network for a motivational 'boost' [2: 268-282]. The swimming metaphor 'throw in at the deep end' describes her optimum way to learn [2:300-305] but only applies to practical subjects where she is animated about her achievements [3:401-427], whereas theoretical adversity prompts irrational behaviour.

'Initially I curl up in a ball and think 'oh my days'. If I don't know something I will fizzle and go and die in a hole. But if it is hard then the only way I am going to make it easy is by learning and reviewing it.' [3:457-462] ... if I know I need to learn it, I will kick myself up the bum and learn it. If I don't have an interest in it and it is hard then I won't even bother. If I don't need to know it, then why would I need to learn it?' [3:467-472].

Fiona admits to procrastination [3:99] and dismissing content as irrelevant may enable avoidance of difficulty. But the quotation suggests determination to learn and guilt possibly acts as a catalyst for semester 2 revision [3:109-110]. How Fiona goes about learning is shaped by her conceptualisation of independent learning; viewed as a solitary activity, she feels like it is a prerequisite of university and defined by taking ownership of work.

'I feel like it [learning] has improved. It is a big jump from college which is more spoon-fed to somewhere that is a little bit spoon-fed but you have got to do it for yourself; there is a lot of independence in general for university. There are so many people here, but you are still by yourself having to live, work, feed yourself, do your essays, revise, practise for something' [3:313-325].

Throughout Fiona's transcripts there is repetition of doing (more) for yourself and by yourself [1:160-165; 1: 339-346; 2:483-500]. The shift away from being closely monitored and guided through tasks is met with regret [1:458-465] but Fiona accepts that working alone will benefit both academic study and her wider holistic development [1: 465-484]; she wants the satisfaction of having done it all by herself. Because of her singular stance, Fiona is resistant to collaborating with peers [2:492-500], which seems inconsistent with her games background and engagement on a degree course where learning entails interaction. Even when she describes a group OAA map reading task, the focus is on her personal response [1:437-443]. Sustaining independent working requires self-regulation, and although Fiona feels accountable for her learning, by the end of the year her perspective alters with the realisation that support is available.

'I think before at school and college; you're not reliant but you have that help so close to you. Whereas, I feel like you have got so much help at university but you have to ask for that help. It is not the lecturer's role to be you need to come to me for help... you need to initiate that. It is that step, the motivation to become, by yourself. At university there is this massive community but you are still here by yourself, independently living, working, you know, doing everything. You haven't got that person at your side always supporting you all the time because you need to support yourself. The lecturers are here to help you but you need to ask them. They are the ones that know and you are the one that needs to find out' [3:67-83].

The quotation illustrates Fiona's philosophy about how to go about learning in HE. Fiona has admiration for lecturing staff; their approval gives affirmation and she appreciates their input [1:496-503; 3:214-218] but seeking help is a personal responsibility. Independent learning is viewed as a state of being, by yourself. Fiona is a lone learner within a community of learners [3:322-325] and this has a substantial impact on how she experiences learning and university.

There is a clear distinction between learning in a lecture theatre compared to a practical environment. Fiona is conscious of difficulties concentrating in a lecture theatre; she describes having to listen intently, neglecting note taking to follow the commentary [3:134-146]. Fiona also feels intimidated in a large lecture theatre setting, electing to stay silent rather than risk ridicule.

'Yeah, lecture halls just scare me. I just feel like in this little box where I don't want to say anything, and what if I say something wrong or incorrect. It is so high school; I don't want to say something and get it wrong and then everyone laughs at me. I feel like that because there can be hundreds of people in there and I could say one thing and it be completely wrong. I am confident in certain situations, in a normal lecture that is physical, but in those situations; it is not going to happen. I would love to be comfortable and confident with saying something but like in the other lecture, the lecturer was 'can I have a volunteer' and I was don't look at me and hiding behind the person in front' [2:548-562].

The lecture theatre presents an impersonal context where she actively becomes invisible. This does not change during the year and she admits to 'freaking out' if a question is directed towards her, preferring ignorance to public humiliation [3:154-160]. Low confidence and poor self-image may be the root of her paralysis. By contrast, the potential for collective failure gives reassurance in a practical setting.

'In a practical lecture, there would only be twenty people and if someone went can you just demonstrate this in front of the class then I am more inclined to do it because we are all doing the same thing. So, if we are going to fail, we are all going to look like idiots together. Whereas if I am in front of everyone in the lecture hall I am thinking 'no one else is doing this, I can't do it wrong' [2:564-573].

Fiona acknowledges effective learning necessitates interaction [3:587-602] and when describing learning in a practical space, she feels energised with a sense of

well-being [3:576-587]. Physically doing an activity provides an experiential route to understanding content, which impacts upon confidence and how Fiona understands her 'self' as a learner [2:304-314]. 'Battle terminology' assumes a more triumphant tone [2:73-78] and she feels more appreciated by her peers [2:539]. Whilst Fiona enjoys group tasks, she is frustrated when peers do not make an equal contribution [3:476-488], finding it difficult to confront them about work ethic. Collaboration is most enjoyable when shared with someone who holds similar interests [3:545-550] and success amplifies her sense of agency [2:318-334].

Fiona is conscious of her learning trajectory and she feels increasingly positive about her competence to meet the learning demands of HE. Passing the first assessment period was the biggest learning hurdle; more so than returning after the Christmas break, often the trigger point for student withdrawal [2: 167-178]. Examinations cause significant distress [3:28-29]; knowledge escapes her and the repetition of 'always' [3:619] emphasises how helpless she feels. To 'struggle' is an accepted part of being at university [3:332-347] and she normalises the pressure by suggesting no-one will fly through without encountering some difficulties [2: 450-452; 2: 457-458]. Semester 2 is likened to restarting and by repeating that she must keep going [2:424], Fiona recognises the need for perseverance in facing the challenges ahead.

When asked to describe how she knows she has understood the content of her learning, her response focuses on feeling 'comfortable' [2:517-524], drawing an emotional analogy that suggests the absence of doubt or anxiety. When theoretical content is learned through a combination of practical and taught study, knowledge is given context and extreme feelings of stress appear reduced by the exhilaration of physically testing understanding [2:578-594]. Despite her difficulties, Fiona is very positive about her experience [3:3-4]. She is conscious of how complex learning is and anticipates another jump as she enters year 2 but does not feel she has changed significantly as a learner. When asked about becoming an academic learner, Fiona remains insistent that she is non-academic.

'To me an academic learner is someone that is good with exams, good at sitting in lectures, good at non-practical things. I wouldn't class myself

as an academic person because I don't see myself like that, but that is what I class as an academic person' [3:626-632] ... 'An academic person is someone who is becoming a Doctor or Chemistry; something like that.' [3:636-638] ... 'someone who is a real genius.' [3:641] ... 'To me being physical and doing things is not academic. I don't know why but whenever someone says are you an academic person I am like, no I don't think so because I look back at my GCSE's and think' [3:647-651].

Fiona's background remains the strongest influence on how she enacts her "self" as a learner. She staunchly defends her unwillingness to change socially and this may extend to her inflexibility regarding learning. However, Fiona's reflections on being a research participant are insightful, suggesting change during year 1 may be more profound.

'It has opened me up to realise about myself and about learning. Ok, you might know about it but once you have spoken about it and been open, I have come to realise certain things about myself. Certain ways I have learned and what has given me confidence, what has been difficult and not given me confidence and what I am looking forward to. It has been so helpful, I think I have opened up a lot' [3:793-800].

#### 4:1:6:3 Knuckle-down and push on through

Fiona views university as the final educational hurdle to overcome in pursuit of her ambition to become a PE teacher [1:349-361]. Taking a 'gap year' would risk losing the drive to undertake a degree, and she consciously makes the decision to power through [1: 364-371]. Fiona gradually amends her goal to focusing on the graduation ceremony, making her family proud [2:435-441], and then finally conquering year one [2:617-622]. The reasoning behind the shift is not explained, but insight into the difficulties Fiona has encountered with learning and socially suggest she may simply be preoccupied with the immediate demands of study. However, Fiona is conscious of the speed at which time is passing and she refuses to stagnate [3:110-115].

Possessing a degree holds status and it is important to Fiona that she takes responsibility for her learning [3:102-106]; doing something for 'myself' characterises her ambition and fees provide powerful extrinsic motivation to maximise learning opportunities [1:254-265]. Fiona tackles living off-campus in a

practical manner but she is frustrated by the seeming indifference exhibited by peers living in Halls. Her indignation at the extra effort that is required on her part remains throughout the year [3:47-62] and she hints that her additional motivation not only signifies her difference, but potentially makes her more deserving of success.

Sustaining motivation is not easy and Fiona admits to occasional disengagement, particularly in a lecture theatre and when she does not find the content interesting [3:339-344]. Initially, Fiona copes with the challenge of self-regulation by giving herself a pep talk, telling herself to 'knuckle down' [1:147-150, 1:268-270] and later finding the resilience to 'push on through' [2:93-99]. Fiona is seeking agency and positions herself as the primary barrier as well as enabler of her learning. Fiona finds inspiration from role models and appreciates help from lecturing staff in overcoming personal difficulties [1:392-402; 1:406-416].

#### 4:1:6:4 The best choice I have ever made; but I just can't wait to go home

Fiona's sense of being an individual within a larger community [3:67-83] extends to her sense of belonging. Having moved from a close knit rural community to a town, distance from home and living off-campus provoke feelings of isolation. Intensified by separation from family and friends [1:96-106] and without a background understanding of HE to draw upon, Fiona positions herself as a pioneer [1:55-66]. She regards herself as independent and clicks into a routine of self-sufficiency [1:6-15; 1:422-424; 1:432-434] but admits to feeling alone and a bit lost [1:248-249]. Dislocation prompts reflection on her upbringing and she ponders the freedom and sense of space she enjoyed [3:660-671]. Fiona seems to be trying to recapture an idyll where she felt secure and accepted, which partly contradicts her rationale for attending university but overcoming unfamiliarity is a necessity in achieving holistic maturity.

Fiona assumed peers may be experiencing similar feelings of dislocation [1:24-29; 1:84-91] but with most first years residing in Halls, she rapidly notices how much harder she needs to work forging social networks living off-campus [1:234-243]. Difficulty gaining acceptance by the netball team and issues with bullying heighten

the sense of being an outsider. At the start of the second interview, Fiona shares a 'Memory Board' [2:7-41], a collage of photographs, which she describes.

'It is literally of my whole last year from college and I was surely, that has got to give me some inspiration because it has got when I won my awards. My outstanding student of the year and then my sports person of the year as well. I have just got things like my brother and sister, and there is my Mum and Stepdad. Like little memories. This is my best friend and just loads of things'. [2:11-20] ... 'It is just looking at it and thinking that I had such a great year and I need to have a board next year showing all the things I had from this year at university' [2:21-25] ... 'It is just every time I look at it I think I am happy there and I need to be happy' [2:26-27] ... 'There are genuine smiles' [2:32] ... 'When I have had a bad moment, I just look at it and think this is why I am here, this is the reason why I am at university to make these people proud of me and go somewhere further' [2:36-40].

Fiona's narration provides insight into her self-image, state of well-being, and determination to be successful in HE. Awards affirm her sense of self and endorse her position as a successful sports person, but finding herself in an environment where peers possess similar, or greater talent may be threatening. Highlighting the genuine smiles and stating, 'I am happy there and I need to be happy' suggests Fiona is experiencing considerable loneliness. Her best friend gives reassurance when she finds meeting new people challenging [1:93-106] and so it is poignant that in the final interview, Fiona claims never having a best friend [3:487-492], suggesting an event, or possibly distance has damaged relationships. The photographs show an individual who prior to university, enjoyed a socially rich environment where she was accepted without question. Fiona admits to being shy but is determined not to surrender any preconceived sense of self, and will persevere to gain approval on her terms [1:122-127], which she achieves to a certain extent with some of the netball team [1:416-419].

Fiona avoids harm to her self-concept by emphasising her contentment in her own company [3:496-499]; yet the advice to her 'Fresher-self' to be more confident and sociable reiterates enduring insecurities [3:752-767]. University is defined by its purpose and despite declaring love for her experience [1:504] and appreciation for the warmth shared by staff [3:521-535] when asked how she resolves difficulty,

Fiona is quick to reply with '*I just can't wait to go home*' [3:193-194]. However, Fiona also passionately defends her choice of university and its location.

'I feel I belong because this feels right; it fits with me.' [3:729-730] ... 'it is about what suits me and this university suits me. It is perfect, the perfect setting. I have had to adapt to certain things like living in a town but it is what goes with what I am and this is like the best choice I have ever made' [3:735-741].

Becoming independent is a life skill, not solely an approach to learning, and assuming personal responsibility involves putting herself before others [2:127-129]. Fiona feels safe and comfortable around campus and is confident that it will meet her needs.

'It's not just the course, being at University, it's the living. When I get out of University I am going to be ready and set to be my own person and do what I want to do for myself.' [2:340-344] ... 'Doing this now at this age, I think this is the right moment for me to do it; I always felt like I was quite an independent person but now I am this massive independent person. I know this is going to help me, not just getting a job but socialising, being the real me and doing things for myself it's just going to help me so much' [2:349-356].

Adapting to university living holds equal significance to meeting the demands of learning and the phrase 'being the real me' emphasises the role of university as a passage towards autonomy. Yet Fiona has declared her unwillingness to change; low confidence and difficulties with socialisation suggest her authentic 'self' is on hold, possibly through fear of rejection. Graduation represents completion of a self-enhancement project; she will be at the peak of her confidence and ready to face the world [3:722-727], perhaps battle-scarred, but she would have done it alone.

#### **4:2 Recurrent Master Themes**

To gain a more holistic understanding of the phenomena associated with the experience of learning during year 1, a cross-case analysis was undertaken to identify patterns of convergence and divergence in the participant accounts. The integrative process of examining the connections between accounts involved a shift in viewing data from an idiographic to a group perspective. Initially, I found this

unsettling given the closeness I felt to each participant but as increasingly complex networks emerged, I found reassurance that my ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspective for this study was appropriate.

Parallel issues were encountered in contrasting ways and the methods employed to cope with learning provided insight into the subtle and sometimes acute differences between the way each participant made sense of experience. The temporality of existence was brought into view; making family proud featured as a shared aspiration but held different underlying motives. Eddie is a first-generation undergraduate wanting to carve a better future through education, whilst Alan seeks affirmation that gives weight to his sporting credentials. Both participants are shaped by their backgrounds, which impacts how they go about learning and experience Being in the present.

Moments of temporal disruption appear at different points and with varying intensity. Lacklustre feelings are brought into sharp focus mid-year for Clare, prompting a thorough re-evaluation of her approach to HE, whereas Fiona describes repeated instances where she struggles with adversity, triggered by external factors such as bullying or internal concerns related to self-image. Both are challenged to find new ways to engage and grasp opportunity, but achieve this in disparate ways.

Transcripts reference 'everyday' experience and learning in a lecture theatre is a convergent and proximal concern, but each participant responds differently: Alan strategically targets knowing the lecturer; Fiona becomes invisible; Eddie grapples with concentration; and Deb listens intently. Attending to how each participant describes their involvement captures divergent persons-in-context and illuminates the way experience influences self-concept and associated learning behaviour. Fiona's invisibility allows her non-academic self-concept to dominate and accentuates feelings of low confidence and competence. In this instance, convergence reappears when practical pedagogies such as demonstration are used to enhance traditional lecture theatre methods.

Transition locates the participants within an unfamiliar learning community to which they must adapt; how they go about this highlights the situated and relational

aspects of experience. Separation is profoundly felt by Bob, who encounters homesickness but his congeniality endears him to peers and he benefits from supportive social networks. Social acceptance is more challenging for Fiona and the absence of an immediate support group reinforces feelings of isolation but also authenticates her independence.

Brief examples of convergence and divergence have been provided to exemplify how different aspects of experience interweave and impact upon each other. An image of the group analysis concept map can be seen in Appendix J. Similarities suggest universal and comparative experience but delving into the *particular* discloses the discrete and uniquely embodied nature of experience. Four Recurrent Master themes have been identified through the cross-case analysis (Table 8).

Recurrent Master Theme				
Theoretical Concept	Self	Becoming	Belonging	Motivation
Theoretical Dimension	Self-concept Self-awareness	Independent learning Pedagogy Feedback Collaborative learning Academic learning	Social acceptance Academic interaction Place	Self-determination Interest Confidence Self-efficacy

Table 8: Recurrent master themes (summary)

Each theme adopts an overarching theoretical concept with specific dimensions of each construct found in the participant accounts listed below. Tables 9-12 illustrate the link back to IMT's and super-ordinate themes for each participant ensuring theoretical references remain grounded in the data and can be traced back to individual accounts. To enter the next level of interpretation and understand student experience of learning in more detail, it is necessary to turn to extant literature, which I have done in Chapter 5: Discussion.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Super-ordinate Theme</b>	<b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	<b>Recurrent Theme</b>	<b>Theoretical Dimension</b>
<i>Alan</i>	1	Seeking a sense of 'self'			
	2	Situating self through attitude and confidence	Showing my confidence		
	3	Seeking status and superiority			
<i>Bob</i>	1	Conflicted view of self (practical v academic)			
	2	Safeguarding [his] sense of 'self'	I would say I am the same		
	3	Personally secure (academically cautious)			
<i>Clare</i>	1	Opposing discourse of 'self'			
	2	Defining self through academic effort and success	Who marked theirs?		Self-Concept
	3	Academic fortification of self			
<i>Deb</i>	1	Expanding familiar self			
	2	Different self in different situations	It's not what the day brings, it's how you bring it		Self-Awareness
	3	Comfortable being herself			
<i>Eddie</i>	1	Developing an academic sense of self			
	2	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Finding my future self		
	3	Maturing confidence and self-efficacy			
<i>Fiona</i>	1	Singular sense of self (being different)			
	2	Vulnerable and conflicted self	I am not your typical netballer		
	3	Seeking to resolve past and present perceptions of self			

Table 9: Recurrent master theme (Self).

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Interview</i>	<i>Super-ordinate Theme</i>	<i>Idiographic Master Theme</i>	<i>Recurrent Theme</i>	<i>Theoretical Dimension</i>	
<i>Alan</i>	1	Functional adaptation		<b>BECOMING</b>		
	2	Independent learning	My life in my hands			
	3	Taking control of learning				
<i>Bob</i>	1	Growing up	It's a big, big thing if I actually get to do it'			
	2	Learning to learn				
	3	Interactive or independent learning				
<i>Clare</i>	1	Independent application to work	I feel like I have been cut adrift			Independent Learning
	2	Coping with learning alone				
	3	Adapting by self-teaching				
<i>Deb</i>	1	Adapting to independent expectations	Other people give me reassurance			Pedagogy
	2	Independent study / learning together				
<i>Eddie</i>	3	Learning as an adopted attitude	I've got the skills to deal with the challenges			Collaborative Learning
	1	Independent v collaborative learning				
	2	Coping with academic learning (strategy and risk taking)				
<i>Fiona</i>	3	Reconceptualising independent learning	Become by yourself	Academic Learning		
	1	Unprepared for independent study				
	2	Adapting to modes of teaching and learning				
	3	Solitary learner within a community of learners				

**Table 10: Recurrent master theme (Becoming).**

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Interview</i>	<i>Super-ordinate Theme</i>	<i>Idiographic Master Theme</i>	<i>Recurrent Theme</i>	<i>Theoretical Dimension</i>
<i>Alan</i>	1	Expeditious forging of relationships		<b>BELONGING</b>	Social Acceptance Academic Interaction Place
	2	Feeling accepted	Building Bridges		
	3	Building bridges (strategic alignment to others)			
<i>Bob</i>	1	Social settling and forming friendships			
	2	Developing collegiality	I call this place home		
	3	Social membership and co-operation			
<i>Clare</i>	1	Anticipating relationships			
	2	<i>Questioning experience of learning</i>	<i>Subsumed</i>		
	3	<i>Questioning experience of learning</i>			
<i>Deb</i>	1	Adapting to learning and living away from home			
	2	Negotiating social and academic relationships	I do feel, I was going to say loved here.		
	3	Feeling at home			
<i>Eddie</i>	1	Social Acceptance (being an outsider)			
	2	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	A socially binding course		
	3	Social Acceptance (being an insider)			
<i>Fiona</i>	1	Coping with social and situated isolation			
	2	<i>Subsumed</i>	The best choice I have ever made; but I just can't wait to go home		
	3	Functional belonging			

Table 11: Recurrent master theme (Belonging).

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Super-ordinate Theme</b>	<b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	<b>Recurrent Theme</b>	<b>Theoretical Dimension</b>
<i>Alan</i>	1	Focusing on task completion		<b>MOTIVATION</b>	Self-Determination
	2	Strategic pursuit of grades	The Last Hurdle		
	3	Owning [his] degree success			
<i>Bob</i>	1	Interest and enjoyment			
	2	Grappling with grades and goals	I want to make them proud		
	3	Inter-personal learning and self-efficacy			
<i>Clare</i>	1	Desire to learn			
	2	Rationalising the value of [her] efforts	This year I think is kind of a test		
	3	Clutching at what counts			
<i>Deb</i>	1	Positive thinking			
	2	<i>Subsumed</i>	<i>Subsumed</i>		
	3	Trying and being [her] best			
<i>Eddie</i>	1	Personal and professional advancement			
	2	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Finding out what you got for what you did		
	3	Going 'over-the-top'			
<i>Fiona</i>	1	Achieving long-term career goals			
	2	Focus on passing Year 1	Knuckle-down and push on through		
	3	Taking ownership of [her] learning			

**Table 12: Recurrent master theme (Motivation).**

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

In this chapter of my thesis I present a discussion that explores each of the Recurrent Master Themes (RMT): *Self*, *Becoming*, *Belonging* and *Motivation*. The discussion involves an interrogation of data placed in the wider context, illuminated by existing research and extant literature, to find out the answer to the question 'what are year 1 undergraduate physical education students' experiences of learning in Higher Education?'. Through interpretation I seek to explore, understand, and communicate the complex experience of the research participants. Having undertaken a cross-case analysis to identify recurrent themes, the research undergoes a shift in the way the data are viewed, employing a double hermeneutic to answer the research question. Group level analysis provides an entry point to consider aspects of shared experience which is expanded by drawing upon idiographic detail to illustrate incongruity found within perceived similarity of experience (Smith *et al.*, 2013).

Having already undertaken a literature review as part of the thesis approval process, it was very difficult to sustain an 'inside' perspective on the data without importing 'outside' extant theory (Smith, 2004). I was conscious that to do so would distance interpretation from the participant lived-experience. On the occasions where I found my writing was being led by the literature, rather than the participant voices, I purposefully moved back to the participant accounts to keep the discussion grounded in their experience. By including direct references back to the participant transcripts, it is hoped the reader will be able to trace the connection between analysis and the literature, and gain a sense of the person-in-context (Larkin *et al.*, 2006). Group level themes are illustrated with transcript examples taken from individual accounts, for example [Alan:1:23].

Foregrounding the participant accounts ensured the literature used had resonance with the data. Additional literature searches were needed to help illuminate and problematise issues or concerns, whilst theoretical concepts explored in the literature review provided a lens through which sense can be made of the participant journey. The intention to focus on cognitive, affective, and social demands on learning guided the initial literature review, but it was unforeseen how the RMT's of

becoming, belonging and motivation would associate so closely to the theoretical concepts and proved instrumental in helping to understand the findings. It was possible to overlay specific dimensions of each RMT onto the theoretical framework, providing clarity when seeking to answer the research question (Figure 5) and segments of this can be seen at the start of each discussion section.

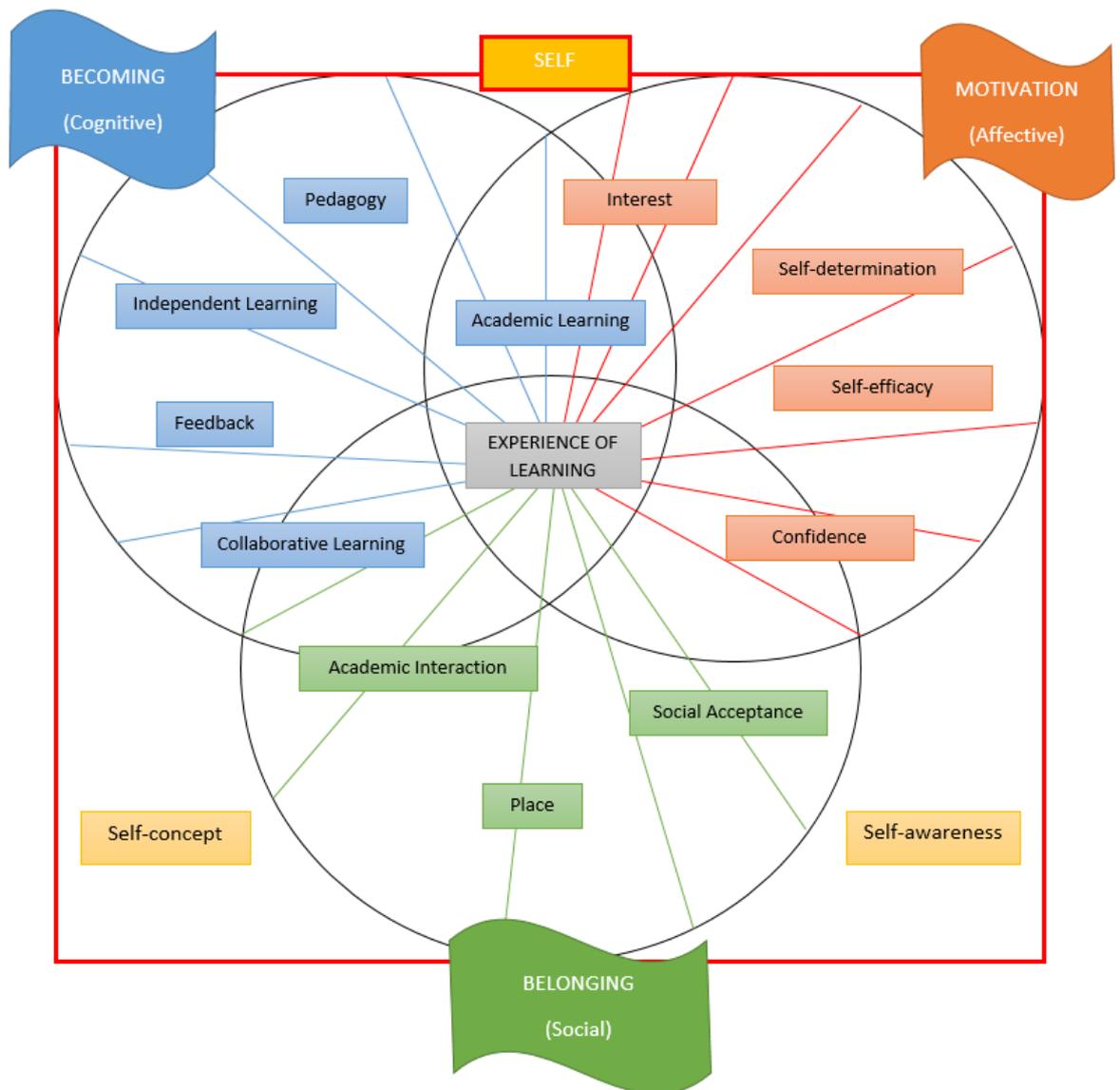


Figure 5: Year 1 Undergraduate Physical Education Student Experience of Learning

Whilst the interview schedule included questions such as ‘Can you describe yourself as a learner?’, interest was based around gaining insight into how students experience learning and navigate transition. Emergent themes specifically associated with aspects of ‘self’ were not anticipated and represent the inductive quality of IPA analysis (Smith, 2004). Smith *et al.* (2013) provide reassurance that

when undertaking qualitative research that invites participants to delve into and share their personal experience, it is likely that they will make connections between the topic and their sense of 'self'. 'Self' endorses the idiographic nature of experience and has been used to frame the three other RMT's; it also permeates the way participants make sense of their experience and has been included throughout the discussion. By addressing each RMT separately, it is possible to consider in detail the challenges and barriers encountered by the participants; but the features of experience do not exist in isolation, and overlap. The under-pinning theoretical dimensions may be shared by the participants, but are felt in unique ways.

The discussion raises questions about how findings may be used to inform my own and colleagues' work, and contribute to sector-wide understanding of practice, transition and retention. Research outcomes and suggested actions will be addressed in Chapter 6: Conclusion.

### **5:1 Self**

Self can be understood as the associated affective beliefs held by an individual that come into view by means of experience, and through which people make meaning of [their] world. Yet self does not exist in isolation; self comes into being through a world of relationships, echoing Heidegger's (2010) ontology of being-in-the-world, and as a point of reference, is partly defined by context and through comparison to others (Baumeister, 2011).

Self contributes to understanding how each individual participant goes about learning and copes with the challenges of transition. Individual perceptions of self mediate learning behaviour; it influences decision making, personal orientation towards or away from opportunities and the regulation of emotions and action. Aspects of self are evidenced in how the participants describe themselves, but also in the language used to represent feelings associated with self-structures. Two dimensions of self, self-concept and self-awareness, feature prominently in the findings and necessitate attention.

### 5:1:1 Self-concept

Transition to HE confronts existing views of self and one's place in the world (Christie, 2009; Krause and Coates, 2008). This can be an unsettling experience resulting in fragmentation of the self-concept, which is of concern when stability is associated with personal well-being and effectiveness (Johnson and Nozick, 2011). A complex range of factors contribute to an individual's understanding of self.

A person's self-concept is the set of beliefs that they have about their personality, abilities, tastes, aptitudes, powers, characteristic behaviour, appearance, gender and social standing. (Hussey and Smith, 2010, p.160)

Hussey and Smith present an intricate construct which, at times, can appear splintered and conflicting (Hird, 1998). This may help to explain the incongruity between Fiona's inner turmoil yet appearing outwardly resilient; she struggles to resolve her existing self-concept, her ideal self and how she believes she is perceived by others. The feeling of disconnection is shared by other participants, but time brings convergence to their sense of self. Alan notices movement from being 'behind' to 'in front' of peers, achieving aspirational status as a student, and reaping the associated benefits to his self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-competence [Alan: 3:140-143]. However, the discrepancy persists for Fiona; she clings to her pre-university self, making it difficult to achieve self-actualisation (Deci and Ryan, 1985). The findings are problematic because as the other participants, Fiona demonstrates self-awareness and the desire to progress; the anomaly seems to rest with her struggle to situate herself within the university environment without experiencing conflict. To counter this, Fiona separates her learner-self from her social-self.

The division extends to academic self-concept; all participants' position as 'practical' learners, indicating a preconception where they anticipate learning will flourish in physically engaging environments. The distinction implies an expectation that non-practical learning may present a greater challenge, but they hold incremental (Dweck, 1999) or malleable (Yorke and Knight, 2004) self-theories where they are open to the possibility of making progress in learning. Fiona is resistant to change;

her academic self-concept is deeply embedded representing an entity (Dweck, 1999) or fixed (Yorke and Knight, 2004) self-theory which presents a very different challenge to the lecturer tasked with facilitating learning among cohorts who possess divergent beliefs about their capabilities. Fiona's self-concept renders certain learning experiences impassable; her method of coping underlines the importance of recognising self-concept as being multi-dimensional and dynamic as students navigate different contexts in HE (Reay *et al.*, 2009). Students will process experiences in the context of the essence of 'who they are' (Baxter Magolda, 2003). Students require opportunities to draw on past experiences to understand their self-concept, and then use this insight as they encounter and make sense of new experience as an integrated part of their learning. By establishing a clear and durable self-concept, students can be secure in the choices they are making and the path their lives are taking.

Self-concept frames personal evaluations of self-esteem and self-competence, which can be experienced consciously through reflective practice, but also manifest through subconscious reactions to inner psychological structures (Michie *et al.*, 2001). This can be seen in Clare's self-talk [Clare: 1:240-271]; she is consciously evaluating her ability to achieve performance outcomes, but her manic articulation may reflect deeper insecurities.

Intense feelings are related to self-judgements in a complex manner and an individual who has positive self-esteem is likely to feel enthusiastic and effective. An individual with negative self-esteem however, feels shameful, unworthy and helpless. (Michie *et al.*, 2001, p.458)

Self-esteem therefore plays an important role in how students cope with stress and change. Levels of stress among the participants are variable and caused by many factors: academic, personal and social. A strong self-concept is thought to mediate against the adverse effects of stress and help develop self-perceived competence, positively influencing successful outcomes (Lawson, 2014; Yorke and Knight, 2004; Michie *et al.*, 2001; Bandura, 1995). However, a strong academic self-concept does not necessarily predict a good learner, and there are occasions where participants find difficulty reconciling perceived effort with grade outcomes [Clare: 3:446-457]. Low academic self-concept elicits an opposite response where, despite achieving

well, Fiona maintains a negative comparison to peers [Fiona:3: 266-269]; by doing this, she avoids disturbing her self-appraisal. Having made a courageous contribution to a discussion, she retreats from efficacious feelings by imagining others would have little concern for her opinions, exposing continued anxiety [Fiona:2:232-244], suggesting this is a way of preserving psychological continuity and protecting against potential academic failure.

Coping with the loss of existing social networks is a matter of concern and point of vulnerability among new students (Kaighin and Croft, 2013; Scanlon *et al.*, 2007), but equally, students are challenged to re-evaluate what it means to be a learner. New educational experiences encountered alongside strange acquaintances, amid an unfamiliar environment, with different teaching methods and tutors serve to challenge the self-concept held at enrolment (Hussey and Smith, 2010). Transition is a time where students develop an understanding of what it means to be a university student (Krause and Coates, 2008) but it is also a stage in the broader life course and marks a point of becoming someone, or something else (Gale and Parker, 2014). The sense of being 'en-route' is strongly felt by Fiona who is looking forward to a point where she can 'be the real me' [Fiona: 2:354-355], whilst Eddie imagines finding his 'future self' [Eddie: 3:556-562]; the nuance between participants is interesting and reflects differences in how each is making sense of experience. Fiona situates her 'true' self beyond university eliciting doubts about her authenticity, whereas HE provides Eddie with the time and space within which he can discover what 'self' means to him. All the participants undergo some form of 'growing up' but occasionally, the unpredictable nature of experience places how they regard themselves as a student or as a learner at risk. Failed assessments [Bob: 2:12-13], financial insecurity [Clare: 2:77-85] and bullying [Fiona: 3:349-371] are harsh realities of transition that demand resilience and supportive intervention to preserve the well-being of those affected.

The origin of self instability may partly reside in ingenuous perceptions of university that become exposed when faced with the reality of forging new knowledge relationships, engaging with new ways of thinking, and discovering learning capabilities (Tett *et al.*, 2014; Briggs *et al.*, 2012; Barnett, 2009). Drawing on previously successful approaches to learning may prove futile, need revision, and if

the divide is too great, may result in discontinuation (Krause and Coates, 2008). The participants, to a greater or lesser extent, hold a perception of self where they have the capability to be successful in HE, but different pedagogies contribute to defining the self-concept as academic learners through interaction and participation (Solomon, 2007). Non-participation has consequences. Solomon describes these students as experiencing learning in terms of something 'done to them' rather than 'done by them' (Solomon, 2007, p.90). In this research, non-participation is a causal outcome of ineffective pedagogy that excludes the participants from becoming legitimate members of certain learning communities; their feelings of exclusion serve to reinforce negative self-perceptions and create tension regarding the value of engagement.

Achieving stability in the self-concept requires situated interactions with lecturers and peers, where students can draw on behavioural cues, adapt to new learning practices and engage with the socialisation process (Luckett and Luckett, 2009; Scanlon *et al.*, 2007). Self-concept is temporal, influenced by context and the role taken by individuals within a setting. As students navigate their way through the changing environments of HE, both academic and social, they are constantly challenged to adapt and assume different roles to function successfully. Deb is particularly sensitive to switching 'self' per context [Deb: 3:318-326] and Alan actively employs this as a strategy to further his progress [Alan: 3:382-388]. Wenger (1998) asserts that learning is conceptually a process of personal transformation; it is an inevitable outcome that as individuals learn, their self-concept is altered. Such personal transformation is evidenced through Eddie's experience of dance but is also anticipated through participant references to graduation that foreground life-changing experience, rather than knowledge and skills acquired through study. In seeking ways to help students navigate HE, it seems important to find ways where experience accounts for the connection between self and becoming.

### 5:1:2 Self-Awareness

Learning behaviour is subject to how individuals believe they are perceived by others, which impacts upon their approach to learning and outcomes gained

(Hussey and Smith, 2010; Hodgins and Knee, 2002). The disruption to self that adapting to university presents demands re-alignment to the new, complex and dynamic social realm. Despite resistance to the imposition of others on her self-concept, the threat Fiona feels to her equilibrium, and the defensive stance taken, underscores the impact social interaction has on her personal belief system and resultant ability to participate in the university community [Fiona: 1:110-120]. This is problematic when being-in-the-world is a co-constituted, situated and relational construct (Heidegger, 2010). Individuals are predisposed to want to function autonomously (Deci and Ryan, 1985) and this is achieved through the integration of experience into increasingly sophisticated self-structures (Hodgins and Knee, 2002). When students face disconnection, effective integration becomes compromised, resulting in adaptive behaviour that is conflicted and unrepresentative of their self:

When autonomous, people experience themselves as valuable for being who they are rather than only for doing particular activities or appearing certain ways to others or to themselves. (Hodgins and Knee, 2002, p.87)

Movement towards an integrated self-structure and consequent autonomous functioning can be seen in the shift Deb makes socially, initially compromising self to 'fit in', to having confidence that she will be accepted, despite not always following the social trend [Deb: 2:36-45]. In some respect, Fiona's refusal to conform may induce a more authentic, but incompatible, self. The search for authenticity has implications for how the participants encounter and make sense of experience. During transition, they experience a flood of new information which requires self-confidence if they are going to be open and willing to change. However, analysis of motivation shows the participants tended to function in a state of identified or integrated regulation which suggests they are more susceptible to adapting behaviour, based on the way they believe they are perceived by others.

Public self-awareness or 'viewing oneself through the eyes of another' (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p.109) undermines intrinsic motivation by ego-involvement, occasioning cognitive, emotional and projected defensiveness (Hodgins and Knee, 2002). Autonomy involves functioning in a manner that is open to reality, but this is prejudiced by controlling environments which contribute to the development of ego-

invested self-structures. It is the responsibility of institutions managing transition to consider what impact practice has on directing students to function in a control-oriented manner; to notice, and be sensitive to the way defensiveness may distort experience before it emerges in dis-engagement, and negative module and student survey evaluations.

Instances of defensive behaviour can be seen in the participant accounts. Clare demonstrates cognitive defensiveness; she wants to be perceived as knowledgeable and delays engaging with peers until she feels able to make an informed contribution to discussion [Clare: 3:375-390]. The participants collectively describe themselves as 'practical learners'; embellished by Fiona through stereotypical references to 'cockiness' and hyperactivity, she draws on characteristics she associates with PE students that serve to annul felt academic difficulties. The participants are pragmatic in the way they experience negative emotions, accepting feelings of doubt as normal and something they can overcome, which should facilitate integration (Hodgins and Knee, 2002). However, the participants also exhibit defensive projection; they make critical comparison of commitment levels, professionalism, and show disapproval of peers who fail to distinguish academic and social boundaries. Emotional and interpersonal defensiveness tend to be indivisible (Hodgins and Knee, 2002), making the variation seen in the participant accounts unusual. Insecure self-structures may explain reluctance to make public, private concerns. If institutional practice has created a controlling environment, this may cause the participants to manipulate experience to preserve ego-invested, or 'false' selves. In the participant accounts, Alan appears self-assured because he believes others perceive him favourably; by contrast, Fiona shares considerable emotional disturbance. The honesty of her articulation may be representative of greater self-determination and autonomy than Alan, who is caught in a cycle of maintaining compensatory self-structures to preserve feelings of self-worth (Hodgins and Knee, 2002).

Learning is infused with control mechanisms that lead students to focus more on extrinsic rewards than on defining their internal sense of self (Baxter Magolda, 2003). How students experience learning is often contradictory to expectations for independence and autonomy, placing students in a liminal space, grasping at

opportunities for self-authorship yet remaining anchored to reliance on the 'knowing' lecturer through fear of failure. If transition is to effectively stimulate intellectual curiosity, greater attention needs to be given to the dimension of self in pedagogic practice.

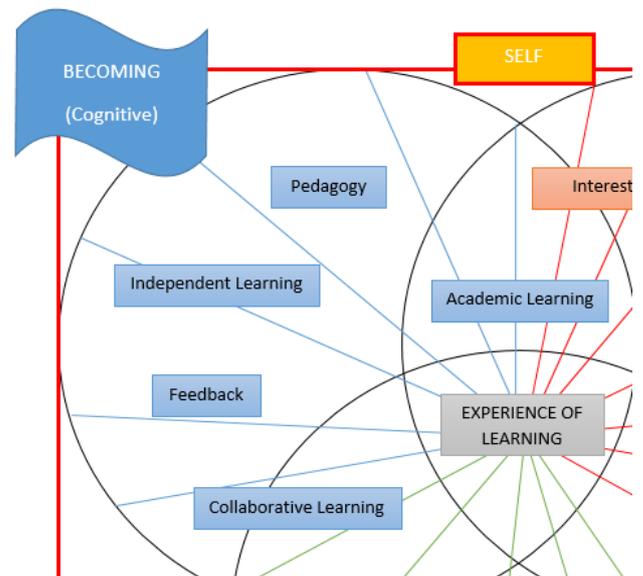
People must develop skills in regulating the motivational, affective, and social determinants of their intellectual functioning as well as the cognitive aspects. This requires bringing self-influences to bear on every aspect of the learning process. (Bandura, 1995, p.18)

The participants state that they only become conscious of the change in 'self' by talking about their experience during the research interviews (Appendix K). What seems to be missing is the dialogic space within which all students can articulate their own experience, and reflect upon how they feel as active participants in learning. Developing student-centred pedagogy with fewer external controls that considers internal process as part of the experience of learning would contribute to the nurturing of 'critically reflective, multi-skilled, independent thinkers' (University, 2012a).

## 5:2 Becoming

When individuals engage with instrumental learning, choices for action are based on knowledge of the options available, possible consequences, and deciphering the feedback or outcomes achieved (Mezirow, 1990). It involves learning to control and manipulate the environment and the people that inhabit it. Communicative learning is

concerned with understanding the meaning of the way concepts, such as autonomy, are implied by others (Mezirow, 1990). These assertions tend to be governed and normalised by the prevailing culture, and therefore require interpretation by a person new to the environment to achieve coherence. As such, understanding depends on effective dialogue.



In our encounters with the unfamiliar, we begin with partial insights to direct the way we collect additional data; compare incidents, key concepts, or words; and relate emergent patterns metaphorically to our meaning perspectives. (Mezirow, 1990, p.9)

The capacity to cope with transition must be regarded as relative to the capacity to cope with change and understood in terms of personal circumstance. An inductive approach to transition that employs a linear pathway expects students to adapt to HE by following a succession of demands, where they accumulate the skills necessary for success. However, often failure to adapt does not become apparent until a crisis is encountered, which may be some time after the set period for orientation, causing stress or anxiety. The student potentially occupies a liminal space where responsibility, and accountability for closing the gap in their understanding is unclear and if left unresolved, the risk of withdrawal is heightened.

Here '*Becoming*' will attend to how students *go about learning*, focusing specifically upon independent learning, pedagogy, feedback, collaborative learning and

becoming an academic learner as evidenced in the participant transcripts. Analysis of the data illustrates that learning to learn in HE may involve common praxis that can usefully be categorised, but how students adapt to the challenges encountered cannot be defined by homogenous groups (mature students, top-up, ethnic minority groups and so on); rather, each individual is precisely that, and should be treated as such. Re-conceptualising transition as a two-way relationship where individual voices are listened to and prized must help students to make connections and formulate meaning as they encounter new learning experiences.

My key argument is that support needs to sit within a pedagogic framework that differentiates and personalises how students experience learning, and that is embedded within the subject discipline. Current practice distorts intervention as a remedial process; programmes of support sit outside of the immediate learning environment and distinguish students as being in difficulty. How staff can change working practice during lecture time to mediate effective adaptation as a pre-emptive strategy to complement externally situated initiatives will be addressed in Chapter 6: Conclusion.

#### 5:2:1 Independent learning

Student perception of independent learning does not match the way it is conceptualised among educational practitioners (Broad, 2006).

Successful transitions depend on the students becoming independent learners...the students who adapt best to the new learning environment are those who understand what independent learning entails, and who are good time managers. (Christie *et al.*, 2013, p.623)

Christie *et al.* (2013) make an important observation, which hinges on students' *understanding* of independent learning. The transcripts show discrepancy between an institutional assumption that new students possess independent learning skills, and the reality of how students go about learning, particularly in the early stages of university study. The participants share an interpretation of independent learning characterised as an isolated and solitary activity, potentially augmented by limited

interactions with lecturing staff; this contributes to their self-concept as a learner but manifests as an enacted mode of working.

Deb describes independent learning as voluntarily 'doing it completely by yourself' [Deb: 1:464-469]. Her words resonate among the other participants, who recognise the need for personal responsibility and autonomy in taking control of learning. These qualities are documented in literature that seeks to provide a definition of independent learning (Spiro *et al.*, 2012; Wingate, 2007; Broad, 2006) but there is a lack of meaningful discourse between students and lecturers where a shared understanding of independent learning is clarified. The phrasing used by Deb suggests detachment that is bound by a sense of autonomy and purpose. Participants assume independent learning necessitates seclusion and accept this as an expectation that fits with their preconceptions of university, privileged above preferred modes of collaborative and interactive learning. Their experience, particularly when writing the first essay, documents a period where students are left to their own devices; to adapt to learning demands by drawing on whatever resources they have at their disposal. These are individually situated and represent diverse prior experience; for example, getting organised [Alan: 1:102], accessing online materials [Bob: 1:212] or simply doing more [Fiona: 1:160]. Theoretically pre-entry learning should equip students with the foundations for study at the next level but often, the opposite is the case (Christie *et al.*, 2013).

The research participants are conscious of the shift from tightly controlled and structured modes of learning in formal education. Disproportionate levels of 'spoon-feeding' [Fiona: 3:313-325] and excessive intervention where staff 'baby us' [Deb: 1:35-47] typify the learning experience participants are familiar with. Accountability measures in schools are determining the behaviour of students on entry to university and this does not prepare them sufficiently for learning in HE (Hutchings, 2015; Wingate, 2007). Freedom from such strict guidance and control may be emancipating and over-due, but can lead to disorientation.

There seems to be a liminal space where students occupy an ambiguous position that is both powerful in its potential to contest prevailing norms but feelings of vulnerability can also immobilise the capacity to act (Allan *et al.*, 2015; Cook-Sather

and Alter, 2011). Where students are lacking opportunity to discover effective methods for independent learning, tensions exist between a possible assumption that students are instantaneously autonomously functioning individuals and the commitment to 'nurturing critically reflective, multi-skilled, independent thinkers' (University Strategic Plan, 2012, p.7). It is difficult to accept that students are consciously being abandoned betwixt and between transitional points of reference, and denied the opportunity to actively engage in shaping their experience during this critical period to preserve the institutional status quo

Students are challenged to adapt quickly and flexibly to the new learning environment (Krause and Coates, 2008), but how they interpret the situation has different consequences. Deb experiences a 'chilled back' atmosphere [Deb: 1:8]; whilst she finds this disconcerting, it translates as an opportunity to do less work. By contrast, Eddie views the absence of staff input as a route to ensuring his work is entirely representative of his ability [Eddie: 1:433-447]. Christie *et al.* state:

Success is bound up with how students' attitudes and strategies in relation to their learning practices change as they move into a new community of practice, and how quickly they learn and adapt to the new rules of the game. (2013, p.635)

The participants each demonstrate different ways of adapting which, if left unchecked, can result in dis-satisfaction. Clare describes facing a dilemma where there is uncertainty between perceived expectations for autonomy and frustration of not knowing whether her efforts are right or wrong [Clare: 3:3-11]. Scaffolding the transition from dependence to independent working would seem like a feasible solution to the barriers encountered by students. Clare's perception of 'self-teaching' is conceptually different from independent learning and whilst staff may defend their availability to students, a lack of visible support and her reluctance to approach staff seems to be increasing Clare's sense of alienation. If 'becoming' is understood as a multi-dimensional process, it seems imperative that the relational aspects of meaning making are socially mediated (Lave and Wenger, 1991), which would imply greater responsibility among institutions to open effective lines of communication, possibly through student voice or dialogue during lecture time. Clare feels 'cut adrift'

but is coping by assuming a disproportionate level of personal responsibility and effort in pursuit of her goals.

Common among the participants is their sense of accountability for their own learning, but unlike Clare, by the end of the first year, some have reconceptualised independent learning as a negotiated partnership. Forging meaningful connections with lecturing staff contributes to the ability to diagnose learning needs and formulate strategy for resolving academic problems (Briggs *et al.*, 2012). Central to this revised understanding is a sense of student efficacy and competence, aligned with the confidence to seek help when necessary [Eddie: 3:75-90]. Fiona shares a similar outlook to Eddie [Fiona: 3:67-83]; what is noticeable in her account is the sense that academic success needs to be earned through personal endeavour. Fiona's use of the phrase, 'to become, by yourself' is revealing; she is conscious of being a solitary member of a wider community of lone individuals, and it is this perspective that should be taken into consideration when attempting to understand how students experience learning. Functional aspects of adaptation are quickly employed by the participants; using post-it notes [Alan: 3: 170-174] or scheduling work commitments in a planner [Clare: 2:142-151]. However, successful independent learning involves the capacity to assume a more self-directed approach where time management, study habits and strategies interweave (Christie *et al.*, 2013; Krause and Coates, 2008). Students move between surface, strategic and deep modes of learning according how they perceive the demands in relation to their ability (Moon, 2004) and this manifests in idiosyncratic behaviour patterns which may not always be appropriate.

The first assessment period represents a critical moment when the participants can evaluate the relative success of their learning strategy. Progress towards deep learning becomes complicated when motivation is guided by outcomes; meeting criteria is the primary objective and to achieve this, participants seem to revert to familiar and tested modes of working established prior to university. Participants demonstrate the strategic use of online materials and tutorials to plug gaps in assignment submissions [Eddie: 2:512-518]. This sits in opposition to progress made in meeting HE aspirations for critically reflective learning at this foundation

stage. Professor Steve Smith (2008) illustrates how student attitudes can impede learning in HE.

Students come very assessment-oriented; they mark hunt; they are reluctant to take risks; they tend to not take a critical stance; and they tend not to take responsibility for their own learning. But the crucial point is the independent thinking. It is common in our institution that students go to the lecture tutor and say, “what is the right answer?” (Children, Schools and Families Committee, 2008, para.129)

Professor Smith draws attention to the way students perceive the role of a lecturer. This mirrors the pupil-teacher relationship experienced during formal education, but if the opportunity to forge a different dynamic through reflective dialogue is absent, the regression is understandable. Alan’s reference to a form of ‘knowledge banking’ (Freire, 2004) has further implications for how students comprehend learning [Alan: 2: 357-359]. Participants are regularly confronted by, and willing to submit to, an ‘expository classroom’ (Freire, 2004, p.102), where the method of instruction intends to transfer knowledge in an authoritarian manner, suppressing opportunity for questioning, dialogue and creative, critical thinking. Research acknowledges the reluctance among some university lecturers to move beyond the delivery of subject content (Hussey and Smith, 2010; Wingate, 2007) but in the context of increasing diversity, failure to address how students understand their own process of learning early is to gamble with their ability to meet higher order outcomes during the later stages of their degree. The insight into participant behaviour, therefore, highlights a need to contemplate the importance of first year pedagogy, particularly if the ideal of deep learning is to be achieved with greater expediency.

### 5:2:2 Pedagogy

The participant accounts raise awareness of the relative efficacy of different pedagogic methods, and this is most clearly observed by comparing the experience in a lecture theatre to a practical setting. During the first year, one third of lectures take place in a lecture theatre; the participants initially seem intrigued by the prospect of being in a space that represents preconceived images of university, but the reality is different. Clare’s experience of a lecture theatre, where degree cohorts combine to numbers of up to 200 students, is echoed by all research participants;

she feels disenfranchised and isolated, too embarrassed to reveal misunderstanding and oppressed by the silence [Clare: 2:399-404; 2:414-424].

The pedagogic approach seems to create a barrier to learning and is a contributing factor in defining the self-structures students develop through the practices in which they engage. Ruitenberg (2014) distinguishes between lecture theatre methods aimed at instruction and those aimed at study; the former intends to teach the learner how to logically *do* something, whilst the latter suspends the usual context of a concept to *think* about it, free from the constraints of pre-defined learning outcomes. Creating the conditions for *study* assumes the need for dialogue that promotes personal interpretation of unfamiliar content; learning requires an opportunity to compare emergent knowing with existing meaning perspectives to locate understanding (Mezirow, 1990). The process mirrors a hermeneutic circle (Gadamer, 2008) and is important where, in a degree structure that combines vocational and academic aims, experiential learning is the focus of many formal learning situations (Moon, 2004). Usher and Solomon see experiential learning as:

A key element of a discourse which constructs experience in a particular way, as something from which knowledge can be derived through abstraction and by use of methodological approaches such as observation and reflection. (1999, p.161)

Lecture theatre pedagogy will carry presumptions held by the lecturer, which suggests communicative understanding is at least partially predetermined. However, legitimising a study approach is difficult when the existence of outcomes, associated with success criteria and ultimate testing of student knowledge, force instruction. There is a sense that where participants experience an expository lecture theatre, spoon-feeding endures but without the support and guidance students are accustomed to. The opportunity to think and learn together seems to be lost. There is also a performative contradiction in teaching about appropriate pedagogies for physical activity in a sedentary and individualistic way.

Large, anonymous teaching groups seem to be creating a virtual chasm between staff, perceived as unapproachable and distanced from the reality of the student experience, adding to the marginalisation felt by participants. In an extreme case,

Fiona actively seeks to make herself invisible for fear of answering a question incorrectly and being ridiculed [Fiona: 2:548-562]. There is a sense that in a lecture theatre presentation, the principal concern is content coverage rather than generating a deep understanding of fewer key concepts; the approach is teacher-centred rather than focused on student learning (Gale and Parker, 2014; Trigwell *et al.*, 1994) which, in turn, promotes surface approaches to learning (Torenbeek *et al.*, 2011; Moon, 2004).

Eddie equates large student numbers with bigger distractions [Eddie: 2:378-385], which resonates with the idea that repeated exposure to instructional lecturing erodes student capacity to concentrate, and such methods should be postponed until the end of a module once a learning relationship has been established (Lowman, 1995). The participants report the tedium of listening passively, and although they appreciate content may change, it is pedestrian in nature, leading to boredom, non-attendance and possible withdrawal.

By contrast, the experience of learning in a practical environment is more positive. Peers seem invested in their learning and Deb is conscious of a change in collective energy, noticing the dynamic interplay between the lecturer and students [Deb: 2:393-405]. The opportunity to 'practise' in the company of peers and under the scrutiny of the lecturer is important. Deb explains that in a practical environment the lecturer can visually observe and check understanding; they are conscious of the progress being made by students and able to intervene, accordingly [Deb: 2:406-413]. Participants are experiencing student-centred pedagogy where deep learning is the more likely outcome (Moon, 2004). Although the environment may be unchanging, participants are active within this space, interacting with each other and forging a relationship with the lecturer where the sense of being *known* by them cannot be underestimated. In a lecture theatre, the lecturer has little indication of the level of student understanding, heightening feelings anonymity and isolation, whereas practical learning seems to support the development of problem-solving, communication, and teamwork which will impact on future learning capabilities (Kember and Leung, 2005). The participants also report a greater willingness to take risks in a practical learning environment; both Deb [Deb: 1:210-220] and Fiona [Fiona: 2:564-573] are reassured by the prospect of collective success and failure,

eliminating the spectre of individual public humiliation. Risk taking may also be influenced by prior experience and familiarity with the learning context; the participants have enjoyed success in the sporting realm which may support an assumption that they possess greater confidence when encountering learning challenges that involve some physicality in response.

Not all theoretical learning can take place in a practical environment, but where staff seek to employ practical pedagogy in a lecture theatre setting, the results appear positive. Making overt connections between practical and theoretical conceptual understanding enables the participants to initiate learning from existing frames of reference, bridging the gap towards the integration and development of new ways of knowing. Demonstrations are a particularly effective pedagogic tool [Eddie: 3:372-380]. The participants become more involved in learning if they can visualise and imagine a constructed reality; this promotes interest and enjoyment. Previously 'dry' content is brought to life and participants make sense of experience in a way that is meaningful to them.

An issue arises when the participants feel unable to progress in their learning and encounter barriers when seeking to transfer knowledge from one context to another. A notable obstruction rests with the quality of feedback and assessment methods that are linked to curriculum design. Frustration is evident when participants complete a test and receive a summative grade but have no understanding of how they came to either the right or wrong answer [Clare: 3:254-261]. In this instance emphasis is placed on measuring the student ability to recall knowledge; it foregrounds the 'inputting' of information where the lecturer's skill is affirmed by the pass/fail rates. As such, a mass lecture theatre experience can be regarded as an efficient space for meeting institutional outcomes at an operational level, but the learning *process* involved in knowing and understanding becomes fragmented (Barnett, 2007; Tam, 2011).

The fundamental role of assessment is to 'monitor, confirm and improve student learning' (Tam, 2011, p.161), which demands those responsible for curricula design and delivery attend to how students connect prior, current and future learning. Achieving efficiency in practice needs to balance effective, individual student

outcomes. In a global climate where concern rests not only with what students know, but with what they can do following HE, the appropriate selection of pedagogy can be considered essential in meeting both student and institutional aims and necessitates evolution in how the lecturing role is perceived.

It is no longer enough for designers and teachers to be competent in their discipline; they are required to create, develop and manage stimulating learning environments, using a variety of resources, methods and technologies, including assessment resources to deepen and enrich student learning. (Tam, 2011, p.163)

This is a tall order when lecturing staff come from a range of backgrounds, many without a formal teaching qualification, and so can lack the pedagogic fluency required. Engaging students as active participants in their learning entails disruption of traditional hegemonic lecturer–student relationships, which brings into view challenges. The University ‘Quality Assurance Common Academic Framework’ (2016a) expects staff to set learning outcomes and provide course materials in advance; thus, personalising learning without prior knowledge of student competency is difficult, particularly when planning for the needs of new entrants. Even when a lecturer takes a student-centred approach, the stipulation of outcomes can have a negative impact, narrowing the conception of learning onto skill acquisition and discrete abilities; crushing creativity and fostering strategic and dependent learning behaviour among students (Bagnall, 1994). Learning is limited where participants experience only summative modes of assessment; ticking off tasks and getting things ‘done’ [Clare: 3:261] underline the conclusion of learning; any mistakes are irrevocable and there is a sense of distance between the student and teacher. Assessment practice that emphasises feed-forward would result in more productive outcomes, initiating the movement towards deep and independent learning expected later in the degree (Guo and Shi, 2016; Tett *et al.*, 2012; Hussey and Smith, 2010), but the curriculum experienced during the first year holds further complex issues that impact on achieving this aim.

Interest in subject content is a factor in deciding which degree course to study (McCune *et al.*, 2010). In year 1, a combination of ‘core’ compulsory modules and optional choices, designed to provide the disciplinary foundations considered

'necessary' for the degree define the structure of student learning. Students have limited control over what they study, but all participants express excitement at the prospect of starting year 2 where they have been able to make choices and create a bespoke degree path that acknowledges their interests and personal ambitions. In a culture where institutional competition for enrolment figures and retention is paramount, ensuring students see the relevance of a subject where content holds personal importance and application must be an attractive proposition (Longden, 2006). Therefore, when choice is limited, appropriate pedagogy needs to include effective assessment that creates a learning dialogue between staff and students and this should include sensitivity to the way individuals respond to feedback.

### 5:2:3 Feedback

The National Student Survey (NSS) consistently reports assessment and feedback as the subject of highest levels of dissatisfaction among students (HEFCE, 2016). Superior feedback is viewed as the most effective way to improve the quality of learning (Beaumont *et al.*, 2011) and so it is logical to prioritise how this is both delivered and received. The participants understand that feedback in HE will not imitate the spoon-feeding experienced in formal education, but they want staff to match the detail and clarity of feedback with the level of effort they have invested in producing work; frustration is felt where this does not equate. Feedback needs to be meaningful and where the format lacks familiarity, the participants encounter difficulties accessing the critique. This is most evident in Clare's experience of audio feedback [Clare: 2:13-23]. Considered an innovative strategy, advocates of audio feedback claim hearing tone and nuance increases student ability to engage with comments in a way not accessible via written notes (Gould and Day, 2013). Clare's account deviates from this assertion where the absence of annotation is perceived as uncaring and impersonal. The dissonance between research and what Clare describes illustrates how: a) students need to learn the process of engaging with, and use of feedback, and b) different formats will be received in personally felt ways. The suggestion that audio feedback presents a 'learning conversation' (Gould and Day, 2013, p.556) should be approached with caution. There may be benefits especially for distance learners, but when most of the year 1 undergraduate

population reside in Halls, physically meeting with staff to discuss learning and clarify understanding may be preferable.

The way participants respond to receiving grades and feedback echoes findings in research (Tett, *et al.*, 2012; Beaumont *et al.*, 2011). The most common reaction is delight at having passed [Fiona: 3:230-232] or despair at failure [Bob: 2:12-13]. Participants are initially making a judgement about their capability based on the numerical grade; but they do attend to comments showing equal concern for positive and negative feedback and are keen to understand the detail in how to improve. The National Union of Students (NUS) Student Experience Report (2008) states that 71% of students wanted individual verbal feedback on assessments; however, the participants in this research show reticence at approaching staff to explicate the detail given. The reasons are puzzling, featuring concern for how they might be perceived and not wanting to impinge upon staff time. Despite reported improvements in staff accessibility (D f BIS, 2014), behind the remarks lies the importance of relationships; a powerful requisite in supporting dialogic feedback, but hindered by mass teaching and end-point summative assessment. By contrast, the participant experience in a practical environment provides opportunity for relationships to form with greater ease and expediency; in this instance, feedback was felt as more personal and had greater meaning.

Students need encouragement to make connections between learning and feedback. The first assessment period is critical in affirming student competency and the participants report significant anxiety and self-doubt during the period leading up to examinations. The use of terminology such as 'overcome' and 'defeat' represent how students perceive the challenge of passing, and they are keenly aware of the consequences of failure. Relationships play an important role in alleviating stress, and where staff scaffold progression in working towards a deadline, students express greater efficacy. Eddie describes how he repeatedly uses reflection as a tool to direct thinking in subsequent assignments [Eddie: 2:428-430]. His behaviour seems anomalous, however, with most participants drawing a line under completed work, then moving on. Feed-forward is either lacking or goes unnoticed, resulting in the potential to keep repeating errors in future assignments.

Although participants tend to speak favourably of the support received, where communication is deficient they partly hold lecturing staff accountable for difficulty or failure, evoking tension between what qualifies as appropriate levels of guidance against the movement towards independent learning (Christie *et al.*, 2013). Yet amid the allegations that new entrants lack appropriate study skills, their rich experience of *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) (Black and Wiliam, 1998) within formal education seems to be overlooked. Schools have invested significantly in AfL since Weaver's (2006) research findings that suggested only a quarter of students knew how to use feedback prior to university, to the extent that assessing without levels is now the aspirational norm (Commission on Assessment without Levels, 2015). Students will be familiar with formative pedagogies; capitalising on this experience may help in promoting a climate where feedback is an integral part of the learning process (Tett *et al.*, 2012; Price *et al.*, 2010) with peer and self-assessment strategies providing the foundation for a shift towards self-regulated learning (Deci and Ryan, 1985). What is apparent in the findings is that the participants are utilising adapted AfL strategies to enhance learning outside of the taught environment.

#### 5:2:4 Collaborative Learning

Analysis of the interview transcripts show that all participants benefit from collaborative learning and adopt this as a strategy outside of the formal learning environment. The participants independently come together with peers to create learning situations where they share responsibility for interpreting content. The opportunity to articulate ideas away from prescribed assessment processes allows them to test emerging understanding, critically reflect and clarify meaning through conversation (McDuff, 2012; Krause and Coates, 2008; Scanlon *et al.*, 2007; Rinehart, 1999). Knowledge checking using recall questions feature during revision sessions [Bob: 3:204-208] but collaborative engagement extends beyond surface indicators of learning; sharing personally framed understanding of theoretical concepts opens debate, feedback is non-threatening and mutual support builds confidence. There is a sense of collegiality; a willingness to share and the reciprocal interaction advance understanding but also promotes self-esteem [Bob: 3:278-290].

Through collaboration, the participants demonstrate a tacit level of criticality which, if nurtured via reflective practice, could impact upon how they perceive and go about learning more broadly. Both Bob [Bob: 3:278-290] and Eddie [Eddie: 3:439-451] show the ability to shift paradigms and all participants value the reassurances collaboration provides. There are differences, however, in how the participants engage: Clare is unwilling to share until she possesses sufficient knowledge to make an informed contribution [Clare: 3:375-390], suggesting apprehension regarding how she may be perceived among peers; whereas Alan is cautious about diminishing his control over learning [Alan: 3:454-457], giving the impression that collaboration is an altruistic deed. Despite the difference, collaborative learning represents a form of group work, which is a preferred mode of learning common among all participants. This may reflect characteristics that can be associated with PE students; they share a background where teamwork can be considered necessary for success and so possess skills for interaction and co-operation. Being enrolled on a vocational degree has the expectation of students joining in group work; foregrounding collaborative pedagogy may utilise prevailing student dispositions for learning and provide a more suitable approach for supporting the development of disciplinary epistemology. The participant collaborative efforts illustrate potential for communicative learning which is not fully being harnessed in the immediate learning environment.

#### 5:2:5 Academic Learning

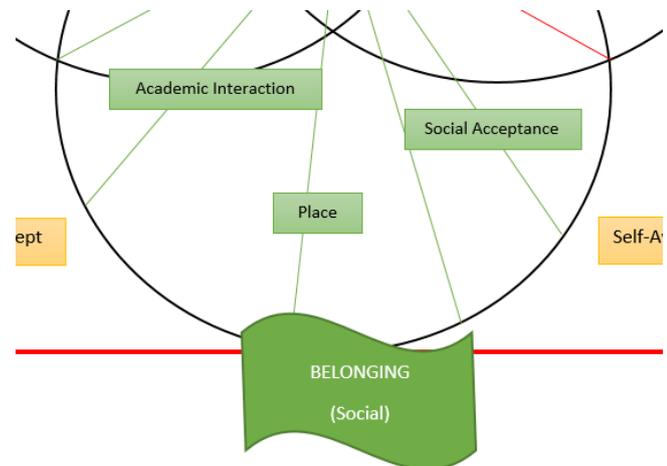
In the final interview, the participants were asked to explain what it means to become an academic learner in HE. Although care was taken to avoid presupposition, the absence of specific research or study skills in their response was surprising; and whilst independent learning is principally perceived as a functional mode of working, academic learning was more propositional, reflecting the distinction made by Barnett (2009, p.429) between 'knowing as such and *coming* to know', an idea that can be expanded to understanding how students *come* to learn. Being is emphasised above doing and as such, links to the affective and social aspects of experience explored in this research.

Common among participant interpretation is the positioning of academic learning as an *attitude* whereby cognitive and epistemological growth is obscured. The participants sense a shift away from 'dualist thinking' (Perry, 1970) or 'absolute knowing' (Baxter Magolda, 1992) towards recognition that knowledge can be uncertain. The participants are in the process of coming to value their own opinions but sensitivity to the perceptions of others means they are not quite ready to sever ties to authority. They have embarked on the transition towards 'relativism' (Perry, 1970) and 'independent knowing' (Baxter Magolda, 1992) but can only describe this as an embodied feeling manifest through a change in behaviour, particularly the level of effort and willingness to engage with learning [Clare: 3:525-540; Deb: 3:78-88]. Attitudinal dispositions are personally situated and described by Alan in terms of percentages to reflect upon who he has become [Alan: 3:652]. Changes in confidence is a key indicator of becoming an academic learner [Alan: 3: 668-672; Deb: 3: 448-459] and where this is lacking, the potential for 'academic' validation is dismissed [Fiona: 3:647-651].

Developing an academic attitude has advantages; students are conscious of transferrable skills which are a prized contributor to an employability agenda. Possessing these skills may hold great value as a graduate when aligned to the concept of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) and how individuals contemplate navigating an unpredictable and changing world, but this should not diminish the significance of knowledge acquisition. University can be regarded as a temporal space, through which individuals pass to gain social and economic mobility, but given the risk individuals are taking in choosing to study, and the debt this entails, suggests that possessing disciplinary expertise holds credence. Nurturing an understanding of the process involved in individually coming to know potentially defines HE and this begins with effective transition.

### 5:3 Belonging

Belonging acknowledges individual students' subjective feelings of acceptance and inclusion by others within a social environment (Kahu, 2014; Thomas, 2012). Drawing on Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of 'Situated Learning', it is possible to view the participant accounts of their experience of learning as a socially mediated



process that takes place within a framework of participation. Sense is made through interaction and learning to become a student in HE is fundamentally anchored in a social world. Relationships between people, events and the environment serve to influence how the participants feel and go about learning, and in contrast with traditional cognitive theories (Piaget, 1971), meaning is located in the negotiation that takes place within a community of practice (COP), echoing aspects of communicative learning (Mezirow, 1990) and a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1979).

A new entrant to university will encounter multiple communities, with embodied socio cultural practices and institutional norms that are potentially difficult to understand, and challenging to navigate. Lave and Wenger consider learning as 'an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world' (1991, p.35), through which the dominant ideas and structures that characterise a specific community are either adopted or resisted. The process and rate of transition is determined by personal needs and background; making connections and finding a sense of 'fit' can be a complex and challenging process (Kaighin and Croft, 2013; Reay *et al.*, 2010). Belonging is in a constant state of flux; it is emotionally sensitive and framed by students' sense of 'self' as they take on different roles and learn to navigate between macro and micro communities.

Lave and Wenger (1991) present legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) as a conceptual bridge to question and gain insight into the dynamic and constant re-positioning of individuals as they develop understanding and become increasingly

(or less) involved as members of a community. How a COP manages its boundaries affects access; thus, it would seem imperative that universities should work to provide entry routes and encourage students to invest themselves where the community enterprise best supports learning. In research (Masika and Jones, 2015; Kahu, 2014; Morieson *et al.*, 2013; Thomas, 2012), *belonging* is often aligned with *engagement*; the former precedes the latter with the likely outcome being improvements to learning and higher retention rates. Evidence from participant transcripts suggests this is potentially an optimistic alliance that should not be taken-for-granted. Institutions wishing to improve the student experience need to consider more closely the dominant student discourse associated with belonging, the impact upon choices made and subsequent engagement. A diet metaphor given by Clare can be used to illustrate this point [Clare: 3:296-302]. She compares the struggle to resist eating a bacon sandwich when everyone else seems to be enjoying one to her perseverance in attending a tedious lecture whilst her peers vote to remain under their duvets with little apparent consequence. The absent students still experience belonging to a COP where membership is characterised by peers struggling to relate to the lecture and who find the content irrelevant.

It is useful, therefore, to extend the concept of *belonging* to consider *not belonging* (Palmer *et al.*, 2009; Solomon, 2007). If viewed as a continuum, new students enter university from a point of relative 'not belonging' and as they navigate through multiple social and academic communities, experience shifting participation that impacts upon their sense of 'self'. One individual may take up many roles, and therefore present and perceive multiple 'selves' as different communities intersect which, in turn, impacts the negotiation of meaning and influences (dis)engagement.

By accepting Wenger's (2009) proposition that learning is best understood in the context of lived-experience, he offers a lens for exploring the idiographic nature of belonging in HE, where practitioners hold responsibility for making the cultural demands, prevailing knowledge discourse and ways of thinking explicit. Successful transition runs far more deeply than making new friends during induction week,

It involves identifying, understanding and assimilating a complex range of assumptions, behaviours and practices often tacitly represented by the

range of disciplines, or fields, they are studying; and the demands persist throughout their studies. (Hussey and Smith, 2010, p.159)

Students require ongoing guidance and support in their quest for knowledge; this necessitates sensitivity and opportunity for learners to feel valued and able to contribute. Hidden or abstract representations of knowledge become meaningless without context (Lave and Wenger, 1991); to ease transition, making the unfamiliar familiar would help to build confidence, enable students to find their voice and facilitate them becoming an active agent in learning. This is not always evident in the participant transcripts where moments of social and academic inclusion or exclusion present very different challenges. The following discussion will explore the experience of belonging in terms of social acceptance, academic interaction and finding a sense of place.

### 5:3:1 Social Acceptance

Transition can be understood as a transient space where individuals find themselves suspended between home and university (Palmer *et al.*, 2009). Not merely physical spaces, they conceptually position life *before* and *after*, with transition representing a period during which a student will encounter events that act as a 'turning point' (Palmer *et al.*, 2009, p.38). Forming social groups and finding acceptance is the dominant concern at enrolment, where the anticipation of meeting new people and making life-long friendships [Bob: 1:15-19; Eddie: 1:62-76] is tempered with the anxiety of not knowing anyone [Alan: 1:20-26]. All the research participants moved away from home and encountered separation as the primary aspect of transition (Gale and Parker, 2014) and the first 'turning point'. The expediency with which participants cope with separation seems to impact how efficiently they progress to the matter of learning. Alan appears quite merciless in his declaration of 'finding his mates' within the first two weeks, whilst Bob seems to relax into knowing others in a more congenial fashion; both gain acceptance relatively swiftly. By contrast, Fiona desperately struggles to forge relationships and displays symptoms of emotional maladjustment. Considerable time is spent reflecting upon a collage of photographic memories and the need to feel happy [Fiona: 2:11-40]. Palmer *et al.* (2009) propose symbolic objects of this nature can be conceived of in three ways:

As typifying a phase in the student's normal emotional development; as a defence against separation anxiety; and lastly, as a neutral sphere in which experience is not challenged. (Palmer *et al.*, 2009, p.51)

The suggestion is that symbolic objects provide continuity in the students' life as they adapt to change; but where social exclusion persists, the impact on the longer-term emotional well-being of a student should become a concern of the institution. It would seem foolish to imagine an institution can force social acceptance, but certain induction activities intend to do precisely this through compulsory mass participation in institution-led 'retention' events, which some experience as excluding. Fiona is helped to overcome the barriers she has faced through being a research participant, affording her the space to speak candidly and make sense of her experience [Fiona: 3:793-800]. Embedding this type of conversation as a feature of the personal tutoring programme may have a profound impact on retention. An induction event that does resonate with the participants is an outdoor and adventurous activity (OAA) day. Although approximately 100 students take part, they work in small groups of eight; staff facilitate rather than lead; groups engage with problem solving where there is little evidence of elitism, meaning all contribute equally; and students have time simply to chat or reflect whilst walking.

The OAA day is positioned in sharp contrast to the 'madness' of Freshers' week, following which Deb describes having to re-acquaint with her flatmates [Deb: 1:139-153]. In the same way that the stress of separation from family members can induce a sense of freedom, learning to live away from home can be both destructive and constructive in promoting a sense of belonging. It is not uncommon for individuals to experience feelings of homesickness during the initial weeks of university (Chow and Healey, 2008) and can even promote coping strategies and healthy attachment behaviours (Thurber and Walton, 2012). Aside from Clare, who had a brief, unfulfilling spell at a different university, all the participants have made the transition directly from school and having spent nominal periods away from their friends and family, they are at high risk of developing symptoms of homesickness (Thurber and Walton, 2012). The moment when Deb finds herself alone having waved goodbye to her mother, waiting for flatmates to arrive is poignant in its telling [Deb:1:125-136]. There is a clear sense of her loneliness tempered with anticipation and she is aware

that it is not just her but also her mother that needs to adapt to change. The ability to establish relationships is central to alleviating the stress of separation. Despite Deb's misgivings about how people are housed together, Halls provide a locus for interaction. Residents share personal histories, find commonality and begin to figure out the socio-cultural features of the new environment, initiating belonging. The ties that form from living in Halls also serve to accentuate feelings of isolation felt by those living off-campus.

The relationship between inclusion and exclusion is important, but by no means straightforward. As the inclusion process deepens, by implication, so does the exclusion process also gain momentum. The exploratory evidence highlights how the structural entry practices of inclusion, such as induction days, fresher weeks, etc., also sow the seeds or conditions for exclusion. The panacea becomes the poison. (Palmer, *et al.*, 2009, p.50)

The participants living in Halls, are inside the social milieu; they work, rest and play together. The passage towards social acceptance comes full circle by the end of the year with the participants attributing family status to their peers. Qualities that signify 'family' such as security, support and affiliation are applied to friendships, with Deb tentatively suggesting she feels '*loved*' [Deb: 3:518-524]; but the experience that serves to unite these students, equally divorces Eddie and Fiona, who live in separate houses off-campus; they are also geographically the furthest away from home. Both participants struggle with social interaction and experience heightened feelings of homesickness, but cope in very different ways. Eddie conceptualises 'off-campus' as an expedient route towards independence, whilst Fiona finds it an ordeal that demands persistent labour in the pursuit of interaction.

By the end of the year, Eddie expresses a deep sense of belonging [Eddie: 3:503-513], preferring to stay at university during vacation, whilst Fiona is pragmatic about university as necessary for meeting longer term life ambitions [Fiona: 3:729-741]; she '*can't wait to go home*' [Fiona: 3:193-194]. Neither intimate possible withdrawal, suggesting the ability to circumnavigate issues of social acceptance and find belonging through alternative, or compensatory routes. Their transcripts suggest this was achieved through academic and pastoral relationships [Fiona: 3:521-535] and membership of the dance community [Eddie: 3:305-313]. Seemingly, social

acceptance does not preclude acceptance into the learning community, although it may hold certain privileges.

### 5:3:2 Academic Interaction

The ease with which students adapt to the academic demands of learning correlates to the quality of teaching, flexible access to support and an understanding of organisational structures (Zepke *et al.*, 2006). LPP directs attention towards the influence that relational aspects of interaction have on the learning processes and experiences of students (Lave and Wenger, 1991). A classroom is not a COP, rather a space within which interaction takes place; it provides a 'context for mutual engagement' (Wenger, 1998, p.141), where knowledge discourse promotes meaning making through interpretation and negotiation (Zepke *et al.*, 2006; Yorke and Thomas, 2003).

Practical lectures are particularly effective in promoting a sense of belonging. Pedagogic methods, especially collaborative learning and the blending of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic techniques inspire the sharing of ideas and the ability to access curricula from a range of learning style preferences. Recognition of sporting capital arguably provides a bridge to the cultural capital of learners and as such, delivers an entry point into a COP which the lecturer can nurture through supportive and personalised feedback. Student engagement is influenced by a perception that their personal sporting attributes are valued and accommodated. This impacts on confidence to persist in areas where they feel less capable and they are willing to take risks and make mistakes. As the students become active participants, multi-directional lines of communication develop which are carried into the broader social and learning environment, engendering strong feelings of course cohesion [Deb: 3:302-315; Eddie: 3:600-607].

The nature of learning in a practical setting resembles propositions made by Zepke and Leach (2005) that support an *adaptation* discourse where student-centred teaching could aid retention. This is problematic when reflecting upon the participant accounts of mass teaching in a lecture theatre. Student-centred characteristics of learning are sacrificed in favour of content delivery to multiple degree cohorts.

Question and answer dominates the lecturer-student interaction, which participants seek to avoid for fear of ridicule, and issues with concentration, interest and distractions foster non-participation. This form of instruction fits with an integrative, institution-led culture (Tinto, 1993 cited in Zepke and Leach, 2005), which may be appropriate for the teaching of generic study skills such as essay writing or referencing, but it can be argued that to disconnect learning from student experience effectively makes it far more difficult to participate in a constructive manner. Indeed, the participants recount anxiety in terms of mastering such skills and so it would seem advantageous to all stakeholders to work from a student-centred perspective; mirroring the shift in conceptual thinking about engagement and retention undertaken by Tinto (2006).

Lecturers play a significant role in how the participants find a sense of belonging; there is consensus in having found staff helpful and as relationships evolve, early reticence at approaching them for guidance dissipates. A feature of the participant experience is how they figure out what kinds of behaviour epitomise a good student and the vulnerability of acting in a way that risks membership of a community that holds desirable properties for meeting personal objectives. Initial caution at wasting staff time by requesting a tutorial is replaced with expectation [Deb: 3:132-150]. As the students become increasingly comfortable and confident, their perception of 'self' within the COP changes; they experience growing alignment with the joint venture of learning which manifests in a sense of attachment to peers, staff and the broader university.

A community of practice is at once both a community and an economy of meaning. The definition of a joint enterprise brings a community together through the collective development of a shared practice. But the definition of that enterprise – and therefore the meanings of the shared practice – are to be negotiated among the participants through the politics of participation and reification. (Wenger, 1998, p.209)

How the participants cope with the politics of participation involves risk, and navigating interwoven communities occasionally leads to tension. Occasionally social and academic communities collide and disrupt practice; Deb describes peers attending lectures with the intention of continuing the previous night's social discourse, blurring her perceived boundaries for interaction [Deb: 3:318-326]. Eddie

is conscious of inequalities of commitment, highlighting his continued attendance despite difficulties commuting to university, whilst peers in Halls remain in bed [Eddie: 2:63-76]. Communities are unstable; their purpose and ability to function requires constant negotiation and investment. Where investment is linked to power, accountability comes into view. When Clare voices her dissatisfaction with the quality of her academic experience (in the context of fees and gaining value for money), it is interesting to consider whether she is speaking from a position of powerlessness or empowerment [Clare: 2:427-454]. Her claim to not learning anything stresses failure by the lecturer to deliver in accordance with their expected role [Clare: 3:17]. Clare may be apportioning blame, but equally demonstrating anxiety at the perceived threat to her learning. Her experience jeopardises the value of participation and risks collapse of the enterprise. Clare's account serves as a warning to institutions to heed the fragility of COP's.

When a style or a discourse spreads through a vast community or constellation, claiming ownership of its meaning becomes a source of power by the very fact that such style or discourse is a source of widespread identification. (Wenger, 1998, p.209).

The participants provide evidence of this when grappling with the question, 'Does year 1 count?' This is a discourse that has been claimed by the disengaged, and is powerful and appealing when faced with the temptation of alternative pursuits, or when seeking to avoid difficulty. It is a discourse that undermines engagement and belonging to the academic learning community. Taking a student-centred approach to practice may go some way to reconciling this problem.

Fortunately, all the participants resist this discourse through a determination to be successful and the existence of positive, supporting relationships. Alan demonstrates a remarkable way to cope with contradictory discourse, based on an understanding of how different communities can nourish cognitive, emotional and social needs. He uses a 'bridge' metaphor to illustrate his conscious and strategic movement between different social and academic groups [Alan: 3:368-388]. He ingratiate himself to older students to benefit from their experience; but this also provides him with a feeling of status among his cohort. Relationships are key to

Alan's sense of belonging, and the security this affords allows him to imagine the future as a second-year student, connecting people and place.

### 5:3:3 Place:

The relationship and bond that individuals have with their place of residence is central to processes of identification (Benson, 2014). Locating oneself within a specific environment contributes to cognitive, affective and social ways of experiencing, making issues of place particularly relevant when considering the transition to university (Cicognani *et al.*, 2010). *Home* conceptually represents more than a physical space; it has personal meaning, is imbued with emotions and is a place of attachment and community, where the sense of 'self' is arguably most deeply rooted (Cresswell, 2004). Each of the participants uses home as a metaphor that provides insight into their broad experience of transition; and how they come to contextually position themselves as members of the academic community, which impacts on how well they adapt to the demands of learning in HE.

Leaving home is the stand-out moment in year 1 for Bob [Bob: 3:405-413]; his close-knit family serve as a reference point where he finds stability and his role is clearly defined. Bob made the decision to attend university in haste; change was rapid, having little time to emotionally or psychologically prepare, which may contribute to heightened feelings of dislocation and homesickness. Transition involves movement from the familiar and routine interactions of daily life to a position of personal responsibility and independence. For many students, the anticipation of freedom and autonomy mediates the relinquishing of former controls, easing anxiety (Lowe and Cook, 2003; Tognoli, 2003). But where the severing of ties happens abruptly, the ability to cope may prove more testing.

By contrast, Eddie could not wait to leave home [Eddie: 1:158-165]; he views university as an opportunity to gain independence and experiment with self-discovery [Eddie: 3:560-562]. Having previously attended an interview for a different course in the same institution, his anxiety rests with how he might be perceived when recognised. However, his familiarity with staff and the environment have resulted in attachment well in advance of enrolment. Students making the transition

to university do so with prejudice and stereotypes of what it will be like shaping their expectations (Palmer *et al.*, 2009). This has implications for institutions seeking to manage student transition since coming to university holds diverse meaning for individuals, who will be lured in multiple directions.

Fiona also anticipates independence but issues of bullying and exclusion limit her social belonging and threaten her sense of 'self'. Fiona displays a type of psychological regression where she clutches to memories of a time and place where she felt emotionally secure and eagerly anticipates going home [Fiona: 3:193-194]. Being away from, and unable to participate in the communities that provide stability and well-being becomes more obvious and disturbing through their absence (Chow and Healey, 2008). Fiona's struggle to participate in certain social practices challenges her perception of who she is, which equally heightens a sense of who she is not (Wenger, 1998). This is problematic when her ability to engage in pursuits that contribute to defining what it means to be a student are blocked. Nonetheless, Fiona seems to resolve this issue by forging a revised view of what it means to be *at university*.

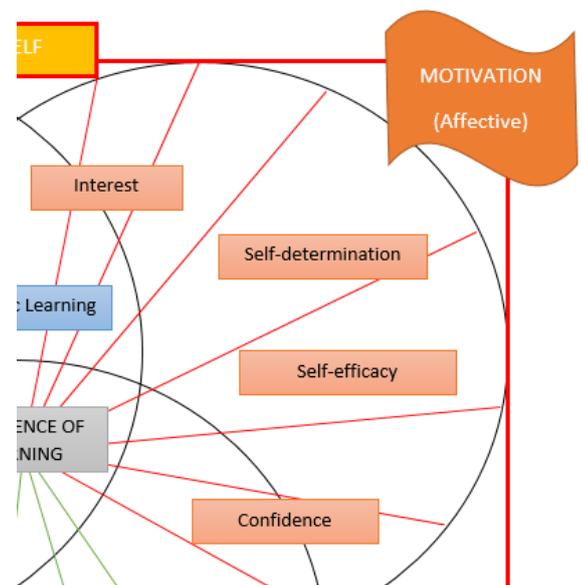
Transition implies a number of antonyms: of journeying away and towards, of loss and gain, dislocation and relocation; reflecting the suspended period proposed by Palmer *et al.* (2009). Navigating the passage between can be challenging. In their research into transition from home to university, Chow and Healey (2008) acknowledge that following a process of interaction, feelings of dislocation begin to subside; their study was conducted over a period of five months. Research concurs in that the more time spent in a place, the greater the sense of attachment and belonging (Benson, 2014; Cicognani *et al.*, 2010). Time is needed to forge relationships, engage with social activity and create memories. Evidence in this research illustrates the way the participants go about adapting and bonding as members of the university; conducted over an entire year, it documents the formation of new attachment, and how experience brings about a shift in belonging where four of the participants now refer to university as *home*. Deb remarks on the PE course vibe [Deb: 3:302-315], Bob designates the university as a happy place [Bob: 3:444-454], whilst Eddie describes the course as 'socially binding' [Eddie: 3:600-607,] which points towards how external management and pedagogic

practice can contribute to developing a sense of belonging. Dance is given as a specific example where the style of lecturing encourages interaction and collaboration that reaches beyond curricula time. The participants are conscious of changes in 'self' perception, but are also aware of the increasing professionalism among their peers (how they perceive others); by the end of the year, there is also less anxiety regarding how they imagine themselves to be perceived.

The recalibration of academic and social self-concepts is an ongoing task as new challenges bring renewed doubt and anxiety (Thurber and Walton, 2012). In seeking to facilitate meaningful transition, there needs to be acceptance that belonging is socially mediated and that learning can be understood as a way of being in the social world (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Experience-in-place is pivotal in the process of transition and adjustment to university (Cicognani *et al.*, 2010; Manzo, 2005). Relationships are fundamental in connecting to the learning community and in providing the resources needed to manage the challenges encountered. From an academic perspective, this is productively enabled using inclusive pedagogy where staff mediate entry points and participation within a COP, focusing on the specific needs of each individual student above the requirements of the institution.

## 5:4 Motivation

Motivation can be understood in terms of the factors that give impetus to action; from an organismic perspective, motivation is volitional and initiates behaviours that enable learning to take place (or not) (Deci and Ryan, 1985). This assumes transition and engagement at university is an opportunity for meeting personally situated needs and evidence from the participant accounts show several reasons for choosing to enrol: from meeting career



aspirations to growing up and making life-long friendships. Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 1985) addresses the energisation and direction of behaviour *to do* something; this involves elements of choice, intention and decision making. It also positions individuals as agents, where 'self' and environment intersect and are managed through a process of reflexive deliberation in the pursuit of learning goals (Zepke *et al.*, 2010; Luckett and Luckett, 2009).

The RMT of motivation draws on SDT as a lens to gain insight into how the participants cope in navigating the interaction between emotion and action. Self-determination posits the needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness as mediating factors in how individuals cope with the stress of adaptation and demands of learning (Vallerand and Ratelle, 2002). This can be observed in the tensions that exist between extrinsic controls and intrinsic motives that influence regulatory behaviour and are impacted by changes in the perceived locus of causality (Deci and Ryan, 2002). Essentially, the participants want to be 'good at' and in control of their learning and futures; they derive satisfaction from an awareness of extending their capability, acknowledged via grades, feedback or an internalised sense of improvement.

Competence is the accumulated result of one's interactions with the environment, of one's exploration, learning, and adaptation. (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p.27)

Feeling competent is a product of experience and associated affective initiators for action including interest, curiosity and enjoyment. Students need to feel competent to function effectively as a learner, but equally that progression needs to be challenged through pedagogy that is sensitive to stagnation and boredom. Where the dynamic interplay between autonomy, competence and relatedness is amplified, optimal learning takes place, echoing Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) construct of 'flow'. This is evidenced through Eddie's experience of dance; he describes loss of self-consciousness and involvement is autotelic. Eddie finds 'flow' through the lecturer pitching work just above his skill level, capturing interest and fostering deep concentration. Efforts to replicate similar learning conditions elsewhere would seem beneficial. When the balance of influence between autonomy, competence and relatedness is less stable, difficulties arise that manifest through personally situated coping mechanisms.

*Dispositions* such as will and determination, combined with *qualities* that characterise human endeavour such as resilience and self-discipline, provide the impetus for how individuals orient and engage with learning and therefore cope with the challenge of transition (Barnett, 2009). However, dispositions and qualities are not normative; they rely on complex emotions that are individually felt and situated within personal experience. All the participants express a willingness to learn, but marked differences in confidence expose variations in efficacy. When seeking understanding of the motives that drive learning, it is important to consider the affective dimensions that influence behaviour, and impact cognition (Ainley, 2006). The participant accounts demonstrate the interdependence of motivation and affect, underlining the role they play in the adaptive process. If our concern is with learning and engagement, then equally we are concerned with lack of learning and disengagement; if students are the latter, then it can be assumed that their experience is not promoting positive feelings that encourage and inspire them to persist, be curious or aspire to learn. Understanding individual variance highlights the need for a student-centred approach to transition.

The RMT of motivation is discussed initially through evidence of participant self-determination, specifically, how intrinsic and extrinsic factors shape regulation. This is followed by consideration of the key affective qualities of interest, confidence and efficacy, and the impact these have on the changing perception of ‘self’, resulting from the participant experience.

#### 5:4:1 Self-determination

Research consistently advocates optimal learning occurs when an individual is intrinsically motivated (Gonzalez, *et al.*, 2012; Guay *et al.*, 2008; Deci and Ryan, 1985) but in their comparison of traditional and non-traditional student motivation, Bye *et al.* (2007) propose that ‘traditional’ undergraduates tend to regulate learning behaviour based on extrinsic motives. If accepted, their findings hold implications for how institutions plan for, and expect groups of students to engage with learning. Results obtained in this study suggest self-determination for the research participants is far more complex. Using evidence from Eddie’s interview transcripts, Figure 6 illustrates how self-determination oscillates throughout the year; a similar profile of variable regulatory behaviour could be presented for each of the participants.

Type of Motivation	Amotivation		< Extrinsic Motivation >			Intrinsic Motivation
Type of Regulation	Non-Regulation	External	Introjected	Identified	Integrated	Intrinsic Regulation
Eddie (transcript lines)		[3: 223-229]	[3:211-220]	[1: 288-301] [3:344-357]	[3:254] [3:434]	[1:130] [2:78-95] [3:182-196]
Quality of Behaviour	Non Self-Determined	<i>Internalisation</i>				Self-Determined

Figure 6: The Self-determination continuum (Adapted from Ryan and Deci, 2002)

The participant accounts demonstrate detailed interplay between motivation, affective and cognitive outcomes experienced in the processes and interactions of learning. These may not be accounted for in institutional practice; the evidence suggests that participants are capable of engaging from an intrinsically motivated perspective, endorsing the innate need for competence and self-determination

(Fazey and Fazey, 2001; Deci and Ryan, 1985), but adaptation to HE increases sensitivity to external controls, shifting regulatory behaviour towards greater dependency. If left unattended, this shift has implications for how the student copes with challenge and difficulty; and for the institution in terms of support and student satisfaction (Marshall *et al.*, 2015; Kacire, 2015).

Resolving tensions between an external and internal locus of causality would seem imperative, but complicated by environmental conditions where learning is framed by extrinsically controlled practice. Emphasis on criteria and grade outcomes limits the potential for individuals to experience working from an intrinsically motivated perspective (Vallerand *et al.*, 1997). Also, the participants enrol with a set of goals; gaining a degree is viewed as the last educational 'hurdle' [Alan: 1:235-240], a prerequisite for their chosen career [Bob: 1: 110-114; Deb: 1:321-335; Fiona:1:349-361], a route towards self-improvement [Clare: 1:198; Eddie: 1: 288-301] and approach learning in the context of life application (Bye *et al.*, 2007). Each entrusts the university with helping them to achieve their ambitions and so it would seem appropriate, particularly where a vocational degree is concerned, that content should be relevant and meaningful, emphasising personal growth alongside qualifications.

Becoming self-determined is a delicate process involving self-correcting behaviour (Deci and Ryan, 1985). As the participants adapt to university, they are increasingly conscious of being on a journey which Alan describes as completing a '*mission*' [Alan: 3: 54]. Self-determination requires self-management and regulation but goals multiply, are temporal, and open to modification. Reconciling intrinsic and extrinsic goal orientation involves making choices and therefore should be viewed as a shared responsibility between learner and the institution. Guay *et al.* (2008, p.235) present three dimensions of action that can promote the autonomous regulation of students: *autonomy support*, *involvement* and *structure*. Both positive and negative examples of these are described in the participant experience of learning, and provide insight that may inform understanding of practice that supports student transition into HE.

Internalisation is an active process where the transformation of external regulation into a personal value demands the ability to modify 'self' perspectives (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Although principally related to understanding child development, internalisation is concerned with experience that allows an individual to become '*competently, self-determining in the social world*' (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p.131). Passive or overly controlling learning experiences limit student ability to interact socially or epistemically, restricting individual ability to revise personal dispositions; this is most commonly felt in a mass lecture theatre setting [Fiona: 3:339-344]. Clare's spiralling discontent with the quality of certain lectures [Clare: 2:427-454; 3:66-73], exacerbated by financial concerns and feeling increasingly lackluster [Clare: 2: 71-81], is an example where failure to adopt autonomy supportive methods block the internalisation process. If feelings of disengagement persist, unless an individual can find alternative ways to regulate behaviour, potential for withdrawal emerges.

Where lecturers utilise autonomy supportive methods, particularly discussion and collaboration, the learning experience fosters internalisation; the participants report improved connections in learning when exposed to blended pedagogies and feel most successful when given the opportunity to actively engage [Bob: 2:149-152; Eddie: 2:180-190; Fiona: 2:232-244]. Intrinsic motivation includes the desire to *know* and understand new things, alongside the drive to *accomplish* something based on a sense of personal fulfilment (Vallerand and Ratelle, 2002). The ability to identify with a task aids integration, feelings of competence grow and movement towards self-determination is promoted. From a broader perspective, autonomy supportive teaching accounts for individual cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997) and builds emotional capital (Reay, 2000), which can both be considered important factors in the way students cope with transition and adapt without relying on their skill at strategically negotiating institutional systems.

The nature of staff involvement in student education plays a significant role in facilitating the internalisation process and therefore the development of self-determination (Guay, *et al.*, 2008; Reeve, 2002). Participants describe feelings of anxiety and alienation from the learning process when staff employ controlling instructional behaviours [Clare: 2:427-454]. In situations where the participants

experience flexibility in how they approach a task, engage in dialogue and have freedom to work creatively [Eddie: 2:78-95], perceptions of self-determination and competence improve. A further outcome is that where students felt valued by staff; this was reciprocated by the desire to perform well for that lecturer [Bob: 3: 330-336]. There is a correlation between the quality of students' motivation and their level of achievement, partly conditioned by relationships that support autonomy (Groves *et al.*, 2015; Zepke *et al.*, 2010; Reeve, 2002).

Separate from staff involvement, but equally significant is the relationship students have with their parents. Contrary to a proposition by Groves *et al.* (2015) that parental expectations diminish intrinsic motivation, making their family proud features as a consistent and important motive to persist and be successful. Family presents an external locus of causality that potentially detracts from autonomous functioning, but pressure to achieve on behalf of their parents was absent from the participant accounts; instead, family provided essential support and encouragement, enhancing the choice to engage from a self-regulating position [Bob: 2:388-391; Fiona: 2:435-441]. Friendships also provide motivational impetus with the participants preferring co-operation above competition; only Alan [Alan: 3:313-316] and Eddie [Eddie: 3:344-357] admit they want to be better than peers. Instead, the participants perceive competition from a position of self-improvement and personal challenge. A more exigent concern seems to be how the learning environment is structured in a way that enables students to efficiently self-regulate learning (Guay *et al.*, 2008).

Quality assurance foregrounds the communication of consistent expectations and standards which should stimulate a sense of security and predictability among students, but in a saturated marketplace, potential conflict occurs that can have significant bearing on student learning behaviour. Institutions may prioritise the product by focusing on grade outcomes and career pathways; guidance becomes overly controlling to the detriment of the learning process and autonomous functioning (Groves *et al.*, 2015).

When some aspect of the situation begins to control the person, to redirect the person's attention away from the task, and to interfere with

his or her experienced freedom to engage in the task, that aspect will decrease the person's intrinsic motivation for the task. (Deci and Ryan, 1985, p.55)

The participants demonstrate obsessive attention to grades, using them to set personal targets, and regulatory behaviour is characterised by the need to 'do more'. Expending personal effort is the route adopted to gain success, and regulation is typified by feelings of guilt and anxiety, both synonymous with introjection. But research shows that intensity of effort is not sufficient, particularly if it is a reactive response to difficulty (Zimmerman, 2013; Guay *et al.*, 2008). Academic achievement is consistently linked to autonomous motivation (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2012; Deci and Ryan, 1991) and so if this represents where optimal learning occurs, considering the interaction between metacognitive processes, affect and motivational outcomes needs embedding into institutional practice. Zimmerman (2013) states that students who self-regulate:

Set superior goals proactively, monitor their learning intentionally, use strategies effectively, and respond to personal feedback adaptively not only attain mastery more quickly, but also are more motivated to sustain their efforts. (2013, p.135)

Zimmerman (2013) draws attention to proactive conduct that characterises a self-determined learner, but the participants exhibit reactive behavioural traits: they are wary of help-seeking [Clare: 3:186-195]; at times, personal effectiveness is based on social comparison [Alan: 3:313-316]; errors are attributed to lack of ability [Bob: 2 12-13]; and they admit to defensive behaviours such as procrastination [Fiona: 1:364-365]. The participants also exhibit proactive traits, but the point at which they demonstrate positive or negative behaviour individually fluctuates, suggesting institutional practice should work towards nurturing self-determination as an ongoing concern. Affective qualities are entwined with autonomous learning, and analysis of the participant accounts highlights interest, confidence, and self-efficacy as significant qualities that give insight to how students cope and adapt to the demands of learning in HE.

### 5:4:2 Interest

Interest can be understood as a key contributor to the activation of, and sustained engagement with learning tasks. This is of significance during transition to HE and important in securing effective learning as students encounter new, and often unfamiliar experiences.

Interest as the immediate reaction to a new learning task is an affective state that involves feelings of arousal, alertness, attention and concentration and is a key variable in the motivation of learning. (Ainley, 2006, p.399)

Interest is conceptualised as a subjective affective state that arises from a position of established, pre-existing personal interest, or through situational triggers (Subramaniam, 2010; Bye *et al.*, 2007; Ainley, 2006; Krapp, 2002). The way students react frames how they participate, and evidence from the participant accounts indicate the emotional response to experience directs how they cope with challenge and go about learning.

The participants arrive at university with already formed personal interests. It is no surprise, given their sporting backgrounds, that they seem more enthusiastic for practical activities, especially those that build on prior experience or that challenge in a way where they can physically connect. The critical factor for institutions is how staff manage situational interest; experience within the learning environment is under the control of the lecturer and so provides opportunity to trigger interest, but sustaining interest requires work and creativity (Subramaniam, 2010). Managed effectively, situational interest has the potential to result in the growth of individual interest and therefore influence a shift towards autonomy; this is seen most strongly in Eddie's experience of Dance. The outcome of skilful pedagogy is evidenced through Deb's account of learning in basketball [Deb: 2:416-429] where the lecturer has been able to *catch* and *hold* student interest, primarily because content is made meaningful and the students are involved as active participants in their learning (Subramaniam, 2010). A similar example can be found in the way participants make sense of scientific theory through the creative blending of pedagogic methods.

However, when learning is experienced as monotonous or repetitive, any gains made through catching initial interest are quickly lost.

Degrees of interest alter how receptive an individual is towards learning, with higher levels of interest necessary for intrinsic motivation (Bye *et al.*, 2007). Krapp (2002) provides a view where situational interest replicates aspects of extrinsic motivation. It is a transitory state where attention and positive feelings are activated by external factors (Ainley, 2006). Balancing individual and situational interest seems necessary in achieving autonomy. Adding the dimension of 'self' bridges the distinction between individual and situational interest by considering investment in learning because of the way it can alter or add to ideal perceptions of the 'self' (Krapp, 2002); a feeling of becoming and being the person [I] imagine myself to be. Clare provides an example where her subjective feelings in response to her experience of psychology lectures create tensions in the way affect, motivation and cognition interact [Clare: 2:427-454]. Clare questions the quality of teaching and grapples with the reason for attending. It is the salience of personal goals that encourage her persistence, and her ability to reflect on the progress she is making towards achieving her goals has a significant effect on her adopting a strategy of 'self-teaching'. In this instance, her behaviour is supported through the existence of extrinsic goals which correlates with positive affect on her self-perception (Dweck, 1999). Clare's experience also illustrates how goals have the potential to over-ride negative feelings and counter potential dis-engagement, but it would be unwise to assume that all students innately possess the capacity to adapt behaviour independent of any intervention. Institutions need to generate circumstances where the connection between individual interests and content is made explicit, activating positive affect that promotes learning. This could be achieved by involving students more in decision making, and utilising their talents as co-creators of curricula content.

#### 5:4:3 Confidence

When an individual experiences a connection between interest, learning and enjoyment, they enter a cycle of engagement where feedback promotes skill acquisition and the confidence to respond to increasingly challenging tasks.

Autonomous people are intrinsically-motivated, perceive themselves to be in control of their decision-making, take responsibility for the outcomes of their actions and have confidence in themselves. (Fazey and Fazey, 2001, pp.345-346)

Fazey and Fazey (2001) draw attention to the affective dimension of becoming an autonomous learner. Emotions frame understanding what it means to be a student and a learner, influencing a relative sense of well-being and feelings of personal satisfaction (Christie, 2009; Bye *et al.*, 2007). The participant accounts are rich in emotional content, but confidence is an affective dimension that is constantly referred to, positioning it as a significant aspect of transition. Research consistently highlights the vulnerability of students as they face the difficulties associated with movement to HE (McMillan, 2014; Christie, 2009; Wingate, 2007; Reay, 2000) and confidence is recognised as an emotional asset, which is more secure among students from middle-class backgrounds due to the buffering provided by economic and cultural capital (Reay, 2000; Bourdieu, 1997). Similarly, McMillan (2014) implicates emotional capital as differentiating the ease with which first or second generation students cope with transition; if this position is accepted, then nurturing confidence in the context of increasing student diversity would seem valuable. The participants demonstrate the diversity that exists *within* identified groups. Preparation for university is variable; all are direct entrants and acknowledge the challenges ahead, yet view change positively [Eddie: 1:3-12] and do not seem intimidated by degree level study. Confidence is important to how they experience and cope with HE but is nuanced differently in a way indistinguishable by background or class.

What is consistent across all participants is evidence of doubt and anxiety regarding their perceived self-competence and to compensate, they demonstrate different ways to gain affirmation: by giving weight to [higher] grades achieved [Alan: 2:325-330], sharing feedback that constructs a sense of self-worth [Fiona: 3:219-230] or recognition of social status [Eddie: 3:182-196]. The aspects of experience each participant focuses on mirrors personal insecurities and often sentences are tempered with hopeful uncertainty [Bob: 3:383-385]. Central to the development of perceived self-competence is confidence which unfolds as an emotional dialogue

that frames personal ability to cope with the demands of learning throughout the year. There is a constantly shifting emotional interaction with changing experience, where the interplay between student and the learning environment determines behaviour and outcomes (Christie *et al.*, 2008).

Students are engaged in a continual process of balancing a 'combination of fear and confidence' (McMillan, 2014, p.1132). There is a clear sense of trepidation when entering the unknown [Bob: 2:31-36] but at no point are the participants disposed to give up; possibly a characteristic that can be associated with their sporting backgrounds. Success is rewarded with positive gains in confidence [Fiona: 2:74-80; 2:460-467], potentially acting like adrenalin producing a sense of well-being that the participants want to replicate; when success is reinforced through a process of reflection, the impact is greater belief in personal competence.

Self-perceived competence is a key motivator for engagement and the ability to persist even when facing short-term failure (Fazey and Fazey, 2001). Confidence seems to provide emotional passage towards feeling control and ownership of learning which, if harnessed, could promote movement towards self-determined behaviour. When an individual assumes responsibility for errors, change is within their control, even if they lack the scholastic skills to do so, whilst apportioning blame renders them unable to prevent it from happening again (Fazey and Fazey, 2001). The participants take responsibility for their learning, and evidence of 'self-talk' suggests this as a method they adopt in locating emotional control. Clare insistently repeats antonyms 'I can't/I can' [Clare: 1:240-271], seeking empowerment in confronting difficulty. The presence of 'self-talk' of this intensity is possibly understandable during the first few weeks of HE when coping with initial problems, navigating institutional learning without yet being in possession of the strategies necessary for meeting academic requirements (Haggis and Pouget, 2002). Clare's self-talk dissipates but Fiona's adoption of battle terminology such as 'defeat' and 'conquer' endures throughout the year; it echoes continued references to a lack of confidence [Fiona: 3:349-371], suggesting a connection between the nature of self-talk and perceived self-competence. Fluctuations in confidence are idiosyncratic yet all except Fiona describe enhanced feelings of confidence by the end of year 1, which correlates with her continued sense of social exclusion.

A constant in the participant accounts is the influence peers and friendships have on regulation of learning behaviour. The dominant message students receive on entry to HE is the need to work independently, and their experience suggests this means in isolation. Interaction with lecturing staff is desirable and appreciated, but where it is lacking, this is accepted as part of the university expectations. Only Clare vocally challenges the quality of interaction and positions this as a lapse in the lecturer's responsibility [Clare: 2:427-454]. The participants either continue to work alone, or seek out peers where learning cues are transmitted and they begin to feel a growing sense of control inside the reassurances of others, findings consistent with those of Scanlon *et al.* (2007). The 'self-help' groups seem instrumental in bridging the gap between transition and adapting to autonomous working [Alan: 3:509-515; Clare: 3:375-390], but where Fiona has struggled to form a supportive peer network, her ability to cope is less secure and she relies on alternative sources of encouragement, principally family, lecturers, and a determination to achieve her goal [Fiona: 3:236-269].

Collaborative learning provides an opportunity for students to build confidence through uninhibited and spontaneous sharing of ideas, promoting feelings of academic self-competence (Zepke *et al.*, 2010; Scanlon *et al.*, 2007). In learning situations where the lecturer dominates, or dialogue is restricted to direct questioning, the participants evade or are frustrated by the lack of interaction [Fiona: 1:304-417]. Remarkably, where Deb has high perceived self-competence in dance, pedagogic methods hinder the development of confidence; she admits to answering questions '*in my head*' [Deb: 1:374-385], a trait that remains at the end of the year [Deb: 3:56-65]. Deb seems unwilling to risk a negative reaction despite the potential gains associated with impressing the lecturer. By contrast, Alan is more concerned with how he can demonstrate confidence [Alan: 2:132-133], which he prioritises above the quality of intellectual contribution he can make.

Inconsistent communication occasionally prompts confusion among participants regarding accuracy of their approach to work. They are searching for ways to work more effectively, or at least feel good about their learning and progress and this is meaningfully equated to a feeling of confidence (or 'comfort' in Fiona's case). Prompt and effective feedback seems to have a significant impact on the

development and depth of student confidence in their competence for completing tasks successfully (Zepke *et al.*, 2010). Archer (2002 cited in McMillan, 2014, p.124) presents a spectrum of performative achievement emotions, 'frustration, boredom, depression, satisfaction, joy, exhilaration and euphoria'; confidence acts as a link to how students make sense of, and respond to feelings that emerge from experience. When emotions are positive and confidence is high, the tendency is to accept further challenges; when emotions are negative and confidence is low, the predisposition is to withdraw (McMillan, 2014). Being at university requires students to move repeatedly between different learning landscapes; this involves a process of continual adaptation to the differences in pedagogy used by the lecturer in charge. The resultant experience can either sustain or inhibit learning, and this is most clearly evidenced through the contrasting accounts from participants of learning in a practical environment compared to a lecture theatre setting. The cycle of constant adjustment also demands mastery of emotional disturbance, and the participant accounts suggest confidence may contribute to managing the extreme highs and lows.

The rise in confidence by the end of the first year may be explained by the participants having realised the relevance of content to the achievement of personal goals and ambitions. Learning in a practical context benefits from an instantly recognisable connection to prior experience, and is therefore easier to navigate; even where the subject matter may present a new experience, such as gymnastics, the physicality involved is familiar. The connection to subjects such as physiology and psychology is alien to some, and for those with a college background in these areas, the traditional lecture theatre setting creates a barrier. By the end of the year, participants have gained experience, forging a personal link that enables a connection to be made. What seems apparent is that confidence is inextricably linked to relationships and the value of learning interactions; where 'risk' is encouraged and supported, fear of failure is reduced. Students require opportunities to demonstrate and develop competence, which is most efficacious when the learning environment and atmosphere builds confidence.

#### 5:4:4 Self-Efficacy

In self-determination theory, efficacy represents the affective feelings associated with how individuals energise behaviour in the pursuit of competence (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Efficacy beliefs play a pivotal role in an individual's perceived ability to achieve a desired outcome, and evidence from the participant accounts show self-efficacy to be influential in determining how students go about, and experience learning.

Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act. (Bandura, 1995, p.2)

The regulatory impact of efficacy and associated affective response has salience for students in transition where judgements about personal capabilities are heightened and serve to mediate learning engagement (Zimmerman, 1995). A problem exists in that self-efficacy cannot be regarded as a singular disposition; it is context dependent and so fluctuates according to setting and activity. Rodgers *et al.* (2014) position self-efficacy from the perspective of two sub-domains: task self-efficacy which relates to the confidence necessary for task performance, and coping self-efficacy which addresses how individuals respond under challenging circumstances. The distinction is apparent in the way the participants describe their experience of learning where the balance between having the *skill* and the *will* to learn is, at times, incongruous. Managing stress and anxiety seems equally important to the impact evaluations of knowledge that demands and proficiency have on shaping individual perceived self-efficacy.

Students with high self-efficacy for accomplishing an educational task will participate more readily, work harder, and persist longer when they encounter difficulties than those who doubt their capabilities. (Zimmerman, 1995, p.204)

Responding to efficacious variation in a way that supports the growth and transfer of efficacy across institutional practice may impact on learning outcomes and promote movement towards self-determination. The transition to learning in HE

involves navigating ostensibly more challenging academic tasks, but students also have a choice regarding the standard to which they apply themselves. High perceived self-efficacy enables greater risk-taking if the task is viewed as personally relevant, whilst low perceived self-efficacy results in the avoidance of difficulty, regardless of how important or valuable the potential outcome may be (Fazey and Fazey, 2001). Efficacy can be developed by four main forms of influence: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states (Bandura, 1995). All four resonate within the participant accounts and help to gain insight into understanding the complex influence of efficacy upon student experience learning in HE.

Establishing a sense of self-efficacy entails experiencing success; providing appropriate opportunities for success however is an involved process where the level of challenge impacts upon perceived self-competence (Bandura, 1995). Quick wins lead to expectancy and premature failure damages belief. The participants recognise that study habits learned in school are no longer sufficient for HE but struggle in the early stages to employ appropriate alternatives. The adaptive quality of self-efficacy is recognised by Bandura, who states:

It involves acquiring the cognitive, behavioural, and self-regulatory tools for creating and executing appropriate courses of action to manage ever-changing life circumstances. (1995, p.3)

It is the acquisition of these tools that are of concern to institutions, particularly during student transition. Evidence of self-doubt remains throughout the participant accounts but this is tempered by the existence of personal goals; the ability to visualise achieving career aspirations or graduating encourages resilience when encountering difficulty. Where self-efficacy is low, priorities shift to cope with the learning demands; Fiona's goals shrink from becoming a teacher, to graduating, to passing year 1. By doing this, she seems to create a scaffold of proximal targets situated closer to her immediate experience, which are therefore easier to imagine and consequently plan for the appropriate action to achieve success (Zimmerman, 1995). By contrast, Alan's self-efficacy is enhanced by achieving and understanding what a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2:1 grade looks like [Alan: 3:254-260]; matching his personal standard to university expectations acts as an incentive to continue the learning behaviour

and strategies he is developing. Both participants are exercising forethought in anticipation of potential outcomes from action (Zimmerman, 2013; Bandura, 1995) but reflexive 'afterthought' seems to be missing from practice, although being a research participant does provide a context for reflective thinking.

A shared example of the participants exercising forethought is seen in how they enact pre-conceptions of independent learning; sustaining work in isolation requires high self-efficacy, which they demonstrate by coping with difficulty through increasing levels of personal effort (Bandura, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995). The participants also demonstrate inefficacious tendencies which they attribute to low perceived self-competence; this is most evident when describing learning in a lecture theatre [Fiona: 2:207-218]. In these circumstances, negative affect is cushioned by reinforcing their self-concept, most commonly being a physical or practical learner, compensating deficiency and providing validation. Access to feedback and knowledge of progress may counter any proclivity to avoid or dwell on adversity, which seems especially important when students are coping with the stress and anxiety of transition. Where efficacy has been strengthened, the participants voice confidence in meeting new and more difficult challenges [Bob: 3:472-484].

The participants allude to mastery experiences; Alan describes being 'walked up to a deadline' [Alan: 1:142-143] but this is not consistent across all modules; Deb is conscious of being left to interpret the first essay without any support [Deb: 1:442-454]. Self-efficacy requires the ability to persevere despite the difficulties encountered; overcoming hardship often results in greater resilience (Bandura, 1995), suggesting Fiona may be best placed of all the participants to thrive in the coming years. However, transition can be eased if learning activity and processes include some form of scaffolding that includes opportunities for supportive interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), frequent and well-timed feedback (Zimmerman, 2013), and that models the standards towards which they are working.

Modelling expectations can be an effective tool in the accumulation of self-efficacy beliefs; lecturers need to be sensitive to their influence. Where students experience investment, they feel more efficacious than when dealing with the lecturer who

delivers and leaves. Learning can be enhanced through cognitive modelling; explaining thought processes in coming to understand and apply concepts has the potential to increase the rate of learning and an individual's ability to retain and transfer thinking to alternative tasks (Zimmerman, 2013). Eddie demonstrates the transfer of learning processes by adapting his approach to independent study [Eddie: 2:252-255], drawing on understanding of learning preferences developed in the academic setting to improve how he goes about non-contact tasks.

The university environment, however, exposes students to diverse social models and the vicarious learning that ensues may not always be beneficial. Witnessing peers persevere and gain success can reinforce determination, whilst detecting failure can weaken motivation (Bandura, 1995). Alan is keenly aware of the people surrounding him and assesses his comparative standing [Alan: 2:117-123] but he also benefits from the relationships formed with senior students who provide reassurance that he will be able to cope with the challenges ahead and provide guidance should he need it [Alan: 3:492-494]. The appraisal of self-efficacy is most strongly felt when it involves comparisons with individuals judged to be most similar to self (Zimmerman, 2013), but where Clare discerns inequity in her social comparison, efficacy traits become unstable; she questions the point of striving for a high grade when gaining 40% can be achieved with minimal effort and at no detriment to her final degree classification. This leads her to position year 1 as a 'test' [Clare: 2:265-270].

Robust social networks protect against negative affect, and the stress of transition seems easier to navigate where difficulties are shared with peers. The participants find comfort in acknowledging peers are 'in the same boat' as them; however, they are also keenly aware of their differences [Clare: 1:157-158]. Social networks need to be actively constructed by an individual (Bandura, 1995), but where the participants are either socially reserved [Eddie: 3:489-500] or feel marginalised [Fiona: 1:120-139], exclusion from this source of emotional defence leaves them vulnerable. The evidence shows in that instances of low social efficacy alternative aspects of self-determination, such as interest, are relied upon to regulate and manage academic demands.

The participants demonstrate the need for affirmation and opportunities to work collaboratively, or engage in more face-to-face interactions with staff that would provide a forum for social persuasion. It is difficult to persuade someone of their capabilities when a negative comment quickly dispels any growth in efficacy. Fiona's sustained contact with home perhaps reinforces why she is resistant to thinking about herself as an academic learner; the self-concept fostered through her background defines her capabilities and provides validation; efficacy is not required in a context where she has already accepted failure. Breaking down perceptions of this nature may prove challenging, but Bandura makes some suggestions that has implications for pedagogy:

Successful efficacy builders do more than convey positive appraisals. In addition to raising people's beliefs in their capabilities, they structure situations for them in ways that bring success and avoid placing people in situations prematurely where they are likely to fail often. They encourage individuals to measure their success in terms of self-improvement rather than by triumphs over others. (1995, p.4)

Although referencing 'self-improvement', Bandura's advice foregrounds the central role 'others' take in social persuasion and fostering a sense of efficacy needs to permeate institutional practice. The participant views about competition in a learning (opposed to a sporting) environment suggest eagerness for self-improvement which can be harnessed through the approaches and methods used by teaching staff. Adopting a linear approach to transition expects rapid and collective movement from dependent to autonomous working, but self-regulation depends on context, which is experienced subjectively. New performance tasks can expose weaknesses and prompt emotional instability among students (Zimmerman, 2013) that may demand staff intervention before it becomes manifest in student motivation and progress.

Awareness of physiological and emotional states contributes to perceived self-competence with feelings of stress and anxiety having a negative impact on self-efficacy beliefs. Christie (2009) acknowledges how deeply emotions characterise student transition and shape their interpretation of experience. Whilst the participants show no signs of physical distress, mood influences perceived self-efficacy. It takes a crisis for Clare to alter her leaden perspective and re-evaluate the life-chances that university affords [Clare: 2:71-81]. By contrast, Fiona is

challenged by rapid mood swings and oscillating feelings of efficacy [Fiona: 3:457-472]. Emotional states are influenced by a range of personal, social, and situational factors; pre-conceptions of perceived competence, identified task difficulty, and the ability to self-regulate all contribute to an appraisal of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995). Both participants have achieved an academic profile that qualifies them for HE but they cope with disruptive thought processes differently. Zimmerman (2013) makes a qualitative distinction between the way proactive and reactive students go about the process of learning, based on a cycle of forethought, performance and afterthought. His proposal has implications for whether individuals are engaging with deep or superficial modes of learning (Zimmerman, 2013; Putwain, 2013; Moon, 2004), and the ideas can be extended to include the influence of emotions on motivation. Proactive learners who demonstrate superior forethought achieve more favourable outcomes. By contrast:

The superficial task analyses of reactive learners preclude them from planning a detailed strategy and compel them to rely on vague methods of learning, such as trying harder or concentrating more. (Zimmerman, 2013, p.143)

The participants demonstrate fluctuations between proactive and reactive behaviour; reactive traits exhibited include nebulous application of effort, help-seeking avoidance and basing self-evaluations on social comparison. Of greatest concern are the defensive reactive responses: Clare's admission of apathy, Bob's helplessness, and Fiona, who procrastinates. These reactions perpetuate feelings of self-doubt. Encouraging self-efficacy rather than turning to non-academic counselling services once individuals feel unable to cope may be a proactive way for institutions to lessen the anxiety associated with transition. In her work on interest, Ainley (2006) notices an affective arousal state, or period post-task where affect is heightened. Perhaps it is at this point where lecturers need to capture feelings of confidence, interest and efficacy to aid the movement towards self-determination by setting tasks that enable a personalised response. The participant accounts provide insight into the mediating affect emotions have on the way individuals experience and take part in learning. There is a synergy between cognitive, affective and social aspects of learning that interact in a complex and dynamic way that is uniquely felt by each participant. Together, they personally

define the experience of transition and what it means to become an academic learner in HE.

### **5:5 Summary**

The research analysis and interpretation of data have demonstrated that learning during the first year of undergraduate study is a complex process, influenced by a range of cognitive, affective, social and self-structures; dimensions that challenge students and shape their experience in an individual and personally felt way. The stories told by each research participant suggests that transition into HE and the subsequent adaptive demands of becoming an academic learner is far from being a linear process (Gale and Parker, 2014). This is of concern when institutional policy and practice tends to assume normative progression, where students are treated as being the same until they face difficulty, at which point intervention strategies are employed, ostensibly with the purpose of securing retention. By contrast, this research takes an idiographic approach where, by gaining insight into the individual journey of six participants throughout the first year, it may help to inform understanding of practice that supports students in an antecedent and personalised manner.

Central to the discussion are the tensions between the relational and connected nature of experience set against the personal concerns of the students and operational controls of the institution. The research prompts thinking about how students go about navigating experience and cope with change; how they situate themselves as learners within a dynamic and complex environment; how they adapt and respond to the new and often compound academic expectations; and how they find the necessary affective qualities needed for success. The discussion draws on an extensive body of research that examines specific aspects of student experience (Christie, 2009; Bye *et al.*, 2007; Haggis and Pouget, 2002) which has helped in understanding *particular* events in the participant journey. However, unlike much of the existing research, this study provides a holistic perspective of the student experience that reifies the interplay between different dimensions, whilst preserving the unique way individuals encounter learning. As such, the research makes a contribution to knowledge that foregrounds the student in relation to institutional

practice, where findings can be used to inform development of the means by which students are supported in the transition to, and during the early stages of learning in HE.

In the following 'Conclusions' Chapter, a series of discussion points with corresponding answers and suggested actions for improving students' experience of learning are presented alongside reflections on the thesis study and suggestions for further research.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

The title of this thesis, 'Navigating Learning during the first year at university for direct entry Physical Education students', captures the complex and dynamic nature of transition and the challenges and barriers encountered as students adapt to learning in HE. By exploring year 1 undergraduate Physical Education student experiences of learning, findings from this research provide a vivid description of the phenomena associated with learning during the first year of undergraduate study. The following conclusion will evaluate and reflect in more detail on the research undertaken in this thesis; outcomes are considered alongside the contribution to knowledge and possibilities for further research.

### **6:1: Reflecting on the research question and aims.**

The trigger for this research came about through my own disturbance based on observing increasing numbers of students demonstrating work-related anxiety and stress that was being overlooked by lecturing staff. Troubled students were not defined by background and patterns of difficulty were not timebound. Students having difficulty coping with transition and the demands of learning were being referred to non-academic staff and support programmes situated outside of the immediate learning environment. I felt this was a reactive (and often dismissive) response where proactive interventions embedded within academic interaction could potentially address issues before they manifest in more damaging behaviour.

Since the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), the diversity of students accessing HE has expanded. Research provided a wealth of information relating to the experience of specific target groups such as gender (Warin and Dempster, 2007) or mature access students (Haggis, 2007), but few considered the 18-21-year-old demographic, which was surprising, given this constitutes the majority (67%) of the undergraduate population. Existing research also focused on specific aspects of learning: becoming an independent learner (Christie *et al.*, 2013), capturing interest (Ainley, 2006) or finding a sense of 'fit' (Reay *et al.*, 2010). There was a gap in the research that provided a more holistic perspective of individual student experience that brought together the interconnected cognitive, affective and social dimensions

of learning which this research addresses through its idiographic approach. It is by presenting a holistic understanding of the role that self, becoming, belonging and motivation play, in defining student experiences of learning, that this research makes its contribution to existing knowledge.

Tensions between the relational and connected nature of experience are brought into view, highlighting the diversity within the sample group, stressing the need to think about and attend to student concerns on a more personal basis. Findings show how critical situated and meaningful interaction is in fostering resilience, engagement and a sense of control over learning. However, academic expectations are not always obvious or explicitly understood by students, with certain pedagogic methods and limited contact with staff exacerbating feelings of anonymity and disconnection.

Students benefit from building social networks and where mechanisms exist to nurture interdependence within learning activities, affective gains are made that impact upon learning and promote a broader sense of well-being. There are examples of good practice that emerge from the data: practical pedagogies that are adapted for use in a lecture theatre, opportunities for collaboration, time to practise, embed and apply knowledge alongside timely and meaningful feedback are all cited in participant accounts. Yet experience is inconsistent and there is scope for improving practice and the institutional systems that underpin them.

The research provides insight that promotes understanding of the means by which students are supported in the transition to and during the early stages of learning in HE. The extent to which students are prepared for university varies, and drawing on school-based study habits to cope with the demands of learning is not sufficient. The time frame for transition is currently set by the university, reflecting a developmental approach; for example, feelings of homesickness are anticipated during the first six weeks with an additional 'pinch-point' for possible withdrawal, following the Christmas vacation. Reducing all student experience into a time bound series of events drastically simplifies the complex, multi-directional and layered accounts given by the participants. This research does not deny the value of anticipating general trends; rather, it points towards an oversight in practice, where

adopting an implied view of transition to guide institutional policy perpetuates assumptions regarding how a student learns to navigate the changes associated with entering HE.

Adopting a transition as a 'becoming' perspective (Gale and Parker, 2014) challenges the idea that transition can be normalised and therefore supported by universal programmes of support, based on linear progression and set time frames outside of which the 'choppy waters' of change remain calm. Indeed, Quinn (2010) understands transition as a feature of everyday life, where individuals are continuously challenged to take on different roles. For the research participants, this is experienced not only with the movement between the social and learning environment, but is also felt in the way alternative 'selves' are enacted within lectures. The findings show that change is encountered in multiple ways, is layered, and the associated challenges and barriers are subjectively experienced by each participant. These are not time bound, nor are they characterised by impediment. It would be implausible to expect institutions to alter modes of working and micro-manage transition; but insight gained from this research can be used to initiate dialogue and help to inform objective decisions about how to best support students as they navigate learning during year 1.

## **6:2: Original contribution to knowledge.**

The most important contribution to knowledge drawn from this research is the significance of ontology and how deeply being and becoming permeate the participants' experience of learning. Literature posits the need for balance in the way ontology and epistemology drive educational practice (Heidegger, 2010; Dall'Alba and Barnacle, 2007; Barnett, 2004) but no previous research exists that demonstrates how inequities in the approach taken by staff manifest in the lived-experience of students.

What it means to 'become a learner' is dynamic, mirroring arguments made in this research that transition is an ongoing process, and demands awareness and openness to changes in being. Learning is an immersive, situated experience where co-constitution acts as a frame of reference for making sense of experience;

therefore, how students cope with, engage and succeed in learning is both a matter of ontology and epistemology. The divergent experiences of learning reported in a lecture theatre compared to a practical environment illustrate the negative affective impact of giving precedence to epistemological concerns. The findings also show how knowledge acquisition and transfer is enhanced when the lecturer shows sensitivity to individual student needs, encourages risk-taking and promotes self-awareness. An example of effective ontological and epistemological balance can be seen in the transformative impact dance has on Eddie; echoing optimal experience described in Csikszentmihalyi's 'Flow' theory (1975), the educational approach in this instance engages the whole person, creating an experience of learning that simultaneously promotes knowledge and being-in-the-world.

Contrary to prevailing models of transition, the development of being and becoming a learner in HE seldom follows a linear pathway and an important finding in this research is that as students adapt to the challenges of learning in a new and unfamiliar environment they are required to navigate ongoing encounters with liminal spaces. This is an under-researched topic in the field of student learning and by identifying factors that facilitate or hinder integration, this research makes an original contribution to our understanding. Previous research has examined specific aspects of liminality; as a constructed space for testing educational innovation (Cook-Sather and Alter, 2011) or a negotiated space in terms of belonging (Palmer *et al.*, 2009). This research delves into the polarity of decision making when suspended betwixt and between, and describes the consequent outcomes associated with adapting to learning in HE. Set against a backdrop where institutional expectations lack clarity, an example can be found in the way participants enact preconceptions of what being an independent learner means to them. Analysis reveals that self-isolating behaviour is underpinned by affective insecurities and anxiety. Difficulties encountered demand a reformulation of individual frames of reference and an accompanying ontological shift, but this is hindered when the influence of control mechanisms restrict possibilities for becoming and highlight who [we] are not.

The vulnerability of students occupying a liminal space is further underlined by revealing the influence of a dominant student discourse that sits in opposition to

institutional expectations for engagement. Who they were becoming mattered to the research participants and they could direct their energies away from the subversive, conflicting culture. But it is evident in the findings that interaction is a crucial factor in the way learning is experienced; being-in-the-world with 'others' shapes how we learn to think, feel and act and examining the persuasive power of student encounters within different COP's is worthy of further research.

This research does not involve testing or the development of theory, but if knowledge is a form of understanding, the findings gained from this study have been discussed at an academic level to explicate the meaning and provide insight that is relatable to theory and add to the body of knowledge regarding learning in HE. Literature helps to understand the *particular*, but this research provides a holistic perspective of student experience that reifies the interplay between the different dimensions of experience whilst preserving the participants' unique encounters with learning. Contextually, findings have been used to develop interventions and make recommendations that have implications for changes in curricula and pedagogy. At a policy level, the research foregrounds the participants and their experience of learning, closing the gap between policy makers and understanding of the student as a consumer.

### **6:3: Implications for practice and recommendations.**

The findings from this research contribute to knowledge relating to how year 1 PE students experience learning in HE. The research outcomes raise further questions that illuminate inconsistencies in practice; I have ordered these into a series of recommendations, each underpinned by a developmental theme, that can be used to prompt discussion or provide a starting point for further research that targets issues relating to transition, learning and retention in HE. I have included current interventions that illustrate what has been changed and make suggestions for what remains to be addressed in practice. Additional examples of how I have begun to draw on research findings to inform practice and implement change are listed in Appendix L.

### 6:3:1 Recommendation 1.

*How can lecturing staff in HE be encouraged to adopt and implement student-centred pedagogy?*

The research findings have illustrated how student-centred pedagogy has a positive impact on engagement and the ability to adapt effectively to university learning. Participants felt less isolated when given opportunities to work collaboratively, articulate ideas and actively participate in the process of learning. Participants demonstrated a preference for face-to-face interaction which elicited a sense of being known, that efforts were valued by staff, and feedback that related explicitly to individual progress facilitated a proactive approach to study.

I have introduced Action Learning Sets (ALS) (Brockbank and McGill, 1998) as a pedagogic approach for the acquisition, sharing and transfer of knowledge. Students work in small groups with the task of solving a problem, giving feedback or finding creative solutions to issues encountered in learning. ALS draw on the experiences of students foregrounding existing knowledge and enhancing their learning capabilities through reflection and metacognitive reasoning (Mezirow, 1997). However, successful ALS seem to depend on the skill of the lecturer to question and balance knowledge input, especially when working with year 1 students who may not possess the appropriate experience required. Problems also emerge with managing an equal contribution from set members. Flipped learning advances the ALS concept, and seems to provide a solution to this problem through pre-learning tasks.

To promote the sharing of good pedagogic practice, my University has recently introduced learning walks (Resnick, 1996) as a professional development strategy. The objective is admirable but depends on the willingness of staff to engage, interpret and apply observations to their own context. Coming from a PE background, there seems to be an 'open-door' policy among my immediate colleagues, possibly a vestige from days spent on playing fields and in shared sports facilities where reciprocal exchange is an everyday occurrence. In a practical setting, use of peer and self-assessment strategies are common pedagogic tools

and an opportunity exists to transfer and develop these into methods appropriate for alternative learning environments. Similar potential exists with the opportunity to capitalise on students' prior experience of Assessment for Learning (Black and William, 1998). The challenge rests with how to engage hard to reach members of staff and to ensure creativity is not obscured or initiatives subsumed into accountability measures.

A student-centred approach requires awareness of the extremes of self-structures. Through interaction, it is possible to discern whether a student holds a fixed or malleable self-theory which will impact belief in personal capabilities and how they go about learning. Yet as individuals learn, self-concept is altered and therefore experience needs to be supportive and empowering, sensitive to the connection between self-concept, becoming and experience. This research demonstrates how adopting a student-centred pedagogy can benefit learning outcomes from a sector-wide perspective by:

- Facilitating integration into the academic learning community.
- Teaching processes of reflection and meta-cognitive thinking that fosters student ability to work independently.

#### 6:3:2 Recommendation 2.

*Is there a need to prioritise connectedness before autonomy in year 1?*

The participant transcripts indicate that during transition, students intermittently find themselves occupying a liminal space; there is inconsistency in the assumptions made by staff regarding knowledge, skills and capabilities expected among new students, and the perceptions held by students concerning how to go about study and learning. The participants make connections where meaningful content is brought to life through creative and interesting pedagogy. Relationships appear fundamental in developing connectedness and attending to these, in terms of subject discipline, the approachability of staff, and integration with peers seems essential.

I have used the degree course periodic review to map curricula content, identifying opportunities to cross-reference and apply knowledge in a range of settings. The understanding of learning processes has been enhanced by focusing on reflection and the use of formative feedback but flexible tapering of a learning scaffold that develops individual understanding of how they 'come to know' something would help provide for variations in adaptive ability. The expansion of online communication aims to deliver consistency and provide an expedient route to accessing tutors and feedback, but I remain mindful of the participant dissatisfaction and sense of de-personalisation when face-to-face contact is limited.

Measures have been taken to develop social connectedness; welcome week programmes include more opportunities for cohorts and degree courses to interact and the Student Union have been instrumental in delivering 'alcohol free' events that have been well attended. Retention activities have been planned for key points throughout the academic year but problems endure regarding the possible exclusion of students living off-campus. Initiatives may influence cohesion but remain outside of the academic context; undertaking an action research project, working alongside students to examine academic connectedness would be beneficial.

This research positions transition as a liminal space where institutional structures and pedagogy either help or hinder student capacity to emerge as competent learners. The findings contribute to sector-wide issues of transition by:

- Exemplifying how innovative pedagogy has utilised opportunities for collaboration, active participation and co-operation in a traditionally non-practical space.
- Underlining the importance of supporting students in the use and application of all forms of knowledge in diverse ways, contexts and for separate purposes.

### 6:3:3 Recommendation 3.

*Where, in practice, are emotional coping strategies enabled?*

Stress and anxiety feature throughout the participant accounts, but individuals cope with the emotional disturbance of transition in very different ways. Affective states are fragile and constantly in flux and the risk of developing mental health issues is made very real in one participant account. Emotional disturbance is often grounded in academic difficulty but unless the student actively seeks help, intervention is at the discretion of the module tutor, and where relationships are absent, problems go unnoticed. Confidence promotes feelings of academic self-competence; this is influenced by pedagogic methods, quality of relationships, and value of learning interactions.

Achieving success in meeting proximal targets aids self-efficacy beliefs, but the positioning of targets is individually specific; the higher the efficacy, the stronger the belief in personal capability to achieve larger, more distant goals. Self is multi-dimensional and defined by context. A strong self-concept mediates against adverse feelings of stress and anxiety and robust social networks can ease and protect against negative affect, but these need to be actively sought and constructed. The opportunity to be an active participant in learning supports feelings of self-esteem and self-perceived competence, allowing the discovery of potential and ability.

The Student Support team offer a range of specialist information, advice and guidance; whilst invaluable, these services are situated outside of the direct learning environment. I have applied the process of adaptive change (Heifetz *et al.*, 2009) to improve the academic tutorial system. By strategically introducing staff to learning conversations that foster relationships that bridge the academic–pastoral divide, it is hoped that students may feel more confident approaching academic staff and the support team can devote their energy to resolving deeper problems that some students face. Adaptive change requires nurturing tacit skills, whilst scaffolding a route to meeting a specific vision or aim. Further research could target this intervention. Elsewhere in the University, ‘Mindfulness’ is successfully used as a therapeutic tool to aid stress reduction and could be made available to all students to promote emotional coping.

Findings from this research illustrate the connection between academic success and emotional resilience and contribute to understanding how institutions can promote well-being inside the academic learning environment through:

- Lecturing staff actively promoting study habits that enable students to cope effectively with workload.
- Experience that foregrounds the development of emotional capital, equal to learning processes and skill acquisition.

#### 6:3:4 Recommendation 4.

*Are institutions conscious of the counterpoint between inclusion or exclusion?*

The research findings show a delicate counterpoint exists between whether an individual experiences inclusion or exclusion. Teacher-centred pedagogy serves to alienate individuals from the learning process, but irrespective of good intentions, other social and academic practices can also isolate despite seeking to include. Mass participation does not predict mass inclusion. The participant accounts demonstrate how participation is guided as much by emotions as by knowledge or skill and owning transition is difficult when students are unfamiliar with the environment, people and practices.

I have developed modular content to include opportunities for students to experience ALS, problem-based learning (PBL) and enquiry-based learning (EBL) methods. PBL and EBL promote confidence in academic abilities, support engagement and enhance preparation for higher level study (Summerlee and Murray, 2010). By manipulating the learning environment, I constructed small group learning situations that stimulate social interaction and the forming of support networks that the findings suggest aid adaptation and persistence. I incorporated outcomes that foreground the learning processes involved in PBL/EBL which should lead to enhanced reasoning, articulation and meaning making skills. Initial evaluation of student work through moderation processes and external examiner

scrutiny suggests evidence of increased fluency and creativity in student assignments.

My University regularly includes students in discussion about their experience but this happens in formal meetings outside of the learning environment; findings suggest there is potential to extend the feedback loop. Bergmark and Westman (2016) challenge the traditional roles of students and teachers by inviting students to plan a modular course, co-creating curriculum with lecturing staff. This innovative approach confronts perceptions of what it means to be a teacher and a student, but is dependent on students possessing prior knowledge and experience appropriate for the level of study. It can be argued that first year students lack the necessary depth of subject knowledge, justifying an expository approach to teaching; but they are experts in the student experience and able to communicate what pedagogic methods best promote learning. An action research project where students work in partnership with staff to plan the pedagogic methods used for a module would be an interesting intermediary step in developing the concept of co-creation.

Findings from this study focus on issues of participation above non-participation in learning, and provide insight that can contribute at a sector-wide level by considering:

- The quality of the interactions taking place within the learning environment that enable possibilities for the negotiation of meaning.
- How to cultivate inclusive pedagogy where entry points for learning participation are mediated and social networks are nurtured.

#### 6:3:5 Recommendation 5.

*How might institutions redress the balance between control and mastery orientation learning?*

The research findings highlight the reductive and negative impact of controls on learning behaviour and show that students tend to be functioning from an identified or integrated position of regulation. Expository classrooms seem to be failing to develop epistemic awareness, appropriate mindsets, skills and competencies for

coping with learning in HE. The research shows that 'being a good student' is associated more with the acquisition of knowledge and skills that result in higher grades and less with becoming 'critically reflective, multi-skilled, independent thinkers' (University, 2012a, p.7).

Mastery experiences relate not just to the acquisition of skills, but also to overcoming emotional disturbance (Zimmerman, 2013). I have attempted to address this issue through my own pedagogy by drawing on personal and professional experience to role model metacognitive processes, scaffolding tasks to build learning confidence and explicate the thinking involved in 'coming to' understand new knowledge. By embedding reflective practice into Level 4, 5 and 6 work-based placement /professional development modules, I have created a shift from the reproduction of knowledge towards an experience where learning becomes meaningful for the individual. Students are engaged with the process of cognitive development but by making content personally significant, they explore notions of self, of becoming and being someone 'else', potentially countering defensiveness before it becomes disengagement and withdrawal. It is difficult to evaluate the affective impact of these changes but moderation processes and external examiner feedback have noticed a difference in student assignments which demonstrate understanding of how to make sense of experience and overcome difficulty.

Where possible, I have also increased access to real life experiences; formal placements are supplemented by visiting groups and speakers, and volunteering is actively encouraged. Journal writing is an on-going non-contact task and the students bring their experience back into the classroom where the examination of critical moments is used to inform discussion and focus on specific professional development needs. Outside of the direct learning environment, the University has implemented a mentoring scheme but currently few PE students access this.

Supporting transition is a sector-wide issue; it involves the process of adapting to new social and academic worlds, which includes navigating cultural norms, and refining epistemic perspectives. This research provides insight that adds to discourse about:

- The extent to which autonomy supportive pedagogy is used within different learning contexts; particularly how practice either develops or constrains the internalisation of regulation.
- How to situate opportunities for discussion, collaboration and the sharing of ideas in a facilitative experience where the modelling of forethought, performance and afterthought promotes self-efficacy and proactive learning behaviour.

#### **6:4: Implications for practice within a dynamic research context.**

Since embarking on this research, the HE landscape has continued to evolve. This research focuses securely on students' experience of learning and while institution managers and leaders grapple with enacting reforms, it serves as a reminder that student learning should be located at the heart of change and developments made in response to a shifting political agenda.

In May 2016, the UK Government published its White Paper, 'Success as a Knowledge Economy: *Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*' (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), 2016) expanding on plans for the introduction of the 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF) which will monitor and hold institutions accountable for the quality of teaching experienced by students in HE. Proposed reforms recognise the variations in outcomes among students who have been exposed to similar learning experiences across institutions, and even the same opportunities when studying the same subject within a single provider (White Paper, 2016). Some disparity may be expected; among the participants in this research there are examples of convergence and divergence in how learning is described and this can be attributed to how they cope with the perceived cognitive, affective and social demands. The idiographic insight findings provided delve into the detail of experience, unlike the TEF which relies heavily on feedback from the NSS to identify 'good teaching'. Students are basing judgements on [often] their only degree experience, raising questions about their ability as consumers to make a good [or fair] evaluation about the quality of the 'product' they are receiving (Wolf, 2017).

Findings from this research can be used to inform understanding of practice at a local level, and contribute to sector-wide investigations into issues of student experience. The recurrent master theme of *Becoming* illustrates how pedagogy and feedback directly impact the experience of learning; viewed in isolation, it would seem strategic intervention from a managerial perspective could address weaknesses in teaching methods. However, where other studies concentrate on isolated aspects of experience, this research takes a holistic view for the duration of the entire first-year of undergraduate study. *Becoming* emerges as one aspect of experience interwoven with recurrent themes of *belonging* and *motivation*, framed by *self*. The findings emphasise the complexity of experience and foregrounds the need to understand, appreciate and work with individual students if changes to practice are going to be meaningful and lasting. For example, the White Paper (2016) raises a question about what happens in a lecture theatre and the resultant impact on student outcomes. The findings in this research demonstrate disengagement and the alienation felt in a mass participation, expository lecture but they also detail how and when lectures work, which is exactly what the White Paper fails to do. The discussion draws on extant literature to examine the deeper impact of experience, in this instance, the associated impact of lecture theatre learning on self-efficacy and the importance of establishing supportive relationships. By delving into the *particular*, institutional response to reform can be firmly grounded in meeting the needs of the students.

The phenomenological detail of concerns shared by my participants underline why this research is important; it provides real examples that both explicate and challenge statements made in the White Paper. Findings concur that 'lacklustre teaching and unacceptable variability in quality need to be addressed' (White Paper, 2016, p.13) but show this is felt by students where teaching is de-personalised and interaction is absent. Delivering good value for students is another feature of the White Paper (2016), based on findings from the HEPI (2015), who report that 34% of students in England think they have received poor value for money. The findings from this research indicate what this means in relation to the lived-experience of the participants. Implementing the TEF has been criticised for being more about raising fees and less about teaching excellence (Forstenzer, 2016; Grove, 2016; Wolf, 2017), meaning students will find themselves in a market-led system effectively

paying more but receiving less. Yet, attending to the question 'what counts?' goes beyond remuneration of fees; it relates to staff accountability and the problems encountered when poor practice makes it difficult for students to balance an effort/success equation. Findings suggest that resolving 'what counts?' involves both pedagogic creativity and affective sensitivity.

My first research outcome was to inform understanding of practice that supports student transition to HE. Findings show participants struggle to resolve what being an independent learner entails and I suggest that achieving independence within a control oriented environment is unattainable. The detail in this study enables critique of the intention to nurture independent thinkers (University, 2012a). My findings mirror a shift in the language used in the new University Strategic Plan (University, 2016b, p.10) which substitutes 'independent' with 'self-reliant'. Self-reliance involves having the ability to draw upon one's own resources; but first an individual must be in possession of these devices. The findings from this research are important and contribute to achieving the new university strategy, by highlighting learning competencies whilst stressing the importance of emotional aspects of learning, specifically the impact of confidence on students' ability to realise their potential and ambitions. This research represents the voices of six individual participants, and the insight gained suggests proposals for increasing interaction, face-to-face engagement and the development of learning communities (University, 2014d) remain relevant yet threatened by plans to reduce contact hours detailed in the University Curriculum Design Framework (University, 2017).

#### **6:5: Recommendations for further research.**

From a practice based perspective, findings from this research have provided insights where I am now able to initiate Participatory Action Research (PAR) from an informed position and influence change. I intend to work alongside students to examine academic connectedness using this research as a starting point to develop pedagogic methods that promote learning and practice, and help students to emerge as confident and competent learners. As part of this study I mean to adapt Bergmark and Westman's (2016) approach to co-creating curriculum where

students work in partnership with staff to plan the pedagogic methods used for a module.

In July 2017, the University *Learning and Teaching Group* circulated information regarding a research project focusing on changing the academic tutorial system across the School. The aim is to encourage students in the process of seeking learning guidance, to cultivate a sense of belonging and foster relationships that bridge the academic–pastoral divide. This research has already contributed to work in this area and will continue.

Engaging with the doctorate programme has initiated further questions about how students experience learning. I am curious to find out more about the ontological and epistemological balance of learning in traditional and non-traditional lecture spaces. This research has shown that developing ways of becoming a skilful learner is most effectual when being-in-the-world explicitly permeates experience. However there are inconsistencies, and finding out how learning can be reconceptualised to privilege knowledge and self equally would be beneficial.

I am also concerned about the ambiguities of liminal spaces and questions remain regarding decision making when a student is suspended ‘betwixt and between’. Findings suggest that when continuity appears disrupted divergent possibilities for action are met with acceptance or resistance, but it is unclear why students select particular courses, and what can be done to ensure the ‘right’ choices are made.

Amid the changing demographic of university populations, this research illustrates the importance of understanding the experience of learning from an individual student perspective. There is potential for expanding this research to include alternative degree cohorts, from multiple institutions; this may identify examples of innovative practice that could be shared across the sector. It would also be beneficial to extend the timeframe used in this research; to find out how student experiences of learning change as they progress towards graduation and to evaluate the impact of HE on their lives post-university. Investigating such social processes, and developing explanatory models, would require specific research methodologies such as grounded theory.

## **6:6: Reflecting on the research design.**

IPA provided a methodological approach commensurate with my ontological and epistemological position and an analytic framework that was compatible with answering my research question. This research has achieved the objective of IPA to gain insight into the lived-experience of others; however, the process has accentuated how complex and interwoven the dimensions of learning are and that real differences exist between how individuals cope and adapt to the demands vital for successful transition to HE. The research findings are my interpretation of the participants' experiences of learning during the first year of HE and it was my responsibility to present these in a way that has resonance for others. I was familiar with examples of IPA research, but these either explored phenomena from the perspective of one case sometimes using a sequence of interviews, or several cases drawing upon one interview only. I faced the challenge of several cases, each with a sequence of three interviews. IPA is a flexible methodology and I made sense of the data by including idiographic master themes (IMT) for each participant before seeking recurrent master themes (RMT) across the corpus. The development of IMT's is an original contribution to existing literature on how to conduct IPA analysis. I have endeavoured to present a faithful description of the experience of learning that retains the participant voice; there is a clear decision trail, all conclusions are grounded in the data and I hope this is recognised by the reader. Reflections on the research design are expanded upon in Appendix M.

## **6:7 Plans for dissemination.**

The findings from this research provide an interesting insight into how learning is experienced and the means by which students are supported in the transition to HE from their perspective. Looking beyond the thesis, there exists clear opportunity to influence and inform understanding at a local, national and international level.

I intend to publish findings and the University runs a 'Writing for Publication' module in which I will enrol. *Studies in Higher Education*, the *International Journal of Higher Education* and *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* are publications that have featured during my extant literature search. My research

seems to be consistent with the subject matter found within these publications which may provide a platform that enables dissemination of my research to a wider audience. My Head of School has approached me about writing a selection of shorter magazine articles for submission to national HE press and the University publishes its own quarterly research magazine which I will contribute to.

Throughout my Doctorate programme, I have engaged with opportunities to present my research and I have delivered seminars at the University *Teaching and Learning Conference*, *Pedagogic Research Conference* and *Doctoral College Postgraduate Research Conference*. I have been able to network with delegates from a range of backgrounds and disciplines who work in local, national and international HE settings and I have identified potential for collaboration and partnership during further research. Participating in conferences, either as a presenter or delegate has given access to feedback that has enhanced my research; work in progress has been well received and I look forward to sharing my research as a complete entity. The University currently runs an Erasmus exchange programme and I have been informally invited to visit one of our European partner institutions to share my research and work alongside some of their students. I am a member of the University *Phenomenology Specialist Interest Group* which has provided a supportive and enlightening forum for discussion during this research.

As Course Leader (CL) for the Physical Education degree, the findings from this research directly relate to the experience of students in my care; they also illuminate the detail of issues reported as weaknesses in NSS and equivalent survey undertaken by non-graduating cohorts. The current statistics show that 94% of students enrolled on the PE degree are direct entry, suggesting the concerns raised by the research participants may apply to the broad student population.

Having identified five thematic areas for discussion and future research projects based on the contribution to knowledge made via this study, I am excited to be in a position where I can now move forward to address issues and implement change from an informed and student-centred perspective. I have been in contact with the University *Learning and Teaching Group* who are keen to include my findings in university improvement activities. I have also secured the support of my Head of

School to help convene a small group of staff and student co-researchers and I hope to begin researching in October 2017.

### **6:8 Reflections on my own Doctorate journey.**

My initial thoughts when reflecting on my experience as a doctorate student are how difficult it is to apprehend and articulate with clarity the enormity of the journey I feel I have taken. Excerpts from my reflective journal (Appendix A) highlight some of the critical moments during the research process. To quote my participant Alan [Alan: 3:3], the experience has been a 'rollercoaster' with moments of exhilaration when literature became meaningful and findings began to make sense, contrasted with moments of deep anxiety when time frames were slipping and I felt I was drowning in data. Throughout the process, I have been sustained by a strong belief in the importance of the subject matter. I am passionate about providing students with the best learning opportunities possible and accept that I am not an expert, and so to improve, I needed to question my own practice and engage with learning that would take me outside of my comfort zone. Conducting this research has led me to evaluate my own pedagogy and I am more student-centred in my choice of teaching style and methods. I also feel as if I have greater empathy for the challenges encountered by students and recognise clear parallels between the cognitive, affective and social demands they are navigating and my experience as a research student.

By describing how my own practice has changed, I can simultaneously illustrate how being a doctorate student has altered my self-concept and how I go about learning. Although I profess a social constructionist approach to knowledge before starting this research, my lectures would replicate a behaviourist style where theories and concepts were delivered to students. I would impart information which students needed to interpret by whatever means they had at their disposal; students were learning in a linear, mechanistic fashion. I needed to present as a role model, sharing my experience, including the difficulties encountered and how I overcame these to illustrate the process and practice of learning in all its chaotic complexity. By engaging my emotions during lectures, it became increasingly apparent that students were also becoming more adept at accessing their emotions as part of the

meaning making process. Students were being encouraged to think analytically about theory; discussing and imagining its potential application and sharing examples from their own experience. The risk-taking associated with practical learning environments has been consciously transferred to theoretical classrooms with more opportunities for collaborative learning and interaction. I have noticed changes to self-efficacy and belief in potential capacities for success seems enhanced. The shift towards a more involved and critical way of learning, where different paradigms are explored and there is acquiescence that multiple meanings may exist, demonstrates how my perspective of learning has developed.

I began work at the University in January 2011 and by October, I was enrolled on the Ed D programme. Prior to this, I had been teaching in secondary schools and had always been interested and placed value on the student voice, which had been the focus for my Master's degree thesis. I had some experience delivering seminars to university staff and students but my understanding of what it means to be a lecturer in HE was limited; However, I understood a key difference was the importance of being a researcher. The Doctorate programme has brought together my concern for understanding student learning and the ambition to make research part of my professional practice. Working at doctoral level has not been without its challenges. I have grappled with ontology for five years and only now, writing this thesis do I feel as if I have found resolution. I am naturally drawn to qualitative methods of enquiry but through phenomenology and IPA, I have found a philosophy and methodological approach that fascinates and fits with my outlook. I have enjoyed the reading that research entails and have been exposed to many new ideas and approaches that would contribute to improving practice, but it has been difficult to be ruthless and decide what to include and exclude from writing. Analysis presented a similar dilemma; I felt everything the participants had shared was important; I hoarded every scrap of data and initially wrote garrulously. With the question 'so what?' posed by my supervisors reverberating through my being, I have learned to write in a more succinct fashion that explicates the things that matter most.

I have found being an 'insider researcher' surprisingly unproblematic, possibly because I have spent little time at university without having dual roles to negotiate, but I am also conscious of the incredible support I have received from colleagues,

my doctorate cohort and supervisors, who are all interested in my work, the progress I am making and have one eye on my well-being. I have researched an area of professional practice that directly relates to the institution in which I am situated. The advantage is that I can now insightfully impact change; but I am conscious that I may need to share criticism and difficult 'truths' with people I respect and who have shown kindness throughout my research. I anticipate conflicts of understanding what 'good practice' means from a student perspective and need to retain my researcher identity when disseminating findings.

I am conscious of my own place within the academic community and how this might change, based on my research outcomes. This research has provided insight into year 1 undergraduate PE student experiences of learning and how they navigate transition and the early stages of learning in HE. Conducting this research has made me [I think] a better practitioner, Course Leader, researcher and academic. I conclude my thesis by drawing on the words of Etienne Wenger that underline my belief that an effective academic community should include and account for all its members:

In order to engage in practice, we must be alive in a world in which we can act and interact. (Wenger, 1998, p.51)

I am conscious that this thesis represents the beginning of my research journey. I will continue to foreground the student voice in my work and I look forward to the research and learning partnerships that will develop in the future.

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## Appendices



Be clear about my contribution to practice; what new knowledge to I hope to produce (difficult to answer specifically at the current point but I need to have a sense of where I am going). What is the nature of knowledge (again, is it constructivist).

I need to constantly bear in mind the 'so what?' question.

Phenomenology should lift you beyond the obvious or assumed.

Right now, I need to step away from the 'theories' in the RPA literature review (wait and see!). Only after the final interviews and analysis start to look for possible theories to make deeper interpretative 'suggestions'. [September 2014]

*Recruitment and the first interview:* Feeling nervous (but excited) for the first interviews to begin. Colleagues have been unbelievable in the professional way they have gone about introducing the research to the students and the whole process of selecting participants. The anonymous envelopes worked a treat and I am astounded that so many offered themselves up for participation. I feel happy I have reserves available if any withdraw. The schedule is ready and I feel confident posing the 'can you tell me about / what is it 'like' question in relation to my phenomenological approach. Rooms are booked but check recording devices (fingers crossed). [October 2014]

*Reflections on Bob Interview 1:* Bob really struggled to articulate clearly a perception of himself as a learner. The interview included periods of silence while he thought about his response; allowing time, and accepting hesitation seemed important in allowing him to form his answer. He showed difficulty articulating certain concepts and seemed to grapple for language. It felt alien to not interject and be patient; as a teacher I am used to guiding student thinking and working in time frames where knowing when to intervene are second nature. I also come from a background where talking about [my] learning is common and realise this may be the first-time Bob has been asked to consider his own perceptions of learning, hence the long pauses. Often Bob clarified an earlier statement when answering a subsequent question; this period of processing suggests he may reflect on how he makes sense of ideas presented and that returning to points of conceptual difficulty in the next interview, may provide greater insight [Week 5, 2014].

*Review of first round of interviews:* I am struck by how different each of the participants are; this is exciting given my commitment to the individual and particular nature of experience but already some aspects of experience seem shared (but manifest in unique ways and resultant behavior). I feel concerned for the isolationist approach they seem to be taking to working; being alone seems to be commonplace despite their social preferences. I am also worried about the homesickness being felt by Eddie in particular; as CL I feel responsible for supporting him through this and need to find a way to do this without compromising the research process or trust he has placed in speaking honestly to me about how he feels. I can follow up on personal concerns in the next interview [Week 5, 2014].

*Transcribing and initial thoughts following interview 1:* I have made the commitment to transcribing the interviews myself but currently feel overwhelmed by this decision; I need to persevere but had not realised how long this process would take. It is January now and the next round of interviews are looming. But I do feel like I have developed a relationship with the text; I can notice the nuance and detail in the participant words and feel 'close' to them in a way that gives me confidence for interview 2. Listening and writing the most powerful recollections has been useful in providing a holistic narrative to their experience and I have noticed how different points in the data potentially knit together as well as any contradictions they are making. I am drawn towards the shift in perception of self some of them seem to have made in the short period of transition from school and being spoon-fed to almost enacting an idea of what it means to them to be an independent learner (and working in isolation). Where has this come from? Also, Alan strategic forging of relationships – fascinating; must follow this up. [January, 2015].

*Pedagogic Research Conference:* Presented today at the conference; felt nervous speaking publicly for the first time about what I am doing but am overwhelmed by the positive response, interest and support offered by fellow researchers, many of whom I have never met before. The presentation involved sharing my understanding of IPA and specifically the process of analysis. I wrestled with whether this would be appropriate given my stage in the research process, but the opportunity to speak about my research and gain feedback seemed too valuable to ignore. I presented a

short section of text that had been analysed using the staged process suggested by Smith *et al.* (2013). Engaging in the process briefly helped me feel secure that the methodology would enable me to access the insight I was after; but it also triggered thinking about the potential held within what I anticipate will become a huge amount of data. Managing my time is going to be crucial. [February, 2015]

*Reflections on the interview process:* Just finished the second round of interviews and the use of semi-structured interviews seems to be proving a wise choice (albeit the method for data collection suggested in most IPA papers). The main questions have kept the interviews consistent and focused; but the flexibility of personal prompts based on interview one and the content of each participant response is opening doors to their unique experiences. I feel really pleased with how open the participants are being and have noticed the different aspects upon which they want to dwell. Bob, Eddie and Fiona each made use of photo-elicitation but in very different ways. I was bursting with pride at the way Eddie seems to have handled his earlier homesickness (what a relief) and his video was fantastic. He has discovered dance and it seems like this has given him the life-line he was reaching for. I needed to fight to remain silent and not interject; so much about his experience mirrored my own – has little changed over 25 years? More worrying is Fiona's use of the phrase 'I need to be happy'; must follow up on this in the final interview (but keep a quiet eye on her). [February, 2015]

*Final interview:* First landmark reached! Completed the final interview today and feel excited to be in possession of so much data and what I feel are six really different and fascinating accounts from the participants. What strikes me is how much they have changed over the year and this wasn't apparent in the second interview; they seem more self-assured; their ease with the interview process, almost coming prepared. Me asking fewer questions and them anticipating but also openly sharing their concerns. Candid and trusting. I think I will actually miss meeting with them simply to listen to them speak about learning. I must remember their responses to the final question about being a research participant; this alone could be powerful enough to trigger a change to the personal tutoring system. [June, 2015]

*Supervision Meeting:* The meeting focused around a discussion regarding options for writing the 'Analysis of Results' chapter. Two common approaches were shared:

1) To present findings with content from the interview transcripts and leave any literature reference until the discussion.

Or

2) To allude to literature during the analysis presenting findings, themes, with a commentary and interview quotes with how these relate to the literature.

The approach I want to take is more representative of option 1. I feel this will give clarity to the participant voice and emphasis to their idiographic journey. The 'Discussion Chapter' will pick up on the super-ordinate themes within the literature and look more closely at what the participant experience might suggest. The advice is for 4-5 major themes to constitute the Discussion. The participant quotes should speak for themselves. Think about:

- The sequencing of themes
- How they are temporal over the year.
- Notice if something has strengthened or weakened.
- What are the critical moments in their 'life'.
- What place does learning hold.

Be sure to represent their voices, reflect their experience of year 1 and create a patchwork of their experience [July, 2015]

*Minor melt-down:* Thank goodness for Dad! Had a minor melt-down today; it is nearly Christmas and I am still analysing the participant accounts. Onto Deb now but the task seems endless and I am exhausted. Got to keep going. [December, 2015]

*Analysing Eddie:* The process of analysing data from Eddie's three interview transcripts has proved incredibly challenging. Emergent themes were mapped and interrogated for patterns numerous times, each attempt revealing alternative ways of networking themes. The problem of making sense of his experience caused doubt and concern that a critical element was being overlooked and prompted a return to the recordings. Listening to the interviews in succession revealed a deeply reflective tone to the way Eddie articulated his experience. Dance provides a context through

which Eddie undergoes considerable personal, social and emotional transformation in how he understands both himself and his learning. He also encounters a new mode of physicality prompting a revision of how he engages his body not simply as a tool for achieving sporting outcomes, but as an instrument for personal expression. This seems key to understanding Eddie's journey. [January, 2016]

*Idiographic Master Themes:* Light-bulb moment; IPA is a flexible methodology and I think I have resolved my issue with how to structure six idiographic accounts, then make the shift to the cross-case analysis. Develop IMT's – these would give a logical bridge to move from the individual to the shared. I haven't seen anything like this elsewhere; but it makes sense so long as I bracket any 'shared SOT's and use in vivo quotations to keep the participant voices. Add to agenda for next supervision meeting. [March, 2016]

*Recurrent Master themes:* In Clare's extract (Figure 4) she seems to be seeking 'affirmation' but this is done in quite an introverted and reflective manner; she is telling herself that she 'can do' something, that she has changed and is capable. The language connects to a sense of empowerment and she privileges the idea of independent learning. However, Alan also presents the theme of affirmation; but for him the description, language (and tone) is very different. Alan is telling [me] what a good student he is; he paints a picture of what he perceives to be an ideal student / learner. He wants [me] to believe he is all these things (enthusiastic, conscientious, committed, organised). For Alan, the links extend to self-concept but the underlying sense is different from Clare. Whilst Clare is being reflexive is Alan being strategic? What does the detail reveal about the strategies students employ to cope with learning? [April, 2016]

*Reflections on writing the Discussion Chapter:* I began writing this chapter in April 2016 after a long and arduous process of analysis and writing the findings chapter but the RMT's found give insight I think will be beneficial and interesting to both a reader and in making a contribution to knowledge. I began with the 'Becoming' dimension as this seemed like the most complex RMT to interpret; the difficulties encountered doing this have possibly helped to question the other RMT's more

closely. By May 2016 I felt 'stuck'. Although I was reading (and enjoying the freedom of finally opening up my ideas to comparison and scrutiny of how others in literature had encountered similar issues) I realised my writing was feeling labored and somewhat forced because I had started to allow myself to be led by the literature. I needed to go back to the participant transcripts and re-listening to the recordings grounded me back in the data. I felt I was being too descriptive in my writing and needed to 'thicken' my interpretation. I can speculate but need to write from 'within' (remember questioning and empathetic voice). [June, 2016]

*Grappling with ontology.* Everyone seems to hold a secure position on how they see the world but I continued to struggle...until today! It seems so obvious now but my concerns are actually a reflection of my relativist stance. Listening to my fellow researchers articulate their position does not mean I need to agree, or adopt their ideas no matter how convincing they sound. As a relativist it seems highly likely that others will view the world differently; but their unwillingness, and possible efforts to convince me that my perspective is incorrect is a characteristic of their belief. Being-in-the-world is my fundamental ontology. Hurrah. [October 2016]

*My first full stop:* Today I wrote my first full-stop...I have a complete thesis! But it is 104,000 words long. Some serious editing lies ahead. [November 2016]

*So what?:* Today I sat in the staff forum meeting and it hit me how important and timely the findings from this research are and the contribution it can make in informing decisions that are being made across the university. Structural changes were shared by the School leaders, and concerns raised in questions from staff underlined how important it is that I disseminate and move forward with the points raised in my conclusion. I feel I have answers (insight) that is desperately needed to represent the student voice which seems sadly lacking in the efficiency (consistency) message being presented today. [December 2016]

## **Appendix B: Interview schedule.**

### Questions and prompts:

1. Can you tell me about your initial expectations about coming to university?
  - Did you have any preconceptions about what it would be like?
  - How do you think your school / college experiences of learning have prepared you for university?
  - Have you (or any member of your family) had any experience of learning in Higher Education and has this influenced your expectations at all?
2. How did it feel starting university?
  - What challenges have you faced so far?
  - Have there been any difficulties that you have come up against (if so can you tell me about them and whether you have managed to resolve them)?
3. Now you have been at university for a few weeks can you compare your expectations with the reality of learning in Higher Education?
  - How is it the same / different from learning in school or college?
  - How 'ready' do you feel for learning in Higher Education?
4. Can you describe yourself as a learner?
  - Are there any things that you find easy / difficult?
  - If you find something difficult what do you do?
5. Do you think your approach to learning has changed or developed since coming to university?
6. Can you tell me about how you understand the content of your subject learning?
  - Have you any preference for the type of content you enjoy learning about most?
  - Have you been challenged to learn something new?
  - Has your learning changed since coming to university; have you developed new skills?
7. How do you feel about your learning?
  - What motivates you to learn?
  - Are there any times when you feel unable to learn; if so can you describe to me when and how this feels?
8. Can you describe how you take part in your learning?

- Are there any people who have either helped you to learn or that you feel have created a barrier to your learning?
  - How do you find the learning environment; is it supportive or do you find it difficult to get involved?
9. What has helped you to settle into university; in particular helped you to deal with the experiences of learning?
10. Can you tell me about any critical moments in your learning so far?
11. Can you describe the difference between independent learning and learning with support?
- How might this comparison relate to your experiences of learning so far?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your experience of learning so far?

## **Appendix C: Research sub-methods.**

Dear Participant,

In addition to the series of three interviews you are invited to make optional use of either / both / none of the following research sub methods. The intention is to provide you with tools that will help you to record significant moments during your first year of undergraduate degree learning. Any information shared using these methods will remain anonymous and stored securely. The information will then be used during the following interview to help you to illustrate elements of your experience during the interview conversation.

### Voice Pods:

Voice-pods entail you making a brief (2-minute maximum) recording on your mobile phone of key moments or reflections on things you notice about your learning. Participants are asked to send a voice pod recording [every two weeks] to a secure email account, set up by the university purely for receiving the participant voice-pods. Once received the recording will be transcribed and then deleted. Transcriptions will be used as prompts during your interview only. Transcriptions of voice-pods will also be stored securely on a password protected computer that only the researcher will have access to. No social media will be used in this research so your thoughts will remain private and confidential.

### Photo Elicitation:

Participants will be asked to select between 3-6 photographs that represent their experiences of learning; the photos can relate to the content of learning, how you feel about your learning or social aspects of learning responding to critical moments or reflection that has taken place during the period between scheduled interviews. The photographs will then be used to help you describe your experiences of learning and to expand upon the answers given during your interview. You can choose between taking photographs yourself (using your mobile phone) which can be

downloaded via a secure email account set up by the university, or selecting existing images from published work that represent your experiences. The images will be labelled with your participant pseudonym, dated and stored in a secure, lockable cabinet available for use as a data source during analysis. Any photographs that include images of either yourself, others or identifiable aspects of the research location will not be published to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the study.

Please send voice pods and/or photos to [email withheld].

Thank you in advance for your contribution and time; it is greatly appreciated.

## **Appendix D: Participant information sheet.**

Dear Participant,

I am undertaking some research and would like to invite you to become a research participant. The working title of the research is; **Navigating Learning in Higher Education** and I am interested in finding out about your experiences of learning during year 1 of undergraduate study.

The aim of the study is to find out what it is like to be an 18 year old coming to university and becoming a learner in Higher Education. I am interested in listening to your experiences of learning within the academic context (lectures, seminars, workshops, practical etc). It is hoped that the research findings will help to inform my own and colleagues understanding of how to best support student transition into Higher Education and work towards assisting you in becoming successful learners.

The research entails a series of 3 one-to-one interviews spread over the course of year 1. The first will be in week 5, the second in week 15 and the final interview during week 30. Interviews will take approximately 30 minutes where you will be asked to tell the researcher about your experiences of learning. The interviews will be arranged at a time that suits you and in a location outside of the normal lecturing space. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed; participants will be able to read and confirm the accuracy of the transcript before it is analysed. Recordings and transcripts will be stored securely on a password protected computer that only the researcher will have access to.

All information shared during the research process will remain private and confidential. All participants will remain anonymous with pseudonyms being used throughout the writing of the study. The study has a clear focus on student experiences of learning and all questions will be research based. If at any point during an interview should you wish to not answer a question you will not be expected to do so. Also, any reference you may make towards peers, staff or specific module content will remain anonymous. You will have the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of the interview transcript. You will also have access to the results of the research.

The research is entirely separate from your academic study and will not influence or impact upon your grades in any way. The researcher will not be responsible for marking your work or for representing you at any formal university board meeting. There may be times when you are working with the researcher in their capacity as a lecturer either during a taught module or as an academic tutor. All interaction of this nature should be seen as separate from the research. If during the research interview you wish to raise a question or make a disclosure that is not related to the study the recording will be suspended and you should follow normal university procedures regarding academic tutorials or student support.

Unfortunately, the university is unable to offer any form of reimbursement for your participation in the research. Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring any

consequences for doing so. Should you wish to withdraw any data given up to this point may still be used by the researcher for the purpose of this study only.

Should you wish to become a research participant please could you complete the indication of interest slip at the bottom of this letter and return it to [colleague name] in a sealed envelope labeled 'Research Participant Recruitment' by Monday 27 October 2014. If you are interested but have any questions you wish to ask before submitting your interest slip, please see [colleague name] or email questions to [colleague email address].

Selection of participants will be random so please do not put your name on the return envelope, however the intention is to have a gender split of participants that represents the gender ratio of the year 1 cohort so could you please write male or female on your envelope.

If your envelope is selected it will be passed unopened to the researcher to ensure anonymity of participants. You will then be contacted directly via email by the researcher with instructions for giving consent. At this point you will be given the contact details of the researcher and an independent member of staff who can be contacted should you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research.

Thank you in advance.

-----  
I would like to become a research participant.

I have read the details of the research given on the 'Participant Information Sheet' and understand what my involvement will entail.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: Male / Female (circle)

email address: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please place this slip in an envelope marked 'Research Participant Recruitment' indicating your gender in the top corner. Please do not put your name on the outside of the envelope. Return the slip to [colleague name] in room [office room number] by 27 / 10 / 2014.

**Appendix E: Participant Consent Form.**

**Navigating Learning in Higher Education**

An exploration of year 1 undergraduate Physical Education student experiences of learning.

(please tick)

- I agree to take part in this research which is to find out what are year 1 undergraduate Physical Education students' experiences of learning in Higher Education.
- The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and the possible risks involved.
- I have read the information sheet and I understand the principles, procedures and possible risks involved.
- I am aware that I will be required to attend a series of 3 interviews during year 1 (one during week 5, the second during week 15 and the final one during week 30). I have the option to submit voice-pod recordings of my experiences of learning and / or bring 3-6 photographs that represent my experiences of learning, to aid discussion during the interviews.
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will normally be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.
- I agree that should I withdraw from the study, the data collected up to that point may be used by the researcher for the purposes described in the information sheet.

Name (please print) .....

Signed .....

Date .....

Researcher Contact Details:

[Name, Office number, email, telephone contact]

Independent Member of staff:

[Name, Office number, email, telephone contact]



**Appendix G: Example table of super ordinate themes (Clare interview 1)**

Super Ordinate Theme	Emergent Theme (Cluster Groups)	Sub-theme (Initial Notes)	Line(s)
Opposing discourse of 'Self'	Authenticating the 'self'	Through personal history / journey	33-42, 69-72
		Feeling the 'odd one out'	65-8
	Self as an individual	Maturity / different	157, 191-3, 304-7
		Insight	197-201
		As a learner (and learning approach)	225-32, 304-7, 220-22
	Affirmation of 'self'	Independent / Serious (Lone learner)	290-91
		Through language; 'I can do'	244,430-2
		Efficacy; meeting challenges / success	244-6, 269
		Authenticating (privileges) independent learning	409-11
		Time frame (personal journey)	62-9, 252-58
Independent application to work	Becoming	An independent learner (input and research)	125-8, 172-5
		Transformation (lazy-motivated)	160-1, 182-4, 220-22
		Growing up	169-71
		A learner (empowerment, resilience, self-determined)	393-402
		Conscious (of personal journey)	451-59
	Transition	From 'spoon feeding'	132-3, 436-9
		To independence	353-4
	Preparation for University	Practically	49-51
		Mentally	52-5
		Lack of learning skill / techniques	96-9
Approach to learning	Associations to life experience (Gap year)	202-3, 182-4	
	Routine / schedule / organisation	23-6, 29-30, 276-8	
	Time management	147-9	
	Repetition (going over notes)	231-2	
	Use of Student Central	276-8	
Holistic learning experience	Hierarchy of support: self-peers-lecturers	341-48	
	Connects practical and theoretical learning	15-18, 108-11, 372-74	

Anticipating relationships	Belonging (acceptance)	Living on campus (shared expectations / common goals)	5-11	
		Not-belonging; prior university experience. 'Odd one out'	36, 68	
		Acceptance (feels like 'been here for ages'); social	86-90, 362-69	
		Shared experience; 'we', 'all'	95-7	
	Relationships	Peers – learning support, motivation / competition	36, 116, 163-7, 362	
		Family (pride or pressure?)	77-8	
		Lecturers - knows they will help but doesn't ask; feels like 'wasting their time'; finds them 'daunting'.	118, 335-7, 340	
	Individual learning within a collective space		294-300	
	Desire to Learn	Motivation	Self-determination	136, 197-8, 285-7, 321-3, 149
			Competition (with peers)	167
Feelings		Through active engagement	236-7	
	Feelings	Shifts / Change ('daunted' – 'living the dream')	101-8, 140	
		Pride / accomplishment ('loved it', 'amazing', 'couldn't believe it')	372, 375, 379	
		'It's so cool'	459	
	Empowerment	Of herself ('I can do it')	185-6, 260, 264-5, 424-6, 431	
		Relief (over-coming self-doubt)	261	
	Learning and enjoyment (parallel experience)		280-82	

## Appendix H: Idiographic master themes.

<i>Alan</i>		Super-Ordinate Theme		
<b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	
<i>Showing My Confidence</i>	Seeking a sense of self	Situating self through attitude and confidence	Seeking status and superiority	
<i>My life in my hands</i>	Functional adaptation	Independent learning	Taking control of learning	
<i>The last hurdle</i>	Focusing on task completion	Strategic pursuit of grades	Owning [his] degree success	
<i>Building bridges</i>	Expeditious forging of relationships	Feeling accepted	Building bridges (strategic alignment to others)	

<i>Bob</i>		Super-Ordinate Theme		
<b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	
<i>I would say I am the same</i>	Conflicted view of self (practical v academic)	Safeguarding [his] sense of self	Personally secure (academically cautious)	
<i>It's a big, big thing if I actually get to do it I want to make them proud</i>	Growing up	Learning to learn	Interactive or independent learning	
	Interest and enjoyment	Grappling with grades and goals	Inter-personal learning and self-efficacy	
<i>I call this place home</i>	Social settling and forming friendships	Developing collegiality	Social membership and co-operation	

<i>Clare</i>		Super-Ordinate Theme		
<b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	
<i>Who marked theirs?</i>	Opposing discourse of self	Defining self through academic effort and success	Academic fortification of self	
<i>I feel like I have been cut adrift</i>	Independent application to work	Coping with learning alone	Adapting by self-teaching	
<i>This year I think is kind of a test</i>	Desire to learn	Rationalising the value of [her] efforts	Clutching at what counts	
<i>Subsumed</i>	Anticipating relationships	<i>Questioning experience of learning</i>	<i>Questioning experience of learning</i>	

<i>Deb</i>		Super-Ordinate Theme		
<b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	
<i>It's not what the day brings, it's how you bring it</i>	Expanding familiar self	Different self in different situations	Comfortable being herself	
<i>Other people give me reassurance</i>	Adapting to independent expectations	Independent study /learning together	Learning as an adopted attitude	
Subsumed	Positive thinking	<i>Subsumed</i>	Trying and being [her] best	
<i>I do feel, I was going to say loved here</i>	Adapting to learning and living away from home	Negotiating social and academic relationships	Feeling at home	

<i>Eddie</i>		Super-Ordinate Theme		
<b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	
<i>Finding my future self</i>	Developing an academic sense of self	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Maturing confidence and self-efficacy	
<i>I've got the skills to deal with the challenges</i>	Independent v collaborative learning	Coping with academic learning (strategy and risk taking)	Reconceptualising independent learning	
<i>Finding out what you got for what you did</i>	Personal and professional advancement	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Going 'over-the-top'	
<i>A socially binding course</i>	Social acceptance (being an outsider)	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Social acceptance (being an insider)	

<i>Fiona</i>		Super-Ordinate Theme		
<b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	
<i>I am not your typical netballer</i>	Singular sense of self (being different)	Vulnerable and conflicted self	Seeking to resolve past and present perceptions of self	
<i>Become by yourself</i>	Unprepared for independent study	Adapting to modes of teaching and learning	Solitary learner within a community of learners	
<i>Knuckle-down and push on through</i>	Achieving long-term career goals	Focus on passing Year 1	Taking ownership of [her] learning	
<i>The best choice I have ever made; but I just can't wait to go home</i>	Coping with social and situated isolation	<i>Subsumed</i>	Functional belonging	

**Appendix I: Recurrent master themes.**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Super-ordinate Theme</b>	<b>Idiographic Master Theme</b>	<b>Recurrent Theme</b>	<b>Theoretical Dimension</b>
<i>Alan</i>	1	Seeking a sense of 'self'		<b>SELF</b>	Self-Concept Self-Awareness
	2	Situating self through attitude and confidence	Showing my confidence		
	3	Seeking status and superiority			
<i>Bob</i>	1	Conflicted view of self (practical v academic)			
	2	Safeguarding [his] sense of 'self'	I would say I am the same		
	3	Personally secure (academically cautious)			
<i>Clare</i>	1	Opposing discourse of 'self'			
	2	Defining self through academic effort and success	Who marked theirs?		
	3	Academic fortification of self			
<i>Deb</i>	1	Expanding familiar self			
	2	Different self in different situations	It's not what the day brings, it's how you bring it		
	3	Comfortable being herself			
<i>Eddie</i>	1	Developing an academic sense of self			
	2	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Finding my future self		
	3	Maturing confidence and self-efficacy			
<i>Fiona</i>	1	Singular sense of self (being different)			
	2	Vulnerable and conflicted self	I am not your typical netballer		
	3	Seeking to resolve past and present perceptions of self			

Recurrent master theme (Self).

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Interview</i>	<i>Super-ordinate Theme</i>	<i>Idiographic Master Theme</i>	<i>Recurrent Theme</i>	<i>Theoretical Dimension</i>
<i>Alan</i>	1	Functional adaptation		<b>BECOMING</b>	
	2	Independent learning	My life in my hands		
	3	Taking control of learning			
<i>Bob</i>	1	Growing up			
	2	Learning to learn	It's a big, big thing if I actually get to do it'		
<i>Clare</i>	3	Interactive or independent learning			
	1	Independent application to work			
	2	Coping with learning alone	I feel like I have been cut adrift		
<i>Deb</i>	3	Adapting by self-teaching			
	1	Adapting to independent expectations			
	2	Independent study / learning together	Other people give me reassurance		
<i>Eddie</i>	3	Learning as an adopted attitude			
	1	Independent v collaborative learning			
	2	Coping with academic learning (strategy and risk taking)	I've got the skills to deal with the challenges		
<i>Fiona</i>	3	Reconceptualising independent learning			
	1	Unprepared for independent study			
	2	Adapting to modes of teaching and learning	Become by yourself		
	3	Solitary learner within a community of learners			

Recurrent master theme (Becoming).

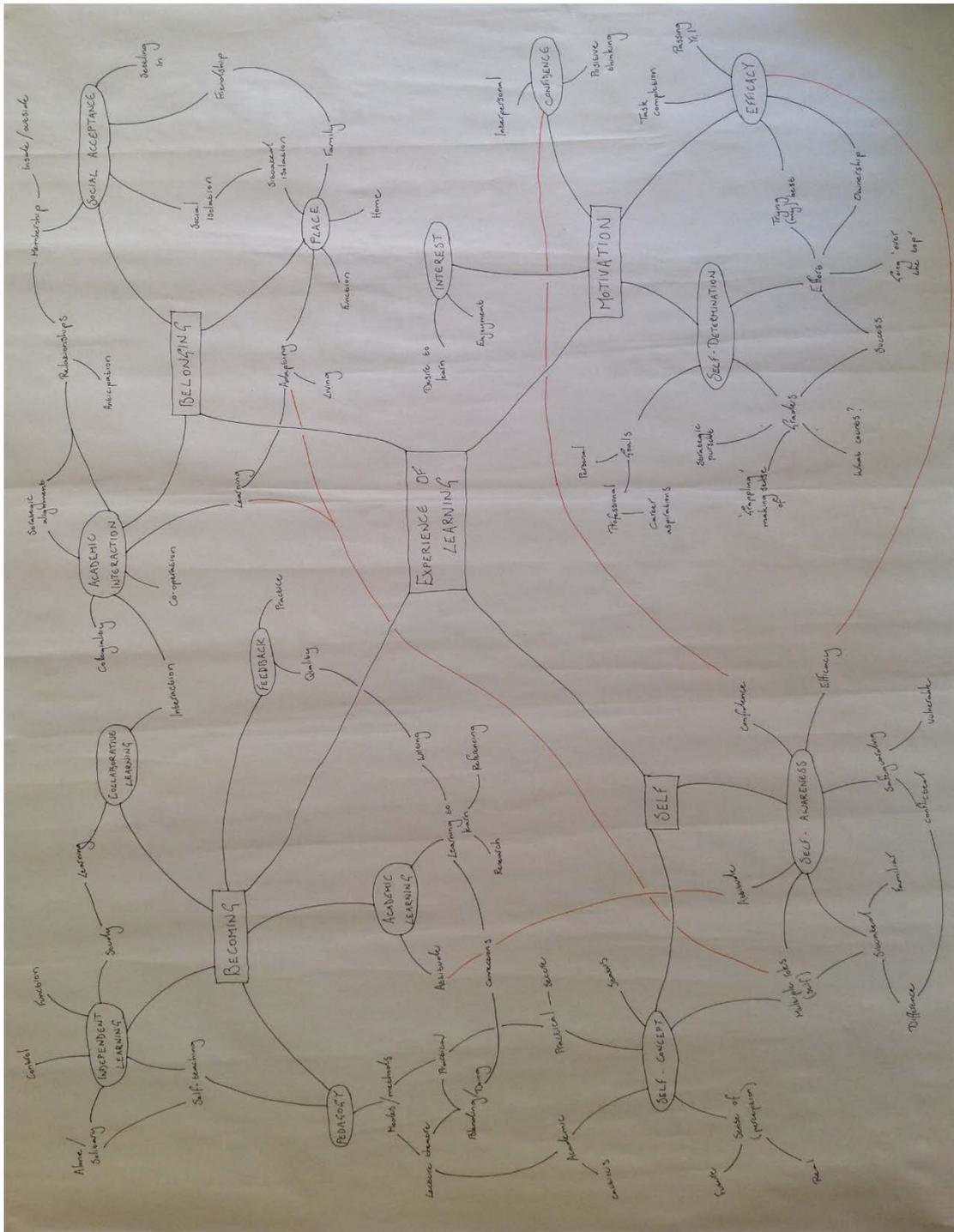
<i>Participant</i>	<i>Interview</i>	<i>Super-ordinate Theme</i>	<i>Idiographic Master Theme</i>	<i>Recurrent Theme</i>	<i>Theoretical Dimension</i>
<i>Alan</i>	1	Expeditious forging of relationships		<b>BELONGING</b>	Social Acceptance Academic Interaction Place
	2	Feeling accepted	Building Bridges		
	3	Building bridges (strategic alignment to others)			
<i>Bob</i>	1	Social settling and forming friendships			
	2	Developing collegiality	I call this place home		
	3	Social membership and co-operation			
<i>Clare</i>	1	Anticipating relationships			
	2	<i>Questioning experience of learning</i>	<i>Subsumed</i>		
	3	<i>Questioning experience of learning</i>			
<i>Deb</i>	1	Adapting to learning and living away from home			
	2	Negotiating social and academic relationships	I do feel, I was going to say loved here.		
	3	Feeling at home			
<i>Eddie</i>	1	Social Acceptance (being an outsider)			
	2	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	A socially binding course		
	3	Social Acceptance (being an insider)			
<i>Fiona</i>	1	Coping with social and situated isolation			
	2	<i>Subsumed</i>	The best choice I have ever made; but I just can't wait to go home		
	3	Functional belonging			

Recurrent master theme (Belonging).

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Interview</i>	<i>Super-ordinate Theme</i>	<i>Idiographic Master Theme</i>	<i>Recurrent Theme</i>	<i>Theoretical Dimension</i>
<i>Alan</i>	1	Focusing on task completion		<b>MOTIVATION</b>	Self-Determination Interest Confidence Self-Efficacy
	2	Strategic pursuit of grades	The Last Hurdle		
	3	Owning [his] degree success			
<i>Bob</i>	1	Interest and enjoyment			
	2	Grappling with grades and goals	I want to make them proud		
	3	Inter-personal learning and self-efficacy			
<i>Clare</i>	1	Desire to learn			
	2	Rationalising the value of [her] efforts	This year I think is kind of a test		
	3	Clutching at what counts			
<i>Deb</i>	1	Positive thinking			
	2	<i>Subsumed</i>	<i>Subsumed</i>		
	3	Trying and being [her] best			
<i>Eddie</i>	1	Personal and professional advancement			
	2	<i>Dance as a transformative experience</i>	Finding out what you got for what you did		
	3	Going 'over-the-top'			
<i>Fiona</i>	1	Achieving long-term career goals			
	2	Focus on passing Year 1	Knuckle-down and push on through		
	3	Taking ownership of [her] learning			

Recurrent master theme (Motivation).

# Appendix J: Group analysis concept map.



## **Appendix K: Participant reflections on the research interviews.**

*Thank you for being a participant in my research. Can you share how you have found this experience?*

Alan:

It has been good because it has made me think who I am. Not just academically but me as a whole I think. Being able to do my first interview and was thinking to myself, what have I actually done because I have only been here a couple of weeks but then going in to the second interview I have developed so much from my first interview and now being here for my last. I think that I am nearly there; I am 75/80%, and I feel like going in to second year I can make myself 100%. Like the things I have spoken about; being confident and outgoing, I have changed so much since being on the first interview. Me as a whole has changed drastically, literally, I feel like I am ready now to actually make my degree count and I feel positive about going in to the second year and the interviews have helped me so much to understand who I am and what I have to do to make my grades better and make me better as a person. [3: 940-957]

Bob:

I have enjoyed it. There have been some challenging questions but it has been really nice. [3:487-488]

Clare:

I think it has made me think a lot more. Like when I am doing stuff, it is like ah, this is annoying, this is not going to help with my learning. It makes you think what is helping you and what is not. It makes you analyse things a little bit more, like analysing the lectures and well, this was a rubbish lecture and I am paying £9,000 for this or right this is brilliant. I think yeah, it has just made me look at things in more detail which I kind of like doing. [3:631-639]

Deb:

I have enjoyed it because it is something nice, something different to do and I like doing different things. When I am actually talking about it, the questions you are

asking I wouldn't be thinking about if I was at home or in the flat. But when you are actually talking about it, like I leave here and I am thinking about the questions that you have asked and I probably go over them. Sometimes I am oh I could have said more about that, but it makes me think and I like that. Especially now when I am not doing anything, my exams have finished so it is nice, refreshing. [3:555-566]

Eddie:

It has definitely helped in many ways. People in our peer group have already started talking about dissertations that rest in the future, so it has helped in terms of knowing the process; the interview process. I could probably take this on and use it in my dissertation in the future if I needed to. I also had an interview the other day with this guy who came in to talk about [dance company] and he told us, oh this could help with dissertations and stuff like that as well. It has also helped to, it has also been one of those things where I haven't realised how I have been until I have spoken about it. So, like knowing how I learn, being in here and saying this is how I learn. I have taken that on and make sure that I actually do it to improve next time round, identifying something that hasn't necessarily gone too well in these interviews and then making sure I do better. So it has been good.' [3:575-592]

Fiona:

'It has opened me up to realise about myself and about learning. Ok, you might know about it but once you have spoken about it and been open, I have come to realise certain things about myself. Certain ways I have learned and what has given me confidence, what has been difficult and not given me confidence and what I am looking forward to. It has been so helpful, I think I have opened up a lot' [3:793-800].

## **Appendix L: Research led interventions.**

The following changes to practice have been informed by my research.

1. Increased opportunities for students to connect theoretical study with practical application of learning (often in a vocational or context specific environment).
2. Enhanced use of partnerships to provide students with access to specific target groups of learners and to experience teaching / coaching activities with 'genuine' subjects.
3. Clearly identified opportunities for formative assessment in all core (and most optional) modules.
4. Diversification of the mode of learning including a greater emphasis on collaborative work developing peer learning / support structures.
5. CL led workshops addressing general issues regarding study skills, essay writing and referencing.
6. Review of staffing levels / tutorial access in modules identified as having aspects of weakness.
7. Review of module choice options and improved mapping of personal career pathways to support employability (and post-graduation career development).
8. Expansion of work-based placement networks to reflect the changing needs of an expanding cohort.
9. Scrutiny of student central lecture / study materials.
10. Embedding assistance with organisation, time management and essential study skills in academic practice.

## **Appendix M: Reflections on the research design.**

I have considered the strengths and limitations of the research design and show how these fundamentally opposing concepts are interwoven, for example a limitation can equally be perceived as a strength.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provided a methodological approach commensurate with my ontological and epistemological position and an analytic framework that was compatible with answering my research question. Any opinions I held about the issues prior to conducting this research were based on assumptions and conjecture; I needed to find out about student experience of learning before I could justifiably embark upon any research that targets change.

Heideggerian phenomenology (2010) is concerned with understanding how humans encounter the world; it considers the subjective, situated and relational aspects of being-in-the-world, offering a perspective through which a researcher can get close to the lived-experience of others. A key point in my rationale was my discomfort with the nomothetic approaches that seem to dominate how transition and learning are managed; an increasingly diverse student population suggested that the needs of individuals were also expanding and being overlooked in favour of system-led mechanisms for directing institutional change. IPA foregrounds gaining insight into the *particular* way individuals experience phenomena and the findings from this research provide information about practice that shifts the lens onto understanding the detail of how students go about learning. This should help colleagues and university leaders to take a more student-led approach to improvement.

Heidegger's (2010) idea of co-constitution where our past belongs to our 'being' and influences our 'being-in-the-world' is seen in the participant accounts, especially through perceptions of self-concept and different approaches to coping. The data captures the person-in-context; the descriptions are limited by representing the sense participants are making of experience at the point of being interviewed. But holding three interviews discloses an awareness of the temporal aspects of experience from which it is possible to conceptualise the participants as being on a

journey. Critical moments are shared that disrupt the flow of time and provide insight into the challenges of adapting to learning. These are proximal concerns, unpredictable and uniquely experienced by each participant who is spatially situated and finding meaning through interpretation of their encounters with the world. I am conscious of the temporality of the findings; my data provides a lens onto experience that happened two years past and I need to defend their relevance in a rapidly changing university landscape. I believe this can be achieved due to the idiographic nature of the research, I have identified short-comings in practice and foregrounded the student in possible solutions lessening the distance between institutional decision makers and associated understanding of the student experience.

Semi-structured interviews were an effective method of data collection. Care was taken during the writing of each interview schedule to minimise my own historicity; open question stems and more personal prompt questions proved flexible enough for participants to deviate when appropriate, and gave the opportunity to delve into the *particular*. My participants were candid about their experience; there was some repetition of response during consecutive interviews but this served to stress the things that mattered most and gave the opportunity to follow-up previously shared information. By actively listening to the participants I was conscious of a shift in the research relationship; I sensed a growing partnership between myself and the participants who wanted their stories to be heard. The nature of interaction has also built confidence in the collaborative potential of engaging students in further research. The instances where participants used photo-elicitation offered an alternative perspective on certain issues and I sensed that speaking to images made the disclosure of concerns somewhat easier to articulate. I would certainly use photo-elicitation as a data collection method in further research but making the sub-methods optional in this research avoided participation becoming perceived as an onerous task.

In total I conducted eighteen interviews generating what felt like a huge amount of data, making sense of this was initially daunting and I speculated whether the sample group was too large and how this might affect the insight gained and transfer of findings. IPA requires an intensive analysis of transcript data that has been achieved through the hermeneutically informed, iterative method suggested by

Smith *et al.* (2013). Adopting the detailed and sequential process advocated by Smith *et al.* (2013) was immensely time consuming but allayed my fears; a strength of this thesis is how it represents six different accounts as each participant journeys through the first year of H.E. The levels of analysis [descriptive, linguistic and conceptual noting] helped to formalise my thinking and enable exploration of different perspectives held by the participants. I identified patterns of convergence and divergence across the corpus and present an interpretation of the *shared* and *particular* experience of learning during year 1 of undergraduate study. Iterative movement between whole-part-whole helped to avoid early foreclosure of analysis to suit existing assumptions or most desirable outcomes prompting critical reflection on my own, colleagues and institutional practice. I was familiar with examples of IPA research, but these either explored phenomena from the perspective one case sometimes using a sequence of interviews, or several cases drawing upon one interview only. I faced the challenge of several cases, each with a sequence of three interviews. IPA is a flexible methodology and I made sense of the data by including idiographic master themes (IMT) for each participant before seeking recurrent master themes (RMT) across the corpus.

Hermeneutics requires acknowledgement by the researcher of their involvement in the study; foregrounding presuppositions and personal historicity. I have maintained a reflexive dialogue throughout the research and present a clear decision trail where I am conscious of my own involvement in the processes of interpretation, but acknowledge this is not an exclusive undertaking; both participants and the reader are engaged with their own interpretation. The written thesis presents a dialogic space where consensual meaning can be found or located. I became increasingly aware of my own preconceptions once I began interpreting the data; assumptions I held about learners' capabilities and the effectiveness of my own pedagogy. Keeping a research journal helped to foreground pre-suppositions and I set aside expectations by identifying my 'most powerful recollections' before transcript noting.

The research adheres to ethical guidance and principles for privacy, confidentiality and anonymity have been followed throughout. Participant recruitment was surprisingly straightforward and I am indebted to the assistance from my colleagues in this process who also shouldered my responsibility during university examboard

meetings negating any conflict of interests. I have managed to create and sustain distance as a lecturer and as a researcher facilitated by attending to issues of time and location of interviews during the practical organisation of the research.

The research is trustworthy in that it is credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable using a clear audit trail. Reflexive awareness has been maintained through journal writing and participants member checked their own transcripts. I have included contextual information to situate the research; the sample group size limits findings to representing local phenomena but I accept this as a feature of IPA. To address concerns about impact I have endeavoured to present a faithful description and interpretation of the experience of learning that retains the participant voice; all conclusions are grounded in the data and I hope this is recognised by the reader. There was potential to include participants from other degree courses in the research but I felt this would reduce the homogeneity of the sample and lead to a comparative study. When planning the research, I was encouraged at one point to adopt Grounded Theory methodology to produce a theory of year one experience of learning but this potentially conflicted with my concern for reducing individuals to a generalisation; I felt confident IPA would deliver the locally specific and idiographic insight I desired.

The research approval process expects a literature review to be carried out before authorisation is given for the study to proceed. Methodologically this could be problematic and can be considered as both a strength and limitation of this research. The initial literature review had identified a trio of theoretical concepts that I superimposed onto Illeris (2007, p28) 'Learning as competence development' model to create a framework for understanding the cognitive, affective and social dimensions of learning. My theoretical framework provided a lens through which one event could be examined from three conceptual perspectives, but by undertaking the literature review I had added to my pre-conceptions which I needed to acknowledge and set aside. The time required for data collection helped to create distance between literature and analysis, and using my journal ensured a reflexive interpretation of findings.

Initial noting had piqued my curiosity and it was difficult to avoid turning to literature before data analysis was complete, and equally challenging to resist sharing partially formed conclusions before a full examination of the extant literature. Writing the discussion placed my findings in the wider context; I could make connections but also recognise gaps in existing literature, specifically how this research illuminates the complexity of experience where other studies tend to concentrate on isolated aspects. My theoretical framework proved instrumental in understanding the entwined nature of experience; it was difficult to avoid repetition because examples from participant accounts could rest within each of the recurrent master themes, but the discrete nuances reveal aspects of experience that might be missed if only one theoretical lens had been employed. Identifying 'self' as a recurrent master theme was unexpected and I perhaps missed an opportunity to target perceptions of self more explicitly during the interviews. But I only came to this realisation because the participants were talking about self in an unsolicited way, demonstrating awareness of their own 'being' which resonates with Heideggerian phenomenology.

This research has achieved the objective of IPA to gain insight into the lived-experience of others, however the cycle continues because the process has raised further questions and presented implications for practice but it has not given objective answers or concrete solutions to a problem. The research findings are my interpretation of the participants experiences of learning during the first year of H.E. and it is my responsibility to present these in a way that has resonance for others. In the meantime, conducting this research has made me [I think] a better practitioner, Course Leader, researcher and academic.