

LEARNING THROUGH A FOUNDATION DEGREE

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Abstract

This research explores the learning experiences of three mature students studying for a Foundation Degree – a two-year qualification, introduced in England and Wales in 2001, that uniquely spans the academic-vocational nexus within higher education. Data collected through interviews and journal entries were used to construct accounts of each of the students' learning experiences, forming a longitudinal case study that spanned two years. This material is used in three ways to give insight into learning through a Foundation Degree. Firstly, the accounts stand by themselves as detailed descriptions of what it is like to learn through a Foundation Degree. Secondly, the accounts illustrate ways in which particular learning theories and models are helpful to understanding the students' learning experiences, and also the areas in which some theories and models fall short. Thirdly, a new conceptual model has been developed which identifies six factors that significantly impact upon the Foundation Degree learner's experience. Each of these factors has the potential to influence learning positively or negatively, depending on where it lies upon a continuum that polarises learning inhibitors and enablers. This model is used to scrutinise Foundation Degree teaching and learning practice, using the accounts as reference points, and more effective approaches to Foundation Degree delivery have been suggested.

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PART ONE: Background and context

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene

This thesis seeks to tell a story about learning. It explores the learning experiences of three mature female students known as Mel, Sam and Heather¹. They are all primary school teaching assistants, studying for a Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln – a small higher education institution in the East Midlands. Foundation Degrees were introduced as a new higher education qualification to England and Wales during the academic year 2001- 02. They are situated at level five of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (QAA, 2008; appendix 1.1) and feature the integration of academic study and work-based learning as a central part of course design and delivery (QAA, 2004; DfES, 2004a). As a relatively new qualification, heralded by policy makers as a significant vehicle for expansion in higher education (DfES, 2003a; DfES, 2003b; HEFCE, 2007; Rammell, 2007), Foundation Degree programmes provide the potential for a ‘rich but, as yet, poorly researched environment for the study of curriculum innovation’ (Foskett, 2003:1). Therefore, as a tutor and then programme leader for the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University

¹ These are not pseudonyms – permission was secured from the students to use their real names.

College Lincoln, I could see the opportunity to use the course as the basis for a unique case study.

The purpose of the thesis is twofold. Firstly, I want to present the students' experiences of learning through a Foundation Degree by drawing upon an extensive data pool for each student, derived from a longitudinal sequence of interviews and journal entries. The result is a sequential set of accounts for each of Mel, Sam and Heather, covering their individual learning journeys from applying and enrolling upon the course, through to graduation. Secondly, I seek to inform theory and policy within the field of learning, as applied to the Foundation Degree, by delving deeply into the students' accounts in an attempt to understand 'how it is for them' as they engage with a work-based course of study at higher education level, and how their experience could be improved. Therefore, as well as being an account of the learning experienced by Mel, Sam and Heather, this thesis contains a parallel account of my own learning journey as an educationalist and researcher: growing in understanding of the students' experiences and seeking to apply that understanding to improving practice within the Foundation Degree.

In presenting the student accounts, I do not propose to offer a flat, two-dimensional description of a particular higher education learning experience. Instead, I seek to capture the full extent of what it means to learn on the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop

Grosseteste University College Lincoln. This will incur the unravelling of a complex web of issues pertinent to the case study students and to their learning experience. This web extends beyond the learning context of the Foundation Degree itself and the environment of Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, to include issues related to learning in the workplace; questions of learner identity, and an exploration of conflict between the multiple roles and responsibilities that each student assumes for the duration of the Foundation Degree. In addition, it will necessitate the presentation of issues specific to me, the academic researcher acting as ‘bricoleur’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 4; Kincheloe, 2005) or ‘quilt maker’, stitching the accounts together. Such issues include the perspectives that I bring to the research process, which have been created and honed through my own learning history and educative experiences. In addition, I have engaged in my own developmental learning journey as I have taken on the role of ‘PhD student’. I have also sought to use the students’ accounts as a vehicle for critically reflecting upon my own practice as programme leader for the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants. Learning, then, is the overarching theme of this thesis – the students as learners coupled with recognition that I am learning as researcher and practitioner through, because of, and as a result of, their experiences.

The story told within this thesis represents several journeys. It has been a journey for Mel, Sam and Heather as they have navigated their way through an undergraduate degree course and grappled with the ‘weave of learning [which]

encompasses a range of intellectual, personal, social, cultural, ethical, political, practical obligations, interests and concerns' (Light and Cox, 2001:45). In doing so, the students have struggled with issues of identity, motivation, self-concept and the practical challenges of managing multiple personal and professional roles. In addition, it has been a learning journey for myself as researcher, learning to work outside of my comfort zone, or 'outside the spoon drawer' (Leitch (a), 2006) in order to find my own voice within the qualitative landscape of inquiry.

Also, parallel to the path I have followed because of my role as researcher has been the path followed due to my being programme leader and tutor to the students taking part in the case study. This role has afforded me the opportunity to get alongside the students – to understand more intimately the bigger picture of why they have engaged in a course of higher education study; how they have dug deep to find the tenacity to persevere with the course, and what it means to them, ultimately to succeed. In taking part in their journey I have been able to reflect upon the course in practical terms as programme leader and to consider the quality of the student experience in the light of the case study students' experiences. I have been able to appreciate the difficulties and struggles faced by the students, both directly related to their learning, but also related to their wider roles and responsibilities as employees and parents. Ultimately, I hope that my critical engagement with the students' accounts will result in improvements to the learning experience for future students studying for a Foundation Degree in Educational Studies at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln. This

chapter continues by situating my emerging researcher identity within the context of my own learning journey.

1.2 Introducing myself

1.2.1 Early experiences of the learning journey

I begin with a personal story of my own learning journey at university, for it has some relevance to how I was drawn to engage in this study and how I decided to approach it. In sharing this account I am necessarily employing elements of self-scrutiny or ‘active reflexivity’ (Mason, 2002:7) (developed, in part, through the process of studying for a PhD) and have sought to tie in the events of my own university education to some of the theoretical perspectives around learning with which I have since become familiar. In addition, I reiterate the notion of the researcher as bricoleur (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 4; Kincheloe, 2005), whose personal history necessarily brings a particular perspective to how the bricolage is constructed: my approach to research design, data collection and reporting has been shaped by my own personal history, thus justifying a brief glimpse into my own learning experiences to date.

My journey through the primary and secondary educational system of the 1970s and 1980s was largely unremarkable. I passed twelve GCE O levels – a significant achievement, but including some subjects of which, if I was honest, I had limited understanding. Such was the system that it was possible to pass examinations by rote learning facts in certain areas, rather than by understanding

key concepts. I now understand that I was operating at the first and basic level of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (1956), that of recalling and reproducing given knowledge. However, from the age of eight I had become increasingly involved in a variety of additional extra-curricular music activities. These included violin, piano and singing tuition; forays into learning the oboe, organ and guitar, and membership of a range of ensembles including choirs, orchestras (school and county level) and chamber music groups. Music became my primary interest and following A levels I secured a place at the University of Cambridge. I had won a 'Choral Exhibition' (a scholarship for singing) and began an honours degree in music in October 1986.

I was of the first generation in my family to attend university, and Cambridge University at that, which was clearly an enormous achievement of which I was proud. Yet, a huge emphasis was placed on the fact that I had won a Choral Exhibition, which meant that for me the very fact that my singing ability had been recognised and rewarded undermined my own belief in my academic ability. Although I had sat the Cambridge Entrance Examination and therefore had secured my place on academic merit, there was always a small thought at the back of my mind that maybe I was not clever enough to succeed at such a prestigious and internationally renowned establishment.

At university, the approach to teaching and learning was based on the traditional model of lectures, supplemented by individual and small group tutorials once or

twice weekly. For me, lectures were a relatively safe environment, as interaction with others was minimal. Within these sessions the aim seemed to be for students to write down as much as possible within the hour lecture, and then to make sense of their notes later, independently. With educational knowledge gained later, I now see this mode of learning and teaching centred around the teacher as transmitter of knowledge, and the student as receiver of it, reflecting the 'banking' model of education heavily criticised as an ineffective educative tool by Freire (1972). Freire, in his seminal text 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1972) emphasised respectful dialogue between student and teacher as key to an effective education and attacked the 'banking' concept of education, in which the student was viewed as an empty account to be filled by the teacher.

On the other hand, the tutorials demanded interaction not only with the tutor but also with a peer group. These sessions were designed to generate debate and original ideas amongst undergraduates, but I found the whole process intimidating. I felt out of my depth as members of my peer group sought to impress the tutor with what I perceived to be clever, abstract arguments, often leaving me floundering as I tried to follow the discussions. In addition, I found essay writing difficult and longed for clues about what was expected of me. Even the practical work (this was a music course, after all!) seemed tedious and mechanistic. Fundamentally, though I did not realise it then, I needed support in the processes of learning as well as some practical support in areas such as writing style and essay structure. This sense of ineptitude was a novel experience for me:

until this point, learning had just happened – now, I needed to learn how to learn. I also craved admittance to the ways of the academy (the rules, expectations and conventions attached to assessed work in particular) which I thought would give me feelings of more security and unlock the mysteries of how to succeed in a traditional university environment. In many ways I was operating as ‘an outsider in the academy’ (Burn and Finnigan, 2003: 119), just as I describe the case study students later on in this thesis.

On reflection, I can now see that I needed to build up an authentic identity as a learner and I needed to develop the capacity to engage more actively in the learning process. I was not at that time capable of shedding the notion that the only legitimate knowledge on offer was that of the tutor. This was indicative of the imbalanced view I held of tutor-student relations, which privileged the tutor as the source of knowledge. Perhaps it was something to do with the attitude of my tutors who might have believed me to be one of those learners ‘assumed to be ignorant, empty vessels, waiting to be filled’ (Clarke, 2002: 65). Whether this was the prevailing attitude is merely speculation. All that I realise now is that I lacked the tools needed to engage, particularly discursively, with the academic debates during tutorials and there is no doubt that this ‘lack’ dented my confidence as a student in higher education.

In my third year at university, I switched to Education with a view to gaining qualification as a primary school teacher alongside my degree. I studied

educational philosophy, sociology and psychology alongside the primary curriculum and grounded this work in practical teaching experience. I was introduced to the writings of some of the great educational philosophers, sociologists and psychologists (for example, John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Carl Rogers, Burrhus Fred Skinner, Jerome Bruner and Margaret Donaldson) and so began the shaping of my educational philosophy, which I sought to apply in my early teaching posts and throughout my career in education.

Fundamental to my developing philosophy was a growing understanding of, and confidence in, the power and value of experience as a tool for shaping learning. In the context of my studies in Education and related Teacher Training I developed a dual understanding of the value of experience. Firstly, I was able to see children learning within classroom contexts and I was able to link their learning to the theoretical models that I had been introduced to. In addition, I was able to recognise higher levels of effectiveness in my own learning, because the theoretical elements of the course made more sense when applied to my own classroom teaching practice. Thus, through a growing theoretical and practical understanding of the value of experience in learning, I gradually developed a clear belief in the value of the learning *process*, as opposed to wholly summative outcomes. I felt that this was what had been missed in my school studies and during the early part of my time at university.

At this juncture, I came across the work of John Dewey and was excited by how his theories about experience both connected to and illuminated my own experiences. Historically, John Dewey's work on experience and its relation to education reinforces the educational value of integrating experience, learning and reflection upon it (Dewey, 1938). He believed that education must not only engage with experience, but also enlarge it. In addition, as early as 1916 in his book 'Democracy and Education', Dewey was expounding the dangers of perpetuating imbalanced power relationships between the teacher and the learner, through teaching methods which create learner dependency upon the teacher and therefore cut down the spaces for integrating personal experience and learning.

My experience of being an Education student shaped me as a teacher who did not want merely to impart knowledge. Rather, as I progressed through my teacher training placements, I developed a view of the teacher-learner relationship as one of partnership. I recognised that the learner had much to bring to their own learning experience – in terms of who they were, what their prior experiences were, how they made sense of these experiences, and how they developed their learning by taking a central and necessary role in the construction of meaning (an idea expounded by 'constructivist' theorists such as Dewey (1938), Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1986)). As I completed my degree course and started my first teaching post in 1990, I felt that I finally understood that the learner could hold the power to influence their own pathway and were not dependent upon the imparting of knowledge from others.

1.2.2 Progress towards research

My progress towards deciding to undertake doctoral studies grew from my approach to improving teaching. Although my career to date lies wholly within education, it spans a variety of contexts over the past eighteen years. This includes periods teaching in the primary and nursery sectors; delivering instrumental music tuition to a range of learners including adults, and school-based management positions including as a primary head teacher. Most recently, I have held lecturing and management positions within higher education.

My involvement with the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln began in January 2002. I had been appointed to a lecturing position at the institution (then a college of higher education), to work mainly with trainee primary school teachers in their final year of an honours degree that incorporated qualified teacher status. During my first week in post, I was asked to support the development of a module for the Foundation Degree, then a new course that had been introduced in September 2001. My recent experience as a primary school head teacher and class teacher seemed ideal – I had managed teaching assistants in a variety of roles – and so I designed and delivered the module, in collaboration with a more experienced colleague. Involvement in more modules followed and towards the end of the academic year I was asked to take on a coordination role for the Foundation Degree, which involved managing the development and delivery of all the second year modules (six in total, appendix 1.2), due to start in September 2002. In May

2003 I was formally appointed programme leader, a role I held until December 2006. By this time, the Foundation Degree had grown from attracting an annual intake of around 30 students to 55 students and so there were around 110 students studying for the Foundation Degree.

Throughout my teaching career I have firmly believed that to be an effective teacher, one must first recognise that teaching is, in itself, a learning experience demanding a reflective, creative and evaluative approach. Early on in my career the idea of reflective practice manifested itself to me as a personal need to know the 'whys' of learning and teaching as well as the 'whats'. In practice, this has meant that a constant feature of my teaching style is the incorporation of space to take a step back and reflect upon the impact that my intervention as a teacher has had upon the quality of learning. This mirrors Kolb's (1984) learning model which incorporates a stage of observation and reflection upon concrete experience prior to the formation of abstract concepts and generalisations, followed by the testing of concepts in new situations. Moon (1999) also highlights the central part that reflection plays within the most effective methods of teaching, whilst Schön's (1983) model of reflection-in-action has often been applied to the classroom teacher who, devoid of 'space' in which to enjoy an extended period of reflection, is required to take rapid (often, intuitive) action in certain circumstances.

In defining my own reflective practice, I have found myself drawn towards Moon's useful overview of the field. She asserts that 'in theoretical terms, there

appears to be no one form of practice that can be called reflective practice' (1999: 63), but nevertheless does identify certain features that are key characteristics of reflective practice. Taking these into account, I recognise the following in my own professional teaching practice:

1. the subject matter of reflection is likely to be one's own practice;
2. reflective practice may have a strong critical element;
3. the end point of reflection may not be a resolution of an issue, but an attainment of a better understanding of it;
4. review and reconstruction of the ideas surrounding reflection will be aimed at understanding or resolving the issue in the context of a general aim of improving practice;
5. still within the overall context of improving practice, the immediate aim may be self-development or professional development.

(Adapted from Moon, 1999: 64)

Developing these characteristics has been influential in enabling me to move from reflective practitioner to PhD student. They also define that movement: in other words, I wish to critically investigate and reflect upon my practice (in the case of my research, 'Learning through a Foundation Degree') in order to attain a deeper understanding of it, which in turn, will enable me to improve practice and also to further my own self and professional development.

My original research proposal (May 2003) focussed on the *assessment* of work-based learning. At this stage I was assuming that work-based learning within Foundation Degrees was perhaps not a unique phenomenon, but a transference of established work-based learning theories and frameworks (for example Lave and Wenger, 1991; Symes and McIntyre, 2000; Boud and Solomon, 2001; Billet, 2002a, 2002b) to the Foundation Degree format. I proposed that work-based

learning demanded forms of assessment suited to its particular needs and that, in particular, learning in the workplace was as much, if not more, about process rather than output. I was keen to investigate the relevance of established work-based learning theories and frameworks in the context of the assessment of work-based learning and the proposal suggested an evaluation of the likely merits and demerits of a variety of assessment approaches through a survey of institutions involved in the delivery of Foundation Degrees.

By December 2003, following an initial investigation of assessment within Foundation Degrees (Taylor, 2005), it became apparent that further themes were emerging which for me held more significant interest for research purposes. Such themes were broader than the focus on assessment that I had originally identified – rather, I became more interested in the area of student learning generally. In addition, through my observations of how students were learning within the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants and through a growing acceptance of the policy rhetoric that this was indeed a unique qualification (QAA, 2004), I was becoming unconvinced about the transferability of existing work-based and learning theories wholesale to the Foundation Degree format. In essence, I felt that learning through a Foundation Degree demanded a reconsideration of the appropriateness of relevant theoretical models and perhaps deserved the development of a model unique to the Foundation Degree that would fully capture the learning taking place. In particular, I had observed of the students undertaking the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies that, for them,

embarking upon the course represented a huge commitment, often involving sacrifices on their part mainly in terms of time spent with family. Staying on the course appeared to be a real struggle as they managed multiple roles and identities as students, parents and employees. Therefore, the focus of the research developed considerably beyond just focussing upon the assessment of work-based learning, to considering the nature of the learning experience for students on a work-based Foundation Degree.

1.3 Doing without research questions

I started out by generating a research question, but went through a process that resulted in the development of a broad framework. The initial research question was: 'How does participation in a Foundation Degree programme impact upon students?' I deliberately chose the word 'impact' because of the active imagery associated with the term. For me, it painted a picture of movement, influence and change. From my work with Foundation Degree students I had observed something happen within their lives as they progressed through the programme. My perception was that, for the majority, engagement with the programme had some sort of significant impact. For many, the impact was positive. For example, for some students, who had left school without ever exploring the possibility of progressing to college or university, the Foundation Degree provided a second chance to progress academically, with the potential impact of enhanced career prospects. For others I could sense and even observe a positive impact upon their personal confidence, self-esteem and belief in their ability as they experienced

success on the course (even those students who at enrolment had expressed doubt that they could cope with such a course). However, for some students, I perceived the impact as having a negative effect. For example, of the students who sought support and advice from me as their tutor in relation to the impact the course was having on their families, some experienced conflict within the home, as they tried to balance the different domestic roles expected of them (wife, partner, mother, carer) with the demands placed upon them as higher education students. In these situations the 'impact' extended to emotional as well as practical aspects.

As I reflected upon the term 'impact' in order to ascertain in more detail what could be meant by the term and also to consider a range of specific research questions, I hypothesised that impact upon the learner may be both intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic impact (within the learner) may be upon personal knowledge, skills and understanding. This could include academic skills, subject knowledge from course modules, and understanding issues affecting the learner's own practice within the workplace. In addition, intrinsic impact may be bound up with personal development. This could include social and emotional development; self-esteem; personal goals and aspirations; learning how to learn and reflecting upon this, and personal and interpersonal skills gained from modes of study and assessment. Extrinsic impact (upon the learner) could involve how personal skills, knowledge and understanding are applied in the workplace as well as the perceptions of workplace colleagues and other stakeholders (for example, pupils

and parents) on the learner's application of newly acquired skills, knowledge and understanding in the workplace.

However, as I considered the overall question and possible subsidiary questions, I came to the view that I did not want to pre-empt any of the research findings. There was a real danger that my detailed knowledge of the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies of Teaching Assistants – the programme content, coupled with a growing knowledge of issues faced by particular students – would bias the specific questions that I chose to focus upon. The resulting research could therefore have been more indicative of my own perceptions of significant features of learning within the Foundation Degree, rather than reflecting the issues of significance to the students. I also became convinced of the need to focus on the students in order to develop a rich understanding of what 'learning through a Foundation Degree' actually meant in practice, and also how that experience linked to both theoretical models for understanding aspects of learning and to policy rhetoric.

I therefore settled on a broader title for the research – Learning through a Foundation Degree – but underpinned this with the following key aims, in order to provide structure and direction to the research:

1. to record accounts particular to each case study student, which span the duration of the two-year course and tell the story of what it was like to learn through a Foundation Degree;

2. to use the accounts to illustrate theoretical perspectives in relation to the learner experience;
3. to use the accounts to understand the learner experience and to discuss the implications for the improved design and delivery of Foundation Degrees;
4. to develop a new conceptual model related to learning and teaching on Foundation Degrees.

These aims have become central to the thesis structure and have provided a framework to support all aspects of research design and the reporting of research findings. However, they have not served to restrict the direction that the research has taken, which has developed as the students' accounts have unfolded.

1.4 The story begins: an outline of the thesis

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, this thesis presents accounts related to the learning experiences of three Foundation Degree students – Mel, Sam and Heather. In setting the scene I began with a somewhat confessional tale of my own learning journey and started to reflect upon what my own experiences might mean for my approach to this research and for my interpretation of the case study stories under scrutiny. Consequently, the centrality of 'active reflexivity' (Mason, 2002: 7) to the research process will, I hope, be clear throughout this thesis.

Chapters Two, Three and Four make up the rest of part one of the thesis and provide further background and context for the study. Chapter Two presents an account of the circumstances surrounding the introduction of Foundation Degrees

to the higher education landscape in England and Wales in 2001. Fundamental to this discussion is an understanding of the context of higher education expansion and the development of new forms of vocational learning. There then follows an overview of current policy and practice in relation to Foundation Degrees including an appraisal of what makes the qualification ‘distinctive’ (QAA, 2004:5). Specific information relating to the course undertaken by the three case study students (the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants) and the institution (Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln) completes this chapter.

Chapter Three maps the threads of inquiry that have informed the study. This chapter is not presented in the form of a traditional ‘literature review’, rather the chapter has been constructed iteratively as the research has unfolded and contains a wide range of literature that became relevant at different points of the research process. The threads that inform the inquiry are: forms of knowledge; being a student, and learning in the workplace. Each of these threads is returned to throughout the thesis.

Chapter Four details the research design and includes some insight into the issues I encountered as I grappled with pertinent questions relating to research approach, methodology, methods, ethics and analysis. Throughout the chapter I aim to demonstrate awareness of how my own thoughts, actions and prior experiences have the potential to shape the research.

Part Two (Chapters Five, Six and Seven) contains each of the students' accounts, which chart their progress through the Foundation Degree. I attempt to 'see through the eyes of [...] the people who are being studied' (Bryman, 1988:61) through the selection, presentation and interpretation of accounts drawn from interview transcripts and journal entries. At this stage, commentary is not extensive, in order to retain continuity in the way that each account is presented. It is in Part Three (Chapters Eight and Nine) that more extensive analysis is included. This part seeks both to understand the learner experience and reconsider Foundation Degree practice through the application of a new conceptual model related to learning and teaching on Foundation Degrees.

This thesis brings to the forefront those who are at the centre of our higher education institutions – the students. In capturing and exploring the learning experiences of Mel, Sam and Heather, I hope to understand more fully the nature of learning within the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln and apply such understanding in order to improve the learning journeys of future students within the programme, and perhaps within similar work-based courses. As outlined above, the students' accounts are presented in Part Two of this thesis. Part One continues with an insight into the research context, including an overview of Foundation Degree origins, policy and practice.

Chapter Two

The research context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter articulates the research context and begins with an overview of the significant changes within the UK higher education landscape since the 1960s. Against this backdrop, Foundation Degrees are viewed as a response both to higher education expansion and to changing attitudes towards vocational learning, as exemplified through the growing developments of work-based learning within higher education as part of ‘the new vocationalism’ (Symes and McIntyre, 2000). In addition, unique features pertaining to the Foundation Degree model (QAA, 2004) are presented in order to convey the distinctiveness of the qualification. Following a description of Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, the chapter ends with particular detail relating to the course undertaken by the three case study students – the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln – and a brief insight into Teaching Assistant roles and training opportunities.

2.2 The expansion of higher education and the emergence of Foundation Degrees

The first Foundation Degree courses began in September 2001, and are therefore a relatively new phenomenon within higher education in England and Wales. However, the rationale for their appearance can be traced to a variety of initiatives

linked to the expansion of higher education, beginning with the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) which made a commitment to make a higher education place available to all those who were suitably qualified. This initiated a major expansion of higher education by recommending the establishment of polytechnics, based upon the premise that a key aim of higher education should be to develop employment-related skills.

Yet, five years later, the Committee on Manpower Resources for Science and Technology (1968) reported a continuing difficulty with attracting well-qualified and skilled graduates into science, technology and engineering in the UK. The Robbins Report had kick-started a rise in the percentage of under-21 students engaged in higher education, which increased from around 5% to nearly 15% by 1970 (Bathmaker, 2003), but expansion then levelled off until the late 1980s. In 1988 another rapid rise in student numbers was recorded, largely within polytechnics and colleges of higher education, following the Education Reform Act (DES, 1988) which created a new funding body for polytechnics and higher education colleges away from local authority control. This rise was further fuelled in 1992 when the two-sector, or binary, system was abolished by the Further and Higher Education Act (DES, 1992), allowing polytechnics to declare themselves universities.

In 1997, the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education chaired by Sir Ron Dearing highlighted the importance of developing higher education level

qualifications as part of a strategy for increasing participation in higher education, in effect giving the government a green light to pursue its growing commitment to widening access and participation and to explore higher education expansion. Dearing expected that much of this expansion would be at ‘sub-degree level’ – an early indication of the role that Foundation Degrees came to have in the expansion of higher education (and this is explored more fully in the next section of this chapter). The ‘Future of Higher Education’ report (DfES, 2003a) clarified a Labour government target of 50% participation within higher education by 2010 for the 18-30 year old age group, although recent statistics show that the proportion of young adults entering higher education has stalled (DIUS, 2008). In 1999/2000 the figure stood at 39% and peaked to 42.5% in 2005/06. However the figure for 2006/07 has been recorded as 40% (DIUS, 2008), suggesting that the 50% target for 2010 may be hard for the government to attain. Nevertheless, in line with the government’s target, the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE) strategic plan for 2006-11 is explicit in its mission to see growth in higher education participation:

We remain committed to fully funded growth in student numbers. We see this as essential if we are to meet the challenge of widening access, and increasing participation and student progression, which all remain crucial to our mission. We continue to see the drive towards widening participation as fundamental in promoting social inclusion and improving the country’s economic competitiveness (HEFCE, 2006: 5).

Within the context of higher education expansion, both in order to meet widening participation targets and to provide appropriately skilled employees for the

nation's workforce, the government has identified Foundation Degree provision as having a key part to play:

We want to see expansion in two-year, work-focused Foundation Degrees; and in mature students in the workforce developing their skills. As we do this, we will maintain the quality standards required for access to university, both safeguarding the standards of traditional honours degrees and promoting a step-change in the quality and reputation of work-focused courses (DfES, 2003a paragraph 5.10).

The role identified here for Foundation Degrees in terms of providing the means to promote a proposed 'step-change' in the quality of work-focused courses within higher education is an aspect not to be overlooked. Alongside the expansion of higher education arising from a desire to engineer social and economic equality for individuals as well as securing national economic prosperity, there were significant developments within the sphere of vocational education and the development of work-based higher education courses, and these are considered next.

2.3 Work-based higher education and the 'new vocationalism'

'New vocationalism' began in schools and colleges and has a specific history that runs parallel to the story of expansion outlined above. During the 1970s, there was increasing dissatisfaction on the part of the government and employers with the quality of both school leavers and university graduates who appeared to be ill-equipped to contribute to a technologically advancing society. During what became known as the 'Great Debate' at Ruskin College in 1976, James Callaghan reported the concerns expressed to him during his tour of Britain, carried out over

the first few months of his term as Prime Minister. As well as complaints from industry that school leavers were not equipped to enter the world of work, Callaghan also conveyed concern that graduates in subjects such as mathematics, science and technology had no desire to join industry. Therefore, it seemed that a dual approach to the future development of vocational education was needed – one that focussed not only upon school leavers, but also upon higher education graduates.

During the 1970s and 1980s, many responses to the skills shortage amongst school leavers focussed upon job-specific training that served to underline the divisions and distinctions between vocational and academic studies by narrowly defining skills and competencies (Farley, 1985; Boreham, 2002; Hager and Hyland, 2003). This drive comprised initiatives such as Youth Training Schemes (YTS), National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and others. The pathway for vocational qualifications became highly competence-based and was even viewed as devaluing vocational learning by some (Boreham, 2002; Hyland, 2006). Crucially, as there developed a growing recognition of the need to move away from the narrowness of pure vocational qualifications in order to have transferable skill and knowledge, and to draw back from the polarisation of vocational and academic learning, the ‘new vocationalism’ was born within schools (Dale, 1985; Pollard, Purvis and Walford, 1988). Initially, this was in the form of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI): rather than focussing exclusively upon skills training, the new vocationalism was as much about

enabling ‘occupational versatility and personal adjustment’ (Dale, 1985: 7), in order to bridge the gap between meeting the needs of industry and supporting individual pupils in fully realising their potential.

Within the post-compulsory sector, the phrase ‘the new vocationalism’ was used to describe courses which sought to provide higher-level applicable knowledge and skills (Symes and McIntyre, 2000; Hager and Hyland, 2003). Of growing importance at this time was the need for traditional understandings of higher education to be reinterpreted and reconstructed within the context of the working world, at the same time as trying not to perpetuate the academic-vocational divide. In this respect, the ‘Choosing to change’ report (Higher Education Quality Council, 1994) recommended qualifications at Higher Education Intermediate level, which combined vocational relevance and the potential for further progression within the higher education framework, as well as enhanced employment opportunities. In 1997, the ‘Dearing’ report highlighted the role that higher education level qualifications could play as part of a strategy for increasing participation. This was followed by two reports of the National Skills Task Force (DfEE, 1998a; 1999a), the second of which ‘Delivering skills for all’ (DfEE, 1999a) recommended exploring a new system of two-year associate degrees in vocational subjects to support progression from level three qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). In addition, organisations such as the Council for Industry and Higher Education (established in 1986); the Centre for Education and Industry (established in 1988); more recently, enterprise and

employability-focussed Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Learning (CETLS) plus initiatives such as the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF), have spawned a range of higher education-based activity linked to graduate enterprise and employability.

Alongside the reappraisal of vocational training and education from a narrow to a broader conception within ‘the new vocationalism’, a growing feature of educational and political discourse was reference to the ‘knowledge-based economy’. This appears in the foreword to the Foundation Degrees consultation document (DfEE, 2000a) and underlines the political endorsement of a growing societal expectation that specialist knowledge was fast becoming the key currency for economic growth and success. The discourse surrounding the knowledge-based economy (an economy where knowledge has become a commodity to be produced, distributed and used) can be construed as challenging higher education as the central producer of knowledge, although commentators assert that the university has long held a central part in the production of knowledge and that this can, and should, continue (Symes and McIntyre, 2000; Delanty, 2001). What is clear, though, is that different forms of knowledge have gained legitimacy in a range of academic, work-based, professional and personal contexts (Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow, 1994; Eraut, 1994; Symes and McIntyre, 2000; Delanty, 2001; Boud and Solomon, 2001) underlining a growing deconstruction of traditional knowledge and institutional boundaries. This development appears to be inevitable within the context of the ‘knowledge

economy' and signifies a change in perception of what a university education may entail.

The developments outlined above created a climate in which it was no longer acceptable to polarise academic and vocational skills or knowledge and understanding. Instead, the new vocationalism promoted a more integrated approach in order both to fulfil widening access and participation targets for higher education and to provide education and training for employment within a rapidly changing and globalised economy, struggling with skills shortages amongst the workforce. In addition, the deconstruction of traditional knowledge and institutional boundaries was leading to the development of higher education courses that sought to apply knowledge in a range of contexts, not just act as transmitters of abstract knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994). To this effect, work-based learning was seen as the 'new frontier' (Raelin, 2000), as 'a new higher education' (Boud and Solomon, 2001) and as 'new practices for new times' (Boud, Solomon and Symes, 2001).

However, although the Foundation Degree – a work-based higher education qualification (QAA, 2004) that combines higher-level knowledge and understanding alongside vocational competence – would seem to be situated within the new tradition of higher education work-based learning, defining work-based learning within the context of higher education is more problematic. Boud and Symes (2000: 15) stated at the turn of the millennium that 'work-based

learning is [...] an idea whose time has come'. Yet, there are potential difficulties of interpretation when referring to work-based learning and what the term may mean, with the Foundation Degree Task Force Report (2004) noting that 'a variety of similar sounding terms are used to describe the work element of higher education programmes. This includes 'work-oriented', 'work-related', 'work-focused', 'work-placed', 'work-based'' (2004:20). Boud et al. (2001) are clear that 'work-based learning is the term being used to describe a class of university programmes that bring together universities and work organisations to create new learning opportunities in the workplace' (2001: 4). The emphasis here is upon the workplace as providing a forum for learning, within a university (higher education) level programme, developed as a partnership between university and work. This is consonant with the Foundation Degree model (discussed further in the next section) where situational, work-based learning is a significant mechanism for learning and demands not only workplace support, but cross-sector partnerships between employers and institutions (Foskett, 2003; Foundation Degree Task Force, 2004; QAA, 2004).

However, others consider the scope of learning at work to also include unintentional, informal learning through workplace socialisation (Lohman, 2000; Guile and Young, 2001; Billett, 2002a, 2002b; Dirkx, Swanson, Watkins and Cseh, 2002). In this respect, Billet (2002a, 2002b) has outlined how informal workplace learning allows individuals to construct meaning from their experiences, whilst Lohman (2000: 84) has extended the scope of informal work-

based learning to include ‘activities initiated by people in work settings that result in the development of their professional skills and knowledge’, thus suggesting that work-based learning may occur along a planned-unplanned continuum. Dirkx et al. (2002) even suggest a hybrid of informal/formal learning – structured activities used to study and learn from specific aspects of work, based upon ‘action learning’ (see also Raelin, 2000; McGill and Beaty, 2001; McGill and Brockbank, 2004).

Raelin (2000) brings a further dimension to the discussion by suggesting that engaging in work-based learning is not just about collecting knowledge and a set of skills, rather it arises from shared action and problem solving, thus underlining the social mode of learning in the workplace. This view is shared by Beaney (2005) who brings many of the above points together by acknowledging that work-based learning has potential power as a legitimate pedagogy, but warns against a narrow focus, emphasising that work-based learning is situational and socially shaped. In this respect, the notion of learning as social practice within the workplace is explored further in the next chapter as a thread of inquiry that recurs throughout the thesis.

In summary, Foundation Degrees developed from a desire to meet employer needs in addressing skills and knowledge shortages at the same time as providing a means for entry to and progression through the higher education framework, thus contributing to widening access and participation. This has developed within

the context of a continuing reappraisal of what constitutes vocational education and training, as well as what constitutes valid ‘knowledge’ within the academy. Linking these debates has been the common thread of an emerging ‘new vocationalism’, which has emphasised the need to reinterpret and reconstruct traditional understandings of higher education within the context of today’s working world (Barnett, 2000), and to embrace work-based learning in higher education contexts. Foundation Degrees have emerged as a new form of work-based learning within higher education, with specific features that give the degree its uniqueness. The uniqueness of the degree will be explored next.

2.4 Foundation Degrees: policy and practice

The Foundation Degree award is recognised at higher education level 2, equivalent to the National Qualification Framework, level 5 (appendix 1.1) and is currently offered in 23 subject areas (appendix 2.1). The integration of academic study and work is fundamental to the Foundation Degree model, as emphasised by the QAA Benchmark for Foundation Degrees which expects the programmes of study to be ‘underpinned by work-based learning’ (QAA, 2004: 5) and the DfES, who state explicitly that ‘a Foundation Degree is a vocational higher education qualification which combines academic study with work-based learning and experience’ (DfES, 2004a: 3). Those studying for Foundation Degrees may be seeking to enter a profession, or may have worked within a profession for a while and the qualification is designed to provide opportunities for individuals to engage in lifelong learning (QAA, 2004). The Quality Assurance Agency

requires that opportunities for progression from Foundation Degrees are identified within individual institutions, with courses normally linked to a programme leading to an honours degree (QAA, 2004).

Foundation Degrees were first announced in February 2000 by the then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, in his 'Modernising higher education – facing the global challenge' speech (DfES, 2000). The Foundation Degrees consultation document (DfEE, 2000a) identified the qualifications framework offered by the Community College model in the USA as a format upon which Foundation Degrees were to be based. This model provides two-year courses focussed on specialist technical and professional skills, closely aligned to employer needs and with core skills seen as central for success. A major theme in the USA was to increase participation in post-secondary education, in order to create a more inclusive society. The same targets are now associated with Foundation Degrees in England and Wales as higher education expands to include those previously disenfranchised by higher education. In particular, the Foundation Degree qualification benchmark states explicitly that Foundation Degrees are designed 'to address shortages in particular skills [...] [and] to contribute to widening participation and lifelong learning' (QAA, 2004:1).

The first Foundation Degree courses started pilot schemes in September 2001 and a target of 100,000 students has been set for 2010 (Foundation Degree Task Force, 2004). The Chairman of the Foundation Degree Task Force, Professor

Leslie Wagner, signified the perceived potential that Foundation Degrees have for moving vocational education on in the 21st century, yet also acknowledged the difficulties faced in fully integrating Foundation Degrees within the qualifications framework and in supporting effective and appropriate partnerships for work-based learning:

Foundation Degrees represent both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is to create a new type of provision meeting the need for a high quality, intermediate, vocational higher education qualification. The challenge is to produce it through partnership, developing effective work-based learning and integration with the existing qualification system (Foundation Degree Task Force, 2004:3).

The Task Force identified, then, an opportunity for Foundation Degrees to represent a ‘new type of provision’ – a distinctive higher level, work-based, vocational qualification. In this respect, QAA (2004) make it clear that the distinctiveness of the Foundation Degree is dependent upon not only its work-based nature, but also upon the integration of certain characteristics, which are employer involvement; accessibility; articulation and progression; flexibility, and partnership. Many of these characteristics are recognisable in other programmes, for example in the Higher National Diploma (HND) and vocational degree courses, but it is ‘their clear and planned integration within a single award, underpinned by work-based learning, that makes the award very distinctive’ (QAA, 2004:5). Crucially, it is the distinctiveness of these integrated features that may have some impact upon student learning, so these features are considered next, in turn.

2.4.1 Employer involvement

A driving force behind the introduction of Foundation Degrees was a demand from employers for a higher level of skills amongst the workforce (Higher Education Quality Council, 1994; DfEE, 1998a; DfEE, 1999a; Leitch (b), 2006). Foundation Degrees are therefore intended to give students the specific knowledge, understanding and skills that employers need. This implies employer involvement in the design of programmes and in monitoring the ‘currency’ of knowledge, skills and understanding that the programmes produce. However, the exact nature of employer involvement has not been specifically defined by policy makers, resulting in varied practice across the Foundation Degree sector. Edmond (2004) suggests that, within the practice of Foundation Degree delivery, and within relevant documentation, there is a perceived conflict between the desire to prioritise the needs of employers and ambiguous discourse regarding the role of employers that does not clarify their needs or specify their role. In my own roles as Foundation Degree programme leader at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln and as external examiner to Foundation Degrees at other English universities, I have observed that employer involvement could be as minimal as the provision of an environment in which the Foundation Degree student can work (as an employee or a volunteer) or as much as financial support and involvement in course design and assessment. Furthermore, the inherent difficulty involved in engaging employers has become an all too familiar theme within Foundation Degree delivery. For example, work by Foskett (2003) emphasises the difficulties and barriers to curriculum change within the context of

partnership working, citing cultural disparities between academic institution and workplace as a particular challenge when attempting to meet a variety of expectations from stakeholders.

The Foundation Degree Task Force, charged with advising the government on future implementation strategy for Foundation Degrees, was asked to consider how best to secure employer involvement, with the resulting report describing employer involvement as ‘at the heart of what makes the Foundation Degree distinctive’ (Foundation Degree Task Force, 2004:28). The Task Force suggested three strands of employer involvement, which form a useful framework around which to consider progress in this area: involvement in development and design; delivery and assessment; supporting students and employing Foundation Degree graduates, with a view to giving credibility to the Foundation Degree qualification.

In relation to development and design, the Leitch Report (Leitch (b), 2006) – tasked with considering the UK’s long-term skills needs – has explicitly championed the further development of work-based courses that not only respond to employer demand, but which also attract financial investment from the employer as key stakeholder. Such investment is expected to cover all levels of work-based education and training from apprenticeships for school leavers, to the development of more intermediate-level degree courses (such as Foundation Degrees) for adults in order to support the development of higher-level skills.

The direction given by Leitch reflects the QAA Foundation Degree qualification benchmark (2004) which states explicitly the expectation that employers will be involved in the design and review of Foundation Degrees. In this respect, Brennan (2004) cites the successful model of Foundation Degrees in Police Studies, for which employers have been fully involved in programme design, assessment and workplace support, thus incorporating all three strands of employer involvement, as suggested by the Task Force. However, this is perhaps an isolated success story, for a collection of case studies presented by Brennan and Gosling (2004) generally present a much poorer picture in terms of employer engagement:

Many of the authors refer to a lack of understanding by employers of what is expected of them and confess to being uncertain about the nature and status of the foundation degree qualification [...] In some cases real tensions have been reported between the emphasis on training and specialist skills demanded by employers and the academic requirements of degree level study (Brennan and Gosling, 2004: 15).

However, if securing employer involvement in the development and design stages is a challenge in itself, retaining involvement in delivery and possibly in assessment – the second recommendation from the Foundation Degree Task Force (2004) – becomes the next hurdle. For example, Green (2006) was surprised to find instances where regular meetings between employers and course teams seemed very rare. The exchange of information seemed to be a cause for concern with some partnerships, and he found that:

the experience of what was required of the employer/provider in respect of work-based learning opportunities seemed to be surrounded by vagueness in many cases. Few had received any kind of guidance from course staff about the kind of work the student might be expected to produce; the

process for supervising the component; the role of mentoring (only existing in few cases); the process of giving feedback to students, and the role played by the providing organisation in the process (Green, 2006: 30).

Furthermore, Duckworth (2006) described the difficulties in securing employer representation at university-based meetings designed to assure programme quality. Employers cited the following reasons for non-engagement: ‘geographical constraints; time available, and timing of meetings to name but a few’ (Duckworth, 2006: 47). Perhaps Green and Duckworth had uncovered more of the cultural disparities between academy and workplace found by Foskett (2003), or perhaps the ineffective relationship between employer and higher education institution was purely down to poor communication. Either way, the learning experience for the work-based student becomes a cause for concern when employers are not engaged effectively, with a real danger being that ‘there is the temptation to dilute the vital work-based learning components in Foundation Degrees. This needs resisting’ (Connor, 2005: 25).

Government discourse makes employer involvement in Foundation Degrees a requirement, but still does not clarify the extent to which involvement by a single employer may be required. For example, Green (2006) found different perspectives on the benefit of work-based components within the courses investigated. Students in employment experienced different levels of flexibility from their employers in terms of gaining additional work experience, often dependent upon the sector in which they were working. For example, service constraints within the Health and Social Care sector meant that students could not

gain an insight into professional areas beyond their own work situation. For students who were responsible for securing a voluntary work placement, Green found that there were dangers inherent in the student's reliance upon the employer to provide worthwhile working and learning experiences for them. This resulted in situations where some students were not fully integrated into the organisation and, in some cases, involved in work that may have been inappropriate for the student to engage in.

Hulbert has suggested that, in order to avoid some of the problematic areas outlined above, employer engagement 'does need to be better understood and articulated as a longitudinal continuum of partnership' (Hulbert, 2007:13). Such a partnership would involve employer and higher education institution collaboration not only with course design, but also profile raising for the Foundation Degree through marketing (nationally and locally) in order to develop a shared understanding amongst the academic and work-based communities of the unique features of the Foundation Degree related to employer engagement. The continuum would then need to extend more explicitly to the employment of Foundation Degree graduates – the final part of the third strand to the Foundation Degree Task Force's recommendations.

2.4.2 Accessibility, articulation and progression

The political impetus behind the introduction of Foundation Degrees had the agenda of inclusion and access at its centre. The Foundation Degree benchmark

states explicitly that 'Foundation Degrees are intended to increase access and widen participation into higher education' (QAA, 2004:5). This could be interpreted as access related to both geographical proximity of an institution and to ease of access to the course by students with non-traditional qualifications (usually qualifications other than A levels). Therefore, Foundation Degrees are expected to be delivered locally, targeting local students, and may take account of experience as well as qualifications when assessing entry qualifications for the course. Additionally, many learners should be able to work full or part time, often as part of their Foundation Degree, or combine voluntary work relevant to the course with paid employment elsewhere, thus increasing accessibility in terms of financial support.

In addition, the benchmark states that 'Foundation Degrees are intended to make a valuable contribution to lifelong learning' (QAA, 2004:5). In this respect, a further defining characteristic of the Foundation Degree is the prospect of progression within work and/or to a suitable honours degree. This feature was emphasised at the consultation stage (DfEE, 2000a) as an essential component of the new qualification. By situating the Foundation Degree as a level 5 qualification in higher education, achievement at this level can provide progression opportunities to other higher education and/or professional qualifications. Therefore, here are built-in aspirational possibilities for Foundation Degree students in terms of progressing to honours degree study, which may open up further possibilities for future progression within the

postgraduate qualifications framework. Thus, Foundation Degrees have the real potential to contribute to the widening participation agenda.

However, although access and progression policies for Foundation Degree students are designed to increase numbers of non-traditional entrants to higher education, support for such students goes far beyond just providing an opportunity to engage with higher education. Unless well supported, Foundation Degree students are in danger of not feeling well prepared for higher education study. In addition, previous negative experiences of educational systems (for example, failure to achieve academic qualifications at school) may have imbued within the Foundation Degree student feelings of self-doubt, whilst the management of multiple roles as part-time student, employee and possibly even parent can mean that the experience of higher-level study is characterised by conflict and struggle. Indeed, conflict and struggle are themes that recur throughout this thesis for the Foundation Degree learner. Nevertheless, key principles that underpin the design and delivery of Foundation Degrees in relation to flexibility and partnership have the potential to create learning environments that could mitigate difficulties for the Foundation Degree learner and it is these aspects of the Foundation Degree that are considered next.

2.4.3 Flexibility and partnership

The notion of flexibility is applied broadly to Foundation Degrees to include the institution, the learner and the employer. Institutions are expected to recognise

and respond to the needs of learners from a variety of backgrounds and with a range of qualifications and experience. In practice, this might mean flexible study patterns (for example, full and part time, distance learning, evening and weekend learning, web-based learning etc.) (QAA, 2004). In addition, it might lead to keener attention being given to flexibility of teaching strategies, buoyed in higher education pedagogy circles in recent years by a greater understanding of how students learn, developed against a backdrop of moves to professionalise teaching in higher education². However, Challis (2005a: 18) acknowledges that ‘Flexibility in this context is a difficult issue to pin down’, contending that flexible delivery is not just a matter of curriculum change, but that ‘truly flexible provision is built around specific and identified needs of prospective learners on the programme’. True flexibility, then, demands a consideration of the learner and their needs – an approach that attempts to provide a learning experience that is relevant to the individual rather than expecting the individual to adapt him/herself to a fixed programme of study.

Flexible delivery is underlined in the Foundation Degree Task Force Report (2004) as an important factor for accessibility. This can mean a very different student experience for Foundation Degree students to that of ‘conventional’ students. However, the flexibility demanded of Foundation Degree delivery is now expected more widely within higher education, in the context of widening

² Dearing (1997) recommended that teaching staff within Higher Education should follow accredited programmes of teacher training. In 2006, the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education was introduced. This provides a flexible framework of standards upon which teaching programmes can be based. The Higher Education Academy accredits programmes which meet the standards.

access initiatives. For example, the survey conducted by Osborne and Young (2006) of widening access initiatives across the UK described the range as including in-reach (developing new ways for potential students to access provision), out-reach (collaboration, partnership and raising awareness of the benefits of higher education to under-represented groups) and also as to do with ‘transformations and adjustments to the structure, administrations and delivery of HE programmes’ (Osborne and Young, 2006:6) – in other words, concerned with more flexibility. Osborne and Young summarise the trend towards flexibility:

Flexibility in the context of widening participation refers to both spatial and temporal matters, namely changes that allow students access to education in locations and modes, and at times that, to at least a certain degree, are of individuals’ rather than institutions’ choosing (Osborne and Young, 2006: 9).

Partnerships within Foundation Degrees may be made across a wide spectrum. For example, higher education and further education partnerships, employer and institution partnerships, partnership with other organisations such as sector skills councils, to name but a few. Partnerships with employers have already been identified (above) as a challenging area largely due to different expectations and cultural disparities on the part of the academic institution and the employer. Higher education and further education partnerships are also not without their challenges. The ‘Foundation Degree Forward’³ database of courses and locations reveals that a wide range of further education colleges are delivering Foundation Degrees validated by higher education partners. However, such partnerships have

³ Foundation Degree Forward is a national body, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, that supports the development and validation of high quality Foundation Degrees. More information can be found at www.fdf.ac.uk

been subject to change as local circumstances and alliances have developed, as institutional policy has changed and also as national policy has developed.

In summary, Foundation Degrees possess certain characteristics – namely employer involvement; accessibility, articulation and progression; flexibility and partnership (QAA, 2004) – which, if fully integrated, have the potential to render the Foundation Degree programme a unique educational offering to those who previously would not have entered higher education. This section has considered the challenges that these characteristics present to Foundation Degree design and delivery and the varying degrees of success seen across the higher education sector in this respect. For example, Foundation Degrees are seen to contribute to widening access initiatives within higher education, thus implying reasonable accessibility to students, but less successful has been employer engagement and partnership working. There is still confusion, particularly amongst employers, as to exactly what the Foundation Degree is (for example, in terms of how it relates to other higher education qualifications, and the balance of academic/vocational content) and what the employer role is in terms of design and delivery. This has the potential to adversely affect the quality of the work-based learning experience for the student and so employer engagement in Foundation Degree delivery emerges as a theme for further discussion in later chapters of this thesis.

Having surveyed the expansion of higher education, the nature of work-based higher education, the ‘new vocationalism’ and policies particular to Foundation

Degree delivery, the final parts of this chapter give further detail relating to the specific research context. This covers Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants, and a brief foray into the Teaching Assistants' role, plus associated training opportunities.

2.5 Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln

Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, founded by the Church of England in 1862, is an independent university college of higher education. To celebrate its centenary in 1962, it took its name from the thirteenth century medieval educator and scholar, Bishop Robert Grosseteste of Lincoln. It gained taught degree awarding powers and University College status in 2006 and has a strategic alliance with the University of Leicester to support the development and validation of research degrees. Within the UK higher education sector, the University College is relatively small (around 1500 students). Traditionally, the University College has been known for its work in teacher education, but within recent years the range of programmes delivered at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln has broadened considerably to include a range of education, arts and humanities programmes (appendix 2.2). In order to reflect the growing diversity of its portfolio, two academic schools were created in 2006: the 'School of Culture, Education and Innovation' and the 'School of Teacher Development'.

The University College's core beliefs and values include a commitment 'to being an inclusive community which welcomes and hosts a diverse population of students' (Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, 2007: 5). The development of Foundation Degrees at the University College is evidence of such a commitment. In 2001, the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants became one of the first Foundation Degrees piloted in England and Wales. Developed in partnership with the University of Leicester, the course became a model upon which future Foundation Degree development at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln was based. By 2007, four Foundation Degrees within the sectors of education, children's services, youth services and arts management had been developed by the University College.

2.6 The Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants

The Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants is situated within the School for Culture, Education and Innovation. The original programme was developed in partnership with the University of Leicester and associated Colleges of Further Education and welcomed its first cohort of 32 students to Bishop Grosseteste University College in September 2001. In 2004 the annual intake was increased to 55 students and the programme was reviewed and revalidated during 2005. The course attracts students from within the East Midlands area, usually covering the counties of Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, South Yorkshire, Cambridgeshire, and

Nottinghamshire. With only one or two exceptions each year, all students are classified as mature students (over the age of 25 years). The majority of students have no experience of academic study beyond GCSE level, but bring with them vocationally-related qualifications and experience relevant to their work role. Taking these facts together, the profile of the Foundation Degree student would be described as 'non-traditional' in higher education terms. In September 2003 the first Foundation Degree graduates progressed to an honours course which also contains large elements of work-based learning. This is congruent with expectations set out in the Foundation Degree benchmark (QAA, 2004), which outlines the valuable part that Foundation Degrees can play in promoting lifelong learning, including opportunities to progress to other higher education programmes.

The programme specification (Bishop Grosseteste College, 2005) features all the characteristics of a Foundation Degree, as described in the Foundation Degree qualification benchmark statement (QAA, 2004). For example, in terms of employer involvement, employers are represented on the Programme Committee that meets three times a year to monitor student progress and assure course quality. In addition, employers are asked to ensure that each student has a mentor in their workplace, whose role is to help the student practically with aspects of the work-based learning programme. The course is designed to be accessible to students who are employed or volunteering in schools. Taught sessions are delivered over an afternoon and an evening each week during University College

term time, therefore demanding minimum release time from employment for the student. The course builds upon curriculum content studied at NVQ levels 2 and 3 for teaching assistants and associated courses, and two clear progression routes articulate from the Foundation Degree, enabling students to gain an honours degree and, in some cases, honours with qualified teacher status (QTS). In addition, the changing nature of partnership working has been experienced first hand by Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln. When the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants was initially developed in 2001 it was done through a consortium consisting of: Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln (then a College of Higher Education); a university (which validated the degree); a cluster of further education colleges already linked to the university and (because of the nature of the course and its focus on school as the workplace) relevant local authorities. Currently, the nature of partnership is quite different, as the University College now has taught degree awarding powers and validates its own courses. Therefore, Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln is now delivering the programme independently of the university, has developed its own relationships with relevant local authorities and sector skills councils, and is cultivating relationships with partner further education colleges who may be interested in delivering the programme on a 'franchise' basis.

The programme is designed to develop understanding of teaching and learning in a variety of educational settings including Early Years, Primary, Special and Secondary schools, with reference to the roles of teaching assistants. This is done

through twelve modules, assessed through a range of modes. The modules, content and associated assessment for academic years 2004-2006 are detailed in appendix 2.3. Entry requirements include two years experience in school as a Teaching Assistant, or equivalent; normally, at least 5 GCSEs at grades A to C or equivalent (for example, NVQs or Access Programmes), and written support from the headteacher of the school (or educational workplace manager) in which the applicant works or volunteers as a Teaching Assistant (Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, 2005).

The programme specification details the following outcomes, which students are expected to achieve by the end of the course:

- demonstrate detailed subject knowledge and understanding of the core areas of the mainstream curriculum in the UK;
- demonstrate detailed knowledge, understanding and evaluation skills of a range of professional issues related to the teaching assistant's role in UK schools;
- apply knowledge, understanding and experience in their own workplace and in new environments;
- take responsibility for their own learning, acting with increasing autonomy;
- use core skills (literacy, numeracy and ICT) and key skills (group working, self evaluation, communication skills and problem solving) in learning support contexts;
- analyse, synthesise and evaluate a range of ideas and information, to improve and inform practice in the workplace;
- have the transferable skills necessary for further employment and progression, including to a relevant honours degree.

(Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, 2005: 3)

In addition to the Foundation Degree Benchmark (QAA, 2004) the programme specification draws upon aspects of the QAA Education Studies benchmark

(QAA, 2000) statements at 'threshold standard'. The statements are designed for honours level courses, but the Foundation Degree enables students to work towards these and, in some cases, meet the benchmark statements. Overall, then, the programme aims to equip teaching assistants to take on higher level roles within school and also provides a progression route for those seeking to study for an honours degree and/or pursue Qualified Teacher Status.

2.7 Teaching Assistants

'Teaching Assistant' (TA) has become the generic term used to describe a range of additional adult support in primary, secondary and special school classrooms. Such support roles can range from specialist learning support (usually working alongside pupils with identifiable and specific learning difficulties) to more general classroom support. It may include supporting groups of pupils, often in the core subject areas of mathematics and English, or even delivering parts of lessons to whole classes. Such roles have enjoyed a wide variety of job titles including classroom assistant, welfare assistant, child support assistant, 1:1 learning support assistant and ancillary assistant.

I have witnessed first hand the changing roles and increase in numbers of TAs working in primary schools since the late 1980s. As a trainee teacher in 1988 and 1989, I had no access to TA support in the classroom. From 1990 to 1993 in my first teaching post, a general 'Welfare Assistant' was assigned to my class for one or two hours a week, so I tended to timetable practical activities such as art,

design technology or cookery then, knowing that I would have a spare pair of hands. My experience was similar to that of Wilkie (2006) who describes working with TAs as a class teacher in the 1980s:

In my first employment as a primary teacher in a foundation stage class of 31 I had support for one session a week, but TAs were only allowed to prepare materials or take small groups outside the classroom for art or cooking. They were not allowed to hear readers or work in the classroom. They took their breaks at different times from the teaching staff and were not invited to meetings. Less than 10 years ago it was common to see a TA vacancy advertised by a card in the window at school, or a parent helper would be asked to do a few hours to support a child...no interview, no job description, no contract, or a short term one that was easy to finish, no appraisal, or inclusion in meetings.

In 2007 there were 165,380 teaching assistants in Maintained Schools – up from 61,260 in 1997 (DCSF, 2008). Increases in the numbers of TAs had already been seen prior to 1997, as a result of the introduction of the National Curriculum (DES, 1988) and the introduction of statutory requirements enshrined within the Code of Practice for supporting pupils with Special Educational Needs (DfEE, 1994). In September 1998 the National Literacy Strategy was introduced (DfEE, 1998b), followed by the National Numeracy Strategy in 1999 (DfEE, 1999b). These frameworks introduced specific curriculum content for all primary year groups, with an expectation that pupils would be able to work through the framework for their year group. This led to a further deployment of TAs to support literacy and numeracy teaching.

In 2002 the DfES stated ‘Our vision is to unlock the full potential of the school workforce to raise standards of pupil achievement, through developing the role of

support staff' (DfES, 2002: 6). In this respect, in January 2003, 'Raising Standards and Tackling Workload: A National Agreement' was signed by school workforce unions, local government employers and the Government. This ushered in a series of important changes to teachers' conditions of service and also opened the way for enhanced roles for school support staff as part of a remodelling of the school workforce. Stephen Twigg (then Minister for Schools) underlined the pace of change: 'Schools are becoming more complex organisations and the work of support staff is becoming more varied and demanding' (TTA, 2005:3).

However, despite the rapid growth in the numbers of TAs recruited from the 1980s onwards, and the more varied roles being undertaken by TAs, appropriate training and development for TAs was slow to emerge. In the early 1990s, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI, 1992) highlighted the significant contribution made by non-teaching staff in schools, but lamented the lack of training for many TAs in these roles. Therefore, the increase in training opportunities for TAs became a significant theme over the next decade. In the mid 1990s the Specialist Teacher Assistant Course (STAC) was established, in order to 'provide staff who could support teachers in delivering basic skills' (Kerry, 2001:5). Interestingly, such courses required partnership between higher education institutions and Local Education Authorities, reflecting the move towards work-based models as demonstrated in the later Foundation Degrees. OFSTED (1999) in DfEE (2000b:7) explicitly highlighted well-trained TAs as a key resource for supporting

effective teaching and learning in primary schools, and by 2004 the growth in training opportunities led some commentators to suggest that a 'professionalisation' of TAs within the UK was underway (Sage and Wilkie, 2004; Drake, Jacklin, Robinson and Thorp, 2004). Sage and Wilkie summarise the developments in training as comprising 'a range of courses from level 2 (GCSE equivalent) to Degree level, short-term and extended, in colleges and universities, or in school through NVQs' (Sage and Wilkie, 2004:19).

The Teacher Training Agency stated in their plans for support staff training and development 2005-06 that 'Our aim is that all support staff have access to high quality training and development' (TTA, 2005:4). Within the documentation, the emphasis is on vocational training, with clear progression through the National Qualifications Framework, alongside professional recognition through Higher Level Teaching Assistant Status (HLTA). Under the HLTA programme, support staff are assessed against HLTA standards (TDA, 2007) and are often then deployed in enhanced roles in response to the remodelling agenda. Drake et al. (2004) argue that the most recent developments in TA training and the move towards a 'professionalisation of TAs' (Sage and Wilkie, 2004:8) mirror parallel developments in teacher education and training. Of particular importance is the move towards more school-based, reflective approaches to professional development and it is within this framework that Foundation Degrees for TAs have developed as higher-level qualifications suitable for academic and professional work-based learning.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the research context, beginning with an overview of the significant changes within the UK higher education landscape since the 1960s and situating Foundation Degrees against this backdrop as a response to both higher education expansion and to changing attitudes towards vocational learning. The growth of work-based learning within higher education has also been charted as part of ‘the new vocationalism’ (Symes and McIntyre, 2000). In addition, unique features pertaining to the Foundation Degree model (QAA, 2004) have been presented in order to convey the distinctiveness of the qualification and the specificity of the case study context was outlined with an introduction to Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln and to the course undertaken by the three case study students – the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants. Finally, a brief insight was given into Teaching Assistant roles and training opportunities. The next chapter maps the threads of inquiry that recur throughout the thesis in relation to understanding what it is like to learn through a Foundation Degree.

Chapter Three

Mapping the threads of inquiry

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to contextualise and map the threads of inquiry that inform analysis of and discussion about the three individual students' accounts which are in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. I have taken a necessarily iterative approach to constructing this chapter, completing some of the work early on in the research process in order to gain a sense of the field under scrutiny, but also returning to this chapter periodically as new threads of inquiry have inductively emerged from the data (Gray, 2004; Silverman, 2005; Scott and Morrison, 2007). Thus, mapping the threads of inquiry has been a continuous process, rather than a single act undertaken in the early stages of the research, as is often done with the traditional 'literature review' model. I decided not to undertake a traditional 'literature review' because I felt such a review would have overly constrained my interpretation of the data as it emerged. This approach reflects the view of Garman, who highlights the dangers of producing a narrowly conceived literature review:

We find the concept of "the review of the literature" to be problematic. It suggests a dysfunctional notion that a one-chapter review of literature is a precursor to, rather than an integral part of the study. Furthermore, there may be a residue of linear thinking reflected in statements about *the* review of *the* literature, implying that there is a single body of literature, to be reviewed only once (Garman, 2006: 8).

The resulting chapter seeks to avoid dysfunctional linearity. Instead, I aim to provide an initial platform for presenting relevant literature which will be revisited and integrated throughout the thesis.

Chapter Two provided a summary of the historical and political development of the Foundation Degree, against the backdrop of change within UK higher education which has seen considerable expansion since the early 1960s. In addition, the key features of Foundation Degrees were considered in the context of policy documents, in order to demonstrate that Foundation Degrees do have unique characteristics amongst a plethora of vocationally-related courses available at different levels to students in England and Wales. This chapter focuses more generally upon learners and learning. It starts by considering forms of knowledge and how they relate to learning within academic and workplace environments. I then turn to what it means to be a student and I identify experience as a key resource for the adult learner. In addition, consideration is given to learner identity, to how the learner views him or herself and to the part that ‘will’ and motivation play in learning. The chapter continues by exploring the theoretical models that underpin learning in the workplace, focussing on learning as social practice and returning to the role of experience.

3.2 Forms of knowledge

I outlined in Chapter Two significant changes that have occurred within the UK higher education landscape since the 1960s. These included the expansion of

higher education and a political desire to reconstruct traditional understandings of higher education within the context of the working world. A consequence of such change has been a gradual deconstruction of traditional knowledge and institutional boundaries and therefore this is a thread of inquiry that warrants further investigation.

In a seminal work (reappraising the nature of knowledge) Lyotard, Bennington and Massumi (1984) suggest that knowledge has moved from being an abstract notion and the exclusive privilege of the intellectual elite, to becoming a fragmented commodity, relevant to specific settings and situations. As well as the nature of knowledge, sites of knowledge production have also shifted (Delanty, 2001). More specifically in the context of higher education, in a work-based course the workplace becomes a potential site of knowledge production, alongside the university (Tennant, 2000; Boud, 2001). However, the kinds of knowledge generated by workplace and academic institution may be very different and an understanding of the differences is an important thread in developing an appreciation of learning in the workplace. The following discussion is based primarily around the influential work of Gibbons et al. (1994) and the two modes of knowledge they have identified and around theories related to professional knowledge, considering Eraut's (1994) work in particular.

In the context of debates about the shifting nature of knowledge and its production, Gibbons et al. (1994) describe two sorts of knowledge production, calling them modes one and two. The features can be summarised thus:

| Mode one knowledge | Mode two knowledge |
|--|--|
| Academic context | Produced in the context of application |
| Disciplinary knowledge | Transdisciplinary knowledge |
| Homogenous characteristics | Heterogeneous characteristics |
| Hierarchical knowledge | Transient |
| Produced inside 'traditional universities' | More socially accountable |
| | More reflexive |
| | Increasingly produced outside 'traditional' university' settings |

Figure 3.1: Mode one and mode two knowledge

The mode two list is aligned to the 'new' view of knowledge, where transdisciplinarity and the notion of knowledge produced within the context of application are key characteristics. It also appears to fit with the ideas discussed previously in relation to the situational and socially shaped nature of learning in the workplace (Raelin, 2000; Beaney, 2005). For example, knowledge produced through learning within a community of practice where groups of people share a common concern and grow together in their learning as they interact with one another (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) mirrors the notion of developing knowledge in the context of a particular application (the first aspect of mode two knowledge in figure 3.1).

In addition, the situatedness of workplace learning means that knowledge is specific to the workplace context and develops interactively and cumulatively in

that context, rather than being derived from an academically contextualised theoretical solution. Furthermore, the cross-disciplinary, transient nature of such knowledge demands from the learner a reflexive approach, which parallels the reflection upon action that must be taken when engaging in any experiential learning (Schön, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991, 1997).

However, in the discussion about the modes one and two model, Boud (2001) makes it clear that mode one knowledge is not rendered unnecessary, but that it may be 'subordinated to other, more pressing agendas' (Boud, 2001:37). So we can argue that this is the case for the work-based learner engaged in a Foundation Degree programme, where aspects of mode one knowledge are clearly relevant for a course that demands collaboration between academic institution and workplace, but where knowledge generated within the workplace (mode two knowledge) also holds legitimacy. Boud observes that a key challenge of the work-based learning curriculum is the extent to which the two modes of knowledge are reconciled, in order to design a curriculum that is both accessible and relevant for the work-based learner.

In the next section of this chapter ('Being a student'), I discuss that learning involves both individual (cognitive and ontogeneous) and social elements. In parallel to and as part of 'being', forms of knowledge and learning can also be considered from individual and social perspectives. Bierema and Eraut (2004) define personal knowledge as 'what individual persons bring to situations that

enables them to think, interact, and perform' (2004: 64), suggesting that the individual view of knowledge deals with personal interpretations of how learning takes place and also of what is learned. A socially situated perspective is informed by social constructivism⁴ and the range of contexts for learning, as well as cultural practices that provide learning resources (Bierema and Eraut, 2004). Within the socially-based practices of work-based learning, cultural knowledge – defined by Bierema and Eraut as the 'cultural practices and products that provide knowledge resources for learning' (2004: 63) – has considerable significance, but is not formally recognised. Indeed, Bierema and Eraut suggest that 'most cultural knowledge [...] has not been codified but still plays a key role in most work-based practices and activities' (Bierema and Eraut, 2004:63). Much of this cultural knowledge is gained through informal workplace learning (a form of work-based learning identified by Lohman, 2000; Guile and Young, 2001; Dirkx et al., 2002) and people are often unaware of its influence.

Eraut's work on theories of professional expertise and the development of a map of professional knowledge are particularly relevant for work-based learning and especially for specific sectors such as education. Eraut (1994) considers three types of knowledge:

⁴ Social constructivism: where learners make meanings and grow in understanding through social encounters.

| Type of knowledge | Key characteristics |
|--------------------------|--|
| Propositional | Most traditional basis of teaching in Higher Education Discipline-based Theory Concepts |
| Personal | Based upon the impressions, experience and encounters of everyday life Some discrete experiences develop meaning when they are reflected upon |
| Process | Uses propositional knowledge Is about ‘knowing how’ – metaprocesses, skilled behaviour, deliberative processes |

Figure 3.2: Propositional, personal and process knowledge

When related to the model developed by Gibbons et al. (1994), Eraut’s ‘propositional’ type of knowledge most closely resembles Gibbons et al.’s mode one knowledge. Eraut’s ‘personal’ knowledge refers to the contribution that a learner’s personal history makes to the situated learning experience. Eraut suggests that personal knowledge gains validity through the development of higher-level skills of reflection within the workplace, thus demonstrating affinity with the necessity of incorporating reflection within a work-based pedagogy in order to draw meaning from experience. Indeed, I would suggest that it is only through reflective practice in the workplace that students are able to make meaning of propositional knowledge, thus process knowledge sums up very well a key aspect of work-based learning pedagogy. For the Foundation Degree, therefore, the bringing together of professional and practical knowledge with subject-based, academic knowledge can result in a course that, if care is not taken, pulls in two directions. The challenge, then, is the integration of the two strands

without compromising either type of knowledge brought to the course by student, workplace or institution.

3.3 Being a student

3.3.1 Adult learners

Mel, Sam and Heather – the three case study students central to this thesis – are all mature students, so it is important to map a thread of inquiry related to learning in adulthood. The literature related to adult learning has multiplied significantly over the past thirty years or so, alongside the growing interest in lifelong learning, that is adult and continuing education provision at all levels from basic skills programmes to courses of higher education. As a result, the territory related to adult learning theory is diverse and complex (for example: Merriam 2001a, 2001b; Kiely, Sandmann and Truluck, 2004; Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner, 2007). Nevertheless, certain ideas have become more prominent than others and have become synonymous with adult learning theory – in particular Knowles’ andragogy (1978, 1980, 1984) and Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning (1991, 1997), which are viewed as ‘foundational’ theories or models of adult learning by Merriam (2001b: 93), and aspects of work that connect to experiential learning such as the model developed by Kolb (1984). Kolb’s work will be explored in later sections of this chapter, but Knowles and Mezirow warrant exploration here.

Knowles (1978, 1980, 1984) originally used the term 'andragogy' to describe a learning theory that he believed was specifically applicable to adults and that, for him, contrasted with pedagogy which applied to children. The theoretical model was dependent upon key underlying assumptions regarding adult learners including their capability to learn independently; their use of life experience in their learning; their desire to apply knowledge to solve problems and their internal motivation to learn. As Light and Cox comment, Knowles' model:

attributes to adults a rich social and cultural reservoir of meaningful experience, a readiness to learn characterized by a real need to know and do; a life-centred, problem-centred and task-centred orientation to learning, and intrinsic, personal and emotional motivators such as confidence and self-esteem (Light and Cox, 2001: 58-59).

Merriam et al. suggest that Knowles' theory 'actually tells us more about the characteristics of adult learners than about the nature of learning itself' (Merriam et al., 2007: 79). Indeed, in this respect, Knowles used the assumed characteristics as key influences for the design of adult learning programmes, learning environments and adult-oriented teaching approaches. However, as he came to realise that such characteristics were not applicable to all adults (for example, some would learn independently and others would rely more on the teacher; some would be internally motivated to learn and others would need extrinsic motivating factors) Knowles moved to a view that andragogy and pedagogy were not necessarily particular to adult and child learning respectively (Knowles, 1984). Rather he represented his ideas as being related to a continuum ranging from student-directed to teacher-directed learning (Merriam, 2001a; Merriam et al., 2007), accepting that recognising and using the experience of the

adult learner would tend to push them towards the student-directed end of the continuum. Therefore, within the andragogical tradition, it is the adult learner's experience that becomes the most important resource for learning (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 2002).

Whilst Knowles' work enables us to understand the characteristics of some adult learners, Mezirow's (1991, 1997) theory of transformative learning explores further the question of how adults learn. Transformative learning, from Mezirow's perspective has at its core the process of change and for adult learners who have already acquired experiences, values, feelings, and perspectives through their life histories, it is concerned with effecting change within an experiential frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997). Merriam et al. identify four components of the transformative learning process: 'experience, critical reflection, reflective discourse and action' (Merriam et al., 2007: 134). Thus, the process starts with the learner's experiences, but involves critical self-analysis and reflection upon the experience in order to effect a transformation of perspective and the creation of new meaning. Reflecting upon Mezirow's (1991) theory, Clarke explains that:

Transformative learning may be triggered by any event in our personal and social life that challenges the assumptions on which we have based our interpretations of experience. This forces a re-evaluation of those assumptions and the development of new meanings in a process of critical reflection and rational discourse (Clarke, 2002: 68).

The suggestion here is that the potential for transformational learning is situated within the learner but that, for the adult learner, personal reflection and wider discussion are vital elements in the transformational learning process.

However, Merriam (2004) and Merriam et al. (2007) present far reaching critiques of Mezirow's work. Merriam (2004) argues that, in theory, transformational learning should occur only within those who exhibit high levels of cognitive functioning, because 'critical reflection and reflective discourse assume a certain level of cognitive development' (Merriam, 2004: 63). The implication for this position is that the possibility for transformational learning within individuals could be significantly curtailed by their cognitive maturity, although Donaldson's (1978) work revealed that children (in other words the seemingly cognitively immature) have the capacity for higher order, abstract thinking if the context has a sense of purpose.

Despite such criticisms, transformational learning theory does have relevance for the Foundation Degree model, where workplace experiences are used by students as the starting point for critical reflection and the creation of new meaning. This, in turn, points to a particular role for the higher education tutor as 'a *facilitator* and *provocateur* rather than as an authority on subject matter' (Mezirow, 1991: 11). In taking on such a role, the tutor acknowledges the characteristics of adult learners (Knowles, 1984) and in particular the experiences that they bring to their learning. The implication is that the tutor supports critical reflection upon that experience through facilitating wider discussion, thus taking on a discursive role in supporting learning, rather than imparting knowledge. In this respect, the relationship between tutorial support and student learning is returned to later in the thesis.

3.3.2 Self-theories and identity

The case study students all fall into the category of ‘non-traditional’ (HEFCE, 1997) – being over the age of 25 years on entry to the University College and possessing non-standard entry qualifications. It is fairly well established that being at university presents students from non-traditional backgrounds with a number of challenges to their sense of identity, belonging and self-esteem (Burn and Finnegan, 2003; Reay, 2003; Bhatti, 2003; Bowl, 2003; Hockings, Cooke and Bowl, 2007). Such students have described entering higher education as ‘entering a new world’ Bainbridge (2005:3) and of feeling as if they are operating as ‘an outsider in the academy’ (Burn and Finnigan, 2003: 119), a term I identify with in Chapter One of this thesis when describing my own early experiences of being at an elite university. These feelings stem from having to cope with the unfamiliarity of academic practice – a notion explored by Street (1984), Lea and Street (2000) and Hoadley-Maidment (2000) with the concept of ‘academic literacy’. Therefore, the complexity of changing and shifting identity (or, the way a person understands and views him or herself) for each of the case study students represents a potentially rich thread for investigation.

For the non-traditional student, the potential for reappraising identity and sense of self begins as soon as they start within higher education. For example, Reay explores transitions to higher education and the role that social class plays. She examines ‘how a sense of self [...] influenced the meanings [the students] ascribed to higher education’ (Reay, 2003: 53), yet that same sense of self is being

moulded and changed by the higher education experience to which they subscribe, often creating uncertainty and anxiety (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 2002; Barnett, 2007).

For non-traditional students, such uncertainties and anxieties are thrown into sharper relief, as they have not had their academic dispositions shaped in the traditionally expected way, through A-levels, sixth form and preparation for university (Reay, 2003) and therefore have no code or framework to revert to. Lea and Street (2000) explain that ‘learning in higher education involves adapting to new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge’ (2000: 32). Essentially, these ‘new ways’ use academic literacy practices as the central mechanism through which students learn. Such practices incorporate forms of communication found within the university environment, such as the lecture, seminar, essay and resources such as the academic journal article. Street (1984) describes the process of reading for academic purposes as ‘unusual’ when compared to the common practices of reading and writing, such as shopping lists, newspapers, signs. It is not surprising, then, that non-traditional students struggle to feel comfortable within an academic environment where they are expected to learn the conventions expected of academic writing very quickly, building upon the prior knowledge they bring from school – the struggle is particularly difficult if their school experience was not commensurately ‘academic’. For the mature student on a professional or work-based course, the problem is exacerbated further, because ‘many students on professional courses

are mature students who followed vocational rather than academic paths on leaving school' (Hoadley-Maidment, 2000: 167). Such pathways would not necessarily prepare the student for coping with academic practice.

Reay (2003) also argues that 'the advent of mass HE [...] has led to the creation of new stigmatised universities and new stigmatised identities' (2003: 58). Such stigmatisation is apparent in the use of terminology which promotes a deficit model, identified by Gorard, Smith, May, Thomas, Adnett, and Slack (2006) – for example, terms such as 'non-traditional' student, or the contrast made between 'widening participation students' and those from 'traditional' backgrounds. Indeed, Gorard et al. identify that 'a key tension is between making special provision for non-traditional students and marking them out as being deficient in some way' (Gorard et al., 2006: 119). This 'marking out' and stigmatisation of identity for non-traditional students could have a significant impact upon Foundation Degree students, with Foundation Degrees potentially being viewed by some (including academics and work-based partners) as 'lesser' qualifications within the academy and an unequal student experience resulting for those enrolled upon Foundation Degree courses.

Furthermore, the work-based element of the Foundation Degree format (QAA, 2004; DfES, 2004a), discussed in the previous chapter, brings an added dimension to the challenges to student identity. Any Foundation Degree student possesses an identity within the academy, and also an identity within the workplace. As

workers or volunteers, membership of the ‘community of practice’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) brings with it a further context within which to define the self through paid or voluntary employment, and this is explored more fully in the next section of this chapter. Furthermore, as work-based learners, Foundation Degree students use the workplace as a resource for learning, thus conflating the student/employee identity when operating within the workplace. Finally, as mature students, the three case study students also possess identities related to their family roles, as parents and partners. With a ‘multiplicity of roles’ (Davies, Osborne and Williams, 2002:4), the tensions caused by managing a range of identities appear to be very real for the mature student as they juggle responsibilities in the home, at work and around their studies (Davies et al., 2002; Gorard et al., 2006).

As well as dealing with multiple and shifting identities and roles (Reay, 2003; Davies et al., 2002; Gorard et al., 2006) and the stigmatisation of identity through the widening participation agenda (Reay, 2003; Gorard et al., 2006), students bring their own belief systems about their academic capability to the higher education setting. In this respect the work of Dweck (2000) about self-theories is a thread worthy of consideration. Self-theories are the belief systems that learners have regarding the mutability of an attribute such as intelligence. Dweck distinguishes between entity and incremental beliefs – or fixed versus malleable views of intelligence:

Some people believe that their intelligence is a fixed trait. They have a certain amount of it and that’s that. We call this an “entity theory” of

intelligence because intelligence is portrayed as an entity that dwells within us and that we can't change. [...]Other people have a very different definition of intelligence. For them intelligence is not a fixed trait that they simply possess, but something they can cultivate through learning. We call this an "incremental theory" of intelligence because intelligence is portrayed as something that can be increased through one's efforts (Dweck, 2000: 2-3).

Dweck's premise is that the student who believes the 'entity theory' of intelligence can become worried about how intelligent they are. This results in them striving to appear intelligent, and therefore less likely to take risks in their learning as they do not want to make mistakes. In contrast, self-esteem in the incremental system becomes something that learners can achieve for themselves through making an effort with their learning, and this view motivates students to learn.

For the 'non-traditional' Foundation Degree student – who, we can speculate, is already struggling with multiple roles, changing identities and the practicalities of understanding higher education culture – whether they adopt an entity or incremental self-theory could have an impact upon their learning experience as well as sense of self. In their work considering the implications of self-theories for teaching and learning in higher education, Yorke and Knight (2004) contend that:

Students with entity beliefs tend to adopt performance goals, that is, they seek to demonstrate and confirm their (believed fixed) level of ability, and to avoid outcomes that would undermine this. Incremental self-theorists, on the other hand, tend to adopt learning goals, seeing the challenges they face as being opportunities for learning (Yorke and Knight, 2004: 27).

In this respect, in the context of self-belief being framed by an incremental view of learning, the personal element to learning effectively comes to the fore and becomes an important factor in achieving success.

3.3.3 Will and Motivation

In the light of the discussion above, about identity, belonging and self-esteem, being a student is far from straightforward for the non-traditional Foundation Degree learner. Rather, being a student seems likely to involve tensions, conflict and difficulty. Yet, in 2006, 90% of students who had begun the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln in 2004 graduated from the course (Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, 2006). Such high rates of completion are not unusual either, with provisional indicators from HEFCE (2007) suggesting that 80% of those who started Foundation Degree courses in 2002 gained the Foundation Degree qualification or higher. Therefore, the evidence indicates that the vast majority of students complete their studies, despite operating in a state of anxiety (Barnett, 2007).

Within the context of a higher education which contains a 'pedagogy of challenge' and therefore which 'calls for qualities of resilience and fortitude' (Barnett, 2007: 54), Barnett contends that "'Will' is the most important concept in education' (Barnett, 2007: 15). Indeed without a will to learn, the student cannot move forwards into new learning situations; it is the will that contributes to

students completing their course of higher education study. Thus, for Barnett, the very essence of being a student is linked to their 'will'. For mature higher education students in particular, their very presence on campus demonstrates that they are there through their own will – often despite other pressures on their time and additional family responsibilities not normally faced by the younger 'traditional' student. For example, the study by Davies et al. (2002) of mature students' decision making in relation to higher education participation revealed the following:

Barriers to entry were linked to the realities of mature student lives: a multiplicity of roles, costs of study, the need for a reliable source of income to meet existing commitments, the importance and value of caring responsibilities, and time problems. Personal factors acted as both motivators and disincentives: the desire to achieve was linked to self esteem and to the wish to act as a role model for the family but at the same time family responsibilities limited participation, increased stress. Juggling was a frequent metaphor (Davies et al., 2002: 4).

The metaphor of 'juggling' is a powerful one. It suggests that the mature student is constantly dealing with a variety of roles and situations which are all priorities and in this respect, for the mature student, engaging with higher education is just one of many responsibilities in an already complex life. Being a higher education student represents a significant practical commitment, but also an 'ontological commitment' (Barnett, 2007: 16). In other words, by willing him or herself to accept the discipline that engaging in study entails, the student is committing to a new existence, or state of being.

Barnett, however, makes a clear distinction between 'will' and 'motivation', describing a motive as 'essentially rational' (Barnett, 2007: 16) – in other words

a reason for doing something towards an end. In contrast, 'will', Barnett argues, is non-rational and is independent of reason. Will is more general and internal to the person concerned, whereas motivation is more specific in character and is in the form of an object or interest external to a person. Yet, motivating factors can be as basic as meeting physiological needs (food, water, shelter) or as profound as self-actualisation – 'a person's desire to become all that he or she is capable of becoming' (Merriam et al., 2007: 282). Such factors were incorporated by Maslow (1970) into a progressive order of human needs, or hierarchy, starting with physiological needs and moving through safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation needs. In terms of non-traditional students studying in higher education, Gorard et al. (2006) found that 'economic motivation was more important to students than the pursuit of knowledge' (Gorard et al., 2006: 46). In this study, students were motivated by a need to improve employment prospects, suggesting a motivating factor fairly low down on Maslow's hierarchy. However, ten years earlier, West (1996) challenged the idea that adult learners in particular were just motivated by financial gains in the long term. He found that they were motivated by a desire to achieve authenticity of 'self'; the very pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy, that of self-actualisation.

Barnett (2007) points out that studying in higher education means engaging in a long, enduring project. Understanding this implies a new role for the tutor – that of nurturing the student's 'will to learn', rather than a traditional role founded upon imparting knowledge. I consider the tutor's role more widely in later

chapters and also consider the factors that act as motivators for the case study students and how these factors influence their 'will to learn'. Now, I move from considering some key theoretical elements related to 'being a student' in the context of the higher education institution to a discussion of key theoretical frameworks related to learning in the workplace.

3.4 Learning in the workplace

Chapter Two situated Foundation Degrees within the new tradition of higher education work-based learning, but the ensuing discussion acknowledged that defining work-based learning was problematic. However, I suggested that commentators were in agreement that, essentially, work-based learning was situational and socially shaped (Lohman, 2000; Raelin 2000; Guile and Young, 2001; Billett, 2002a, 2002b; Dirkx et al, 2002; Beaney, 2005). In order to develop this line of inquiry, the notion of learning as social practice, focussing particularly on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998, 2002), is explored next, followed by a discussion round experiential learning.

3.4.1 Learning as social practice

In the early 1990s, Lave and Wenger's (1991) anthropological view of learning as part of social activity was seen as a move away from 'traditional' views of learning and learners, as promoted by cognitive theorists such as Piaget (1953) and Gagné (1985). Such theorists emphasise the part of the learner in actively processing responses, through engaging the mind. In addition, fundamental to the

cognitive theorists' premise is the idea that learning 'is controlled by the inherent structure of knowledge itself' (Rogers, 2002: 10). This view lends itself to hierarchical models of learning such as those developed by Bloom et al. (1956) and Gagné (1985). In contrast, Lave and Wenger (1991) contend that learning is not something undertaken individually and in isolation, but that learning is seen as participation in the social world. They view social engagement, rather than cognitive processes, as the key to effective learning.

Lave and Wenger see situated learning as a gradual and growing engagement, beginning as a novice practitioner engaging in 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and developing along a continuum to becoming a full participant in a 'community of practice'. The concept of 'legitimate peripheral participation' is central to Lave and Wenger's theory, and it is helpful to unpack the phrase in order to understand the meaning behind it. In engaging in 'legitimate peripheral participation', the learner 'participates in the actual practice of an expert' (Hanks, 1991: 14) and in this respect is engaged in activity that appears credible and worthwhile to experts. However, the participation is initially limited; it is purposefully peripheral in order to allow development along the continuum to full, non-peripheral participation. The notion of participation itself is also a crucial idea for Lave and Wenger, where the focus is on the community rather than on the individual. In this respect, learning takes place within a framework of participation, rather than within an individual mind, enabling learning to be distributed amongst those participating.

However, in considering their framework, it is important not to narrow Lave and Wenger's concept of a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), rather 'a community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 98). Thus, the community of practice is not merely a shared working space or physical environment. Instead it is relational and encompasses active engagement with the world. Therefore, when applied to the context of work-based learning, situated learning within a community of practice which facilitates 'legitimate peripheral participation' necessitates shared enterprise and an overt acknowledgement of the importance of relationships within the workplace in order for learning to happen effectively.

However, using Lave and Wenger's work as a means of understanding learning in the workplace has its strengths and weaknesses (Tennant, 2000; Dirkx et al., 2002; Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson and Unwin, 2005). For example, Fuller et al. acknowledge that the notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation' 'sheds considerable light on the processes involved when people newly enter a community' (Fuller et al., 2005: 65), but argue that the notion does not cater for those who continue to learn in the workplace having attained full membership of a team or department. While the view that Dirkx et al. (2002) hold regarding workplace learning and the nature of knowledge questions Lave and Wenger's continuum model of linear progress from 'legitimate peripheral participation' to

full membership within the community of practice. They do not see ‘a one-way path from ignorance to knowledge, in which knowledge is viewed as a substance’ (Dirkx et al., 2002:7). Instead, they view knowledge as a ‘structural dynamic’ (ibid.), characterised by vibrant interactions between and among people. Thus the theory of ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ appears rather formulaic and inflexible and does not appear to foster the view that it is possible to progress beyond a given situation.

The inflexibility of Lave and Wenger’s model is highlighted further when mapped to the Foundation Degree learner’s experience. Lave and Wenger assume a model of ‘novice practitioner’ moving to experienced, or knowledgeable, practitioner. However, within Foundation Degree study students are not always coming to the workplace as new members. Some with positions of responsibility, or with many years of experience within the workplace are perceived as already established and integrated members of the community of practice. In addition, as I have already outlined in this chapter, work-based Foundation Degree learners assume a multitude of identities during their studies and engage in learning within different physical environments (at university, within the workplace, even at home). This set of circumstances renders the application of Lave and Wenger’s continuum model of moving from novice to fully-fledged practitioner within a stable, cohesive community of practice less than straightforward.

Nevertheless, for me, Lave and Wenger's work provides an invaluable starting point for developing a work-based learning pedagogy, particularly when considered alongside cognitive learning theory. Their foundational principle of learning as social practice, with development for the participant from peripheral to full engagement within a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) has been developed further by Billett (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) to incorporate the relationship between the social and cognitive elements of learning in the workplace and also to incorporate guided learning within a work-based learning pedagogy. Billett's (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) research considers how workplaces enable participation in learning and also how individuals choose to engage with work practice. Central to Billett's work is a concern to understand individual social and cognitive construction around workplace learning within an 'invitational' working environment, where the workplace explicitly invites participation through specific activities and support offered to individuals. Within such a context, the use of guided learning with mentor support can be justified as an intrinsic part of a work-based learning pedagogy and therefore the role of the workplace mentor is explored further later on in this thesis.

For Billett, the notion of participation is 'a product of the evolving social practice of the workplace, which is historically, culturally and situationally constructed, and the socially constructed personal history of the individual' (Billett, 2002c: 466). Billett acknowledges that learning in the workplace is multi-dimensional, combining learning as socially situated practice with the individual learner's

cognitive framework and acknowledging the part that personal history (or ontogeny) plays in how individuals choose to engage in the workplace. Similarly, Dirkx et al. (2002) view as important the cognitive framework that the learner brings to the context of learning: ‘what learners come to know and understand through the process of learning reflects who they are as persons and how they are making sense of their experiences in the workplace’ (Dirkx et al., 2002: 6). Thus, social interaction, the learner’s sense of self and personal experience play their part when learning within the workplace. Indeed, Wenger (1998) in discussing ‘Communities of Practice’ is clear that his socially situated perspective of learning should be viewed as ‘distinct from, although not incompatible with, neurological and cognitive approaches’ (Wenger, 1998: 286) and acknowledges the work of Vygotsky (1978), who viewed engagement in social activity as the foundation for high-level cognitive functions, as influential upon his understanding of learning through social practice.

Therefore, having explored learning as social practice and having explored how the workplace might provide a suitable context for learning, due consideration must also be given to the role of experience in learning.

3.4.2 Experiential learning

John Dewey’s classic text ‘Experience and Education’ (1938) contains extensive observations about the connections between life experiences and learning. He wrote extensively about the educational value of integrating experience, learning

and reflection upon it (Dewey 1938, 1966). He believed that all genuine education was the product of experience but was careful to clarify that not all experiences were educative. Rather, in order for learning to happen through experience, two key principles had to be present. Firstly, that experiences that lead to learning are never isolated events – instead they build upon what has come before and depend upon the learner connecting present and past experiences in order to enlarge meaning. Secondly, the experience has to involve interaction between the learner and their environment – in other words, first hand experience is vital. Dewey believed that education must not only engage with experience, but also enlarge it – a model that fits well with elements of transformational learning and work-based learning. Indeed, Beaney (2005) highlights the importance of viewing work-based learning as a subset of experiential learning: ‘It is the experience of work and how it is worked upon by appropriate abstract learning and reflection that makes work-based learning such a potentially powerful pedagogy’ (Beaney, 2005:6). In addition, Tennant (2000) is clear that ‘the pedagogy of workplace learning, then, should be properly based on the kind of self-reflection which opens up different ways of punctuating workplace experience’ (Tennant, 2000:126). Therefore, in the context of learning in the workplace, the part that reflection plays in turning a workplace experience into a pedagogical tool seems to be crucial, and this is echoed more generally by others who have suggested that reflection upon experience plays a key part in the process of learning (Schön, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991, 1997; Boud,

Cohen and Walker, 1993; Moon, 1999; Brockbank, McGill and Beech, 2002; Fenwick, 2000).

However, despite a broad consensus regarding the value of learning through experience and through processes of reflection, different commentators offer broad interpretations as to what constitutes experiential learning. Kolb (1984), for example, defines experience as involving action – or learning by doing. Kolb’s learning cycle pinpoints four crucial stages that have to be travelled through for learning to happen: concrete experience (involving oneself in new experiences), reflective observation (observational and reflective skills – viewing the experiences from different perspectives), abstract conceptualisation (analytically creating new concepts), and active experimentation (problem solving – using the new ideas/concepts). Moon (1999) comments extensively on Kolb’s model, observing that:

An important feature of Kolb’s idea is that the process of learning perpetuates itself, so that the learner changes ‘from actor to observer’, from ‘specific involvement to general analytic detachment’, creating a new form of experience on which to reflect and conceptualize at each cycle (Moon, 1999:25).

Therefore, what is important in Kolb’s model is the idea of progression in learning, coupled with the need to recycle the cycle, so that reflection, learning and action continue. However, Kolb’s model does not take into account the learners’ situation, nor their personal biographies. Therefore, it could be viewed as at odds, on the one hand, with the notion of learning as social practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2002) and, on the other, with the view of

workplace pedagogic practice espoused by Billett (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) which incorporates an individuals' personal history, or ontogeny, discussed earlier. Essentially, the model seems to operate in a de-contextualised vacuum (apart from the immediate experience being engaged in), with the danger that the nature of learning becomes over-simplified. This view is reiterated by Moon who states that:

Learning and the role of reflection in learning do not seem to be as tidy as the experiential learning cycle suggests. [...] even a simple application in a practical situation will indicate that, in reality, the process is 'messy', with stages re-cycling and interweaving as meaning is created and recreated (Moon, 1999:35).

Fenwick (2000) also warns against ignoring 'issues of identity, politics, and discursive complexities of human experience' (Fenwick, 2000: 244) when exploring Kolb's model, which further underlines the complex web of issues which impact upon a work-based learner's experience and which are difficult to capture within a framework or model.

Despite such difficulties, though, the common thread linking core elements of theorisation related to experiential learning is the place of reflection. I suggested earlier that experience in itself is not sufficient to effect learning – rather, that reflection upon experience plays a key part in the process of learning. This idea has already been explored in the context of Kolb's (1984) work and in Mezirow's (1991, 1997) theory of transformational learning (where critical reflection is identified as the second stage of the transformative learning process). However, it is Schön, author of 'The Reflective Practitioner' (1983), who attempted to

elaborate and categorise the process of reflection through the models of reflection in and on action. This is a thread of inquiry relevant to learning within the workplace because Schön developed his ideas in the context of reflection in professional practice (Schön, 1983, 1987).

Schön's reflection-on-action happens after action and involves reflecting upon the action just taken. In this respect, it seems similar to the reflection identified by Kolb (1984) and Mezirow (1991, 1997) which occurs as part of a learning cycle that then leads to further action. Indeed, Moon suggests that 'Schön's notion of reflection-on-action is encompassed in Kolb's experiential learning cycle as the processing of experience' (Moon, 1999: 51). However, Schön (1983) claims that reflection-in-action is a significant characteristic of professional working and learning. This type of reflection occurs at the time of the action and forms a response to unexpected events as they unfold. Furthermore, in his consideration of how to educate the reflective practitioner Schön (1987) highlights the role of the practitioner community in supporting the development of reflective practice from conscious reflection through to more intuitive reflection-in-action. This reflects the notion of learning as social practice, discussed previously in the context of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

However, other commentators are not convinced by Schön's claims regarding reflection-in-action. For example Eraut (1994), in analysing Schön's work, suggests that a focus on the 'reflective' element is unhelpful. Rather, Eraut

contends that Schön is exploring metacognition in the context of professional knowledge. In addition, Moon (1999) suggests that the imprecise ways in which Schön uses the terms reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action does not support his claims for unique categories of reflection, particularly as reflection-on-action seems no different to the role of reflection within experiential learning. Nevertheless, Schön's work has inspired debate around the role of reflection in professional practice and also around the relationship between theory and practice within professional practice which is of relevance for a work-based course such as the Foundation Degree.

3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has aimed to map the key threads of inquiry that will provide a starting point for informing analysis of the case study material that explores learning within a work-based Foundation Degree. The chapter has focussed upon learning and learners and began by considering forms of knowledge and how they may relate to learning within academic and workplace environments. I then turned to what it means to be a student and identified experience as a key resource for the adult learner as well as considering learner identity, plus will and motivation – drawing a distinction between these last two aspects and also covering issues related to the accessibility of the higher education academic environment for non-traditional students in particular. I then developed the thread related to learning in the workplace and considered learning as social practice, drawing upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) work in relation to situated learning,

but also considering Billett's (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) extension of their work in the development of a model for workplace pedagogy. I have suggested that experience plays an important part in workplace learning, but have discussed some of the difficulties of applying Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle wholesale to learning which is embedded in social practice. In addition, I have discussed the nature of reflection upon experience through a critical review of Schön's (1981, 1987) work.

Taken together, these threads serve to create a picture of what it may be like for the adult learner engaged with a work-based Foundation Degree, in terms of the forms of knowledge used, the challenges inherent in being a student and how learning in the workplace happens. However, what is missing from this chapter is any discussion related to teaching in higher education. It would have been appropriate to discuss a higher education tutor's role in relation to facilitating learning for the adult student, or supporting work-based learning, or contributing to making the academy more accessible, but I have chosen not to. Instead, at this stage I have decided to retain a focus upon the learner and their learning. Towards the end of the thesis, when I apply the empirical findings more widely within a new model for learning through a Foundation Degree, the tutor's role will be considered.

In conclusion, then, the aim for this chapter has not been to present a definitive account of the literature that will unequivocally mould the direction in which data

analysis and discussion will turn; rather, the chapter seeks to provide an initial platform for presenting relevant literature which will be revisited and integrated throughout the thesis. Therefore, having described the research context in Chapters One and Two and mapped the field of inquiry further during this chapter, I now turn to the research methodology.

Chapter Four

Research Design

4.1 Beginnings

4.1.1 Difficult questions

Fundamentally, I have been interested in what Mel, Sam and Heather have to say about their learning experiences. In this respect, the aim has been to generate accounts that seek to avoid a simplistic and reductionist interpretation of what it is like to learn through a Foundation Degree. Instead, I attempt to capture the complex and multi-faceted learning journey undertaken by Mel, Sam and Heather. Through the collection and interpretation of detailed accounts (Riessman, 1993; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Chase, 2005) I have attempted to ‘see through the eyes of [...] the people who are being studied’ (Bryman, 1988:61). However, in engaging in analysis and interpretation of the accounts, I have inevitably drawn upon a range of resources, both consciously and subconsciously. These include my professional perspective as programme leader for the Foundation Degree, my own personal educational history (discussed in Chapter One) and a growing awareness of my emerging role as ‘bricoleur’ or quilt maker (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 4; Kincheloe, 2005) – seeking to create an overall picture from the individual accounts gathered through the research process. Indeed, the final stage of creating one quilt from the three individual ones is addressed in Chapter Nine of this thesis, when a new conceptual model for learning through a Foundation Degree is presented.

Any attempt to capture the reality of experience immediately raises ‘difficult questions’ (Mason, 2002: 4), such as ‘What is reality?’ ‘Whose reality is it?’ and ‘How can reality be represented?’ For the researcher, who brings to the research project their own experiential idiosyncrasies, social constructions, and philosophical perspectives such questions can only be answered through acting reflexively at all stages of the research process, from conception of initial idea, through research design and to project execution and conclusion (Mason, 2002; Scott and Morrison, 2007). This involves ‘thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognizing the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see’ (Mason, 2002: 5). The challenge for me, therefore, has been to develop a heightened awareness of my own internalised truths, beliefs and realities, and to engage reflexively in how these are manifest practically and attitudinally in my personal and professional life. In so doing, I have been led to consider ontological questions related to the nature of reality and epistemological questions related to the nature of knowledge. Therefore, these questions are considered next.

4.1.2 Reality and knowledge

Commentators distinguish between ontology and epistemology by describing ontology as being concerned with what is said to exist, or the nature of reality; whilst epistemology is concerned with how we know what exists (Mason, 2002; Seale, 2004; Gray, 2004; Scott and Morrison, 2007). Mason (2002) asserts that

grappling with questions of ontology and epistemology are essential to the process of developing a research focus and appropriate methodology, whilst others attempt to elucidate the interrelationships between ontology, epistemology and methodology (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000; Gray, 2004; Scott and Morrison, 2007). Different starting points about what is ontological lead to multiple possibilities for ensuing epistemological perspectives and, by implication, for the boundaries within which researcher reflexivity may operate. Therefore, active reflexivity, or self-scrutiny, is only possible if the researcher has a clear ontological perspective and, by inference, an understanding of how they can know about the perspective they adopt.

My own beliefs about ontology embrace the existence of multiple realities. This view is founded upon the key premise that a number of truths, meanings or realities exist, described by Gray as a 'Heraclitean ontology' (Gray 2004: 16), after the Greek philosopher Heraclitus who viewed the world as constantly changing and emerging. This ontology is what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe as 'antifoundational' because the perspective embraces the idea that there is no standard measure by which truth can be universally known and the notion of absolute or definitive truth is rejected. Such a viewpoint leads to an epistemological perspective that does not seek to provide an unequivocal evidence-base to prove universally accepted objective realities. Instead, the perspective is interpretive in nature and is in contrast to an objective view of reality. It strips away the need for researchers to speculate about objective truths,

but rather celebrates the value of people's multiple perspectives and experiences as worthy of exploration and understanding.

This reflects the position I had come to as a trainee teacher (described in Chapter One), when I recognised that the learner had much experience to bring to their own learning. By valuing what people bring to the construction and interpretation of knowledge, a constructivist perspective emerges that focuses on the construction of meaning through interactions with the world (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986). Furthermore, I view this position as compatible with the notion of socially situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991), as, although there are some inherent tensions in aligning a participative learning model based upon a 'community of practice' with one that is about what the individual may bring to their learning, the two are not mutually exclusive. For example, a work-based learner operating within a community of practice can bring to that context their individual construction and interpretation of knowledge for integration within the whole package of skills and knowledge brought by different participants.

Therefore, the implication for a constructivist epistemology is that all knowledge is socially constructed – not just the knowledge of research participants but also that of the researcher (Usher, 2001; Seale, 2004; Gray, 2004; Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). This results in a complex puzzle of identities, relationships and situations, to be unpicked, interpreted and represented with

methodological integrity by the researcher. I suggested earlier that I viewed myself as acting as ‘bricoleur’ or quilt maker, who ‘stitches, edits, and puts slices of reality together’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 5), reflecting a world of multiple realities and perspectives and this role feels particularly apt, given my ontological and epistemological perspectives outlined above.

4.2 Research design: an overview

In theory, producing a rigid research blueprint would not be in the spirit of the ontological and epistemological perspectives to which I adhere. Bringing rigidity to the research design would serve to undermine both an ontological perspective based upon the notion of multiple and shifting realities and a view of knowledge founded upon socially constructed meaning. Yet most who advise on research methods emphasise that generating a research framework or design outline is fundamental to the overall research process (for example: Mason, 2002; Gray, 2004; Silverman, 2005) and, in practice, I found it very helpful to develop a visual model to represent my research design. To this effect, figure 4.1, below, is a simplistic representation of my overall research design that serves to clarify the use of research terminology and categories. The pyramidal structure is deliberate in that my ontological and epistemological understandings are foundational to the process – all other stages of research design flow from this. However, I also acknowledge that the choice of such an image could be construed as naïve - after all, the complexity of the bricoleur’s craft (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) cannot really be captured in a two dimensional picture. Nevertheless, by physically

situating strategy, methodology, methods and tools within this design framework, a picture is generated which can be used as a tool for further interrogation and discussion of the research process.

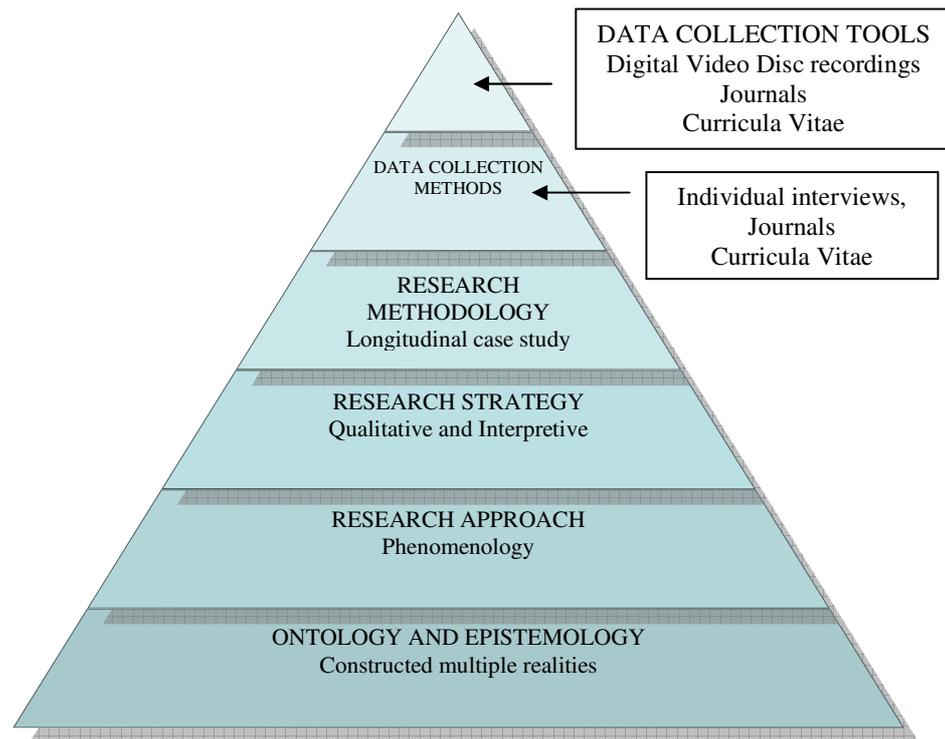


Figure 4.1: Research design framework

4.3 Research approach

A well-defined epistemological position is important in order to ensure that one's claims are correctly underpinned by an appropriate philosophical approach (Mason, 2002; Gray, 2004; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). I acknowledge the inherent complexity of a research design grounded in ontological and epistemological perspectives based upon a philosophy of multiple realities, but nevertheless I have

based my research design upon a phenomenological approach – an approach where phenomena related to the human experience are explored in depth.

The phenomenological approach has its origins in the work of Edmund Husserl (Filmer, Jenks, Seale, Branley and James, 2004; Scott and Morrison, 2007), and later, Alfred Schutz, who related Husserl's ideas to the study of social behaviour (Cohen et al., 2000). Phenomenologists view the notion of reality as a social construction with the researcher interested in descriptions of respondents' experiences, with reference to specific contexts (Gray, 2004; Holloway and Todres, 2003; Scott and Morrison, 2007). Researchers taking a phenomenological approach are 'concerned with the *meanings* that people ascribe to phenomena' (Gray, 2004: 214), they tend to view participants as actors within stories, accepting that the nature of social phenomena is 'available only from the actors' point of view' (Freebody, 2003: 36). Therefore, my research, framed by a constructivist perspective of multiple realities, seems aligned to a phenomenological approach. In addition, the exploration of accounts from particular people in unique situations (in my case, three specific students undertaking a work-based programme of higher education study) further underlines a phenomenological line of inquiry. Later on, I will show how data collection methods, tools and analysis all reflect a phenomenological starting point.

4.4 Strategy and Methodology

4.4.1 Choices and decisions

So far, I have established my ontological and epistemological starting points and have used these to frame my research approach. In espousing an interpretive and constructed view of reality, it may seem an obvious step to align my research strategy to the qualitative paradigm, not least because the field of qualitative research comprises a complex web of interlocking and variant traditions concerned with multiple interpretations of experiential reality. However, such an approach is not without risk. Any interpretive approach will only ever (by definition) research and analyse a reality based upon interpretation, where a number of truths will exist which can only be construed as one truth of many by researcher and/or participant. However, a more quantitative approach (even in my case to the extent of having more students involved in the study) carries with it the danger of excluding aspects of individuality, freedom and moral responsibility, which are so inherent within naturalistic inquiries and which are fundamental to this research in seeking to capture the specific accounts of learning through a Foundation Degree provided by Mel, Sam and Heather. Therefore a qualitative strategy reflects what I wish to know, and is also in alignment with my ontological and epistemological perspectives explored earlier.

However, within the boundaries of a qualitative strategy a variety of decisions related to methodology still persist. I have already outlined my commitment to an approach which attempts to capture the perspectives on learning offered by Mel,

Sam and Heather and which retains fidelity to the accounts being presented. Therefore, the key question I had to ask myself when choosing a particular methodological approach was ‘Which approach will enable Mel, Sam and Heather to tell their stories?’ The chosen approach not only had to capture a complex web of issues pertinent to the students being studied and to their learning experience, but also had to accommodate myself, the academic researcher, acting as ‘bricoleur’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 4), stitching pieces of the accounts together, a role already discussed in Chapter One. In addition, the methodology had to be compatible with my ontological and epistemological starting point of constructed multiple realities (Cohen et al., 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 2005; Rubin and Rubin, 2005) and it had to reflect a qualitatively interpretivist and inductive approach.

The boundaries of choice in research methodology are blurred by the way in which different commentators use terminology in different ways. For example, Gray (2004) straightforwardly discusses a range of potential research methodologies (including action research, analytical surveys, experimental research and more), but this approach carries with it the danger that the spirit of interpretivism is compromised by the neat compartmentalisation of research terms and approaches. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) present a range of strategies of inquiry and state that ‘strategies locate researchers and paradigms in specific empirical, material sites and in specific methodological practices’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 79). They reinforce that strategies of inquiry are always

constituted through and situated within the lens provided by the researcher's paradigmatically-based perspective. This principle is crucial in making decisions about methodological approaches and immediately enables the researcher to narrow the field in terms of methodological choice.

As I considered the options available to me in terms of methodological approaches, I found myself inexorably drawn towards the case study. This approach had the potential to capture the essence of what it was like to learn through a Foundation Degree within the overall research approach and framework already outlined. However, I felt that my reason for choosing a case study approach was as much about the fact that I had accounts to present, as my commitment to a particular approach. Indeed, Stake (2005) states categorically that 'case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied' (Stake, 2005: 443). This reflects my research design, which seeks to understand what it is like to learn through a Foundation Degree, using a series of accounts created by Mel, Sam and Heather, therefore espousing a more overlapping and iterative model where the case study is acting both as methodological choice and subject of study.

4.4.2 The case study

The precise definition of what constitutes a case study varies according to commentator (Merriam, 1988; Bassey, 1999; Yin, 2003; Stake, 2005; Scott and Morrison, 2007), but it is usually aligned with a qualitative and interpretive

research approach. For Yin (2003: 13), the case study ‘investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context’ and is firmly based upon empirical enquiry, whilst Scott and Morrison (2007: 17) suggest that case study research ‘includes the study of a few cases, sometimes one, in which the intention is to collect large amounts of data and study it in depth’. Therefore, the implication is that it is natural situations that are the object of case study research – not artificially created situations. Gray deems case study methodology particularly appropriate when ‘the researcher is trying to uncover a relationship between a phenomena and the context in which it is occurring’ (Gray 2004: 124). Therefore, the approach is particularly apt for my research study, which is investigating what it is like to learn through a Foundation Degree (the phenomena), using the experiences of three individual students within the context of the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln. Indeed, Cohen et al. emphasise that one of the strengths of the case study approach is the explicit recognition that ‘context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects’ (Cohen et al., 2000: 181), reflecting the social constructivist interpretation of reality, outlined earlier.

However, what constitutes ‘the case’ in my study is perhaps open to interpretation. I have already stated that my role within the research is to weave one quilt from three, in terms of using the three sets of accounts, generated by Mel, Sam and Heather, in order to develop a new appreciation of, and approach to, learning through a Foundation Degree (presented in Chapter Nine as a new

conceptual model). For my study, then, I would suggest that it is the phenomena itself – learning through a Foundation Degree – that constitutes ‘the case’. In this respect, the students’ accounts become the vehicle through which to capture the multiple layers of the particular phenomena in order to produce a ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of a situation.

As well as variations in the interpretation of what constitutes a case study, the form that case study research takes also varies and case study research within educational settings is no exception. For example, Bassey (1999) in his desire to reconstruct the case study argues that there are three categories of educational case study: theory-seeking and theory-testing; story-telling and picture-drawing, and evaluative. Evaluative case studies explore a case’s ‘worthwhileness’ and may constitute a formative or summative process. Theory-seeking and theory-testing case studies are ‘particular studies of general issues’ (Bassey, 1999: 62), focussing on issues rather than the case itself. They mirror, respectively, Yin’s (2003) two key types of case study - exploratory and explanatory: the former developing propositions for further inquiry and the latter exploring ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions related to particular phenomena, studied over time. Bassey’s story-telling type of case study is akin to that identified by Yin (2003) as the ‘descriptive’ case study, although alluding to description can be misleading and Bassey is clear that ‘story-telling and picture-drawing case studies are both analytical accounts’ (Bassey, 1999:62). Furthermore, parallels can be drawn between Bassey’s story-telling and picture-drawing types of case study and

Stake's 'intrinsic' case study, so called because 'in all its particularity *and* ordinariness, this case itself is of interest' (Stake, 2005: 445). Stake explicitly states that the purpose of the intrinsic case study is not to build theory or to understand generic phenomenon, but to better understand a specific case, a position aligned with an ontology that values people's knowledge and experiences as worthy of exploration.

It is Stake's definitions that have been helpful in locating my own case study approach. In seeking to understand what it is like to learn through a Foundation Degree, I have aligned myself with Stake's (2005: 445) 'intrinsic case study'. From the outset I have undertaken the study because of an 'intrinsic interest' in the nature of learning through a Foundation Degree, in the context of a specific course – an interest developed largely through my involvement in the course as tutor and programme leader. However, Chapter Nine of this thesis approaches the empirical case study material from a more 'instrumental' (Stake, 2005: 445) stance, using the students' accounts to inform the development of a new conceptual model in relation to Foundation Degree design and delivery, that might be of use beyond the case I am studying, therefore pursuing an interest external to the case itself. Stake (2005: 445) suggests that 'there is no hard-and-fast line distinguishing intrinsic case study from instrumental, but rather a zone of combined purpose' and this is what I attempt to achieve in the final chapter of the thesis, where the particularities of the students' accounts are used instrumentally

to facilitate a more general and applied interest in learning through a Foundation Degree.

However, case study methodology is not without its critics. Meyer (2001) brings a note of caution to those using case study methodology, by highlighting the lack of universally accepted requirements for conducting case study research. She asserts that this is 'both the strength and the weakness of this approach' (Meyer 2001: 329) because the lack of formal guidance for case study methodology means that the research design and data collection methods can be fully created and adapted to the specific research context under investigation. Other criticisms usually centre around the difficulties in generalizing theoretical understandings from case study data. Bassey gets around this by advocating the use of 'fuzzy generalizations' which he describes as 'general statements with built in uncertainty' (1999: 52), whereas Stake in his definition of the 'intrinsic case study' (2005: 445), discussed above, clearly emphasises the need to understand the case itself, rather than to generalize findings to other situations. However, not all are in agreement with Stake's assertion. Silverman (2005) states quite categorically that the intrinsic case study puts the researcher in a weak position as it implies 'description of a case for description's sake' (Silverman, 2005: 128). However, I do not believe that this must necessarily be the case. Rather, such criticism highlights my responsibility as a researcher, who is committed both to an interpretive and evaluative approach, and who is convinced by the 'overwhelming significance of localised experience' (Freebody, 2003:81) to

ensure that the use of case-study methodology is more than just a description of a programme, event or process (Merriam, 1988). Hence my decision, outlined above, to use the case study approach both intrinsically and instrumentally, focussing both on the particularities of the students' accounts and upon how the accounts inform a more general conceptual model related to learning through a Foundation Degree.

4.4.3 Longitudinality

A longitudinal study involves the study of a sample at intervals over a period of time (Cohen et al., 2000; Seale, 2004). Scott and Morrison (2007) suggest that longitudinal studies normally make quantitative comparisons over time, but in the context of case study methodology grounded within a qualitative approach, opting for a longitudinal study has been a key part of my methodological strategy. For example, Yin's (2003) explanatory type of case study approach emphasises the collection of data over time, whilst Bassey's (1999) notion of deriving accounts through the story-telling approach necessitates a sense of engaging with a time line. Furthermore, Merriam (1988) specifically acknowledges the appropriateness of longitudinality within case study methodology and Mason (2002) suggests that designing a longitudinal study enables the researcher to see and interpret developments as they occur, rather than considering events retrospectively – an important practical element of my research approach.

The type of longitudinal study that I have been engaged in has been a ‘cohort’ or ‘panel’ study (Cohen et al., 2000). In this type of work, the same individuals are tracked over time. In contrast, cross-sectional studies involve different samples, or respondents, at different points in time. It was clear early on in my study that the longitudinal panel study would be the most appropriate for gathering the data I required, because I wanted to capture the whole of the experience of Foundation Degree learning. In particular, this methodology has enabled collection of rich data, in depth, at ‘the *individual/micro* level’ (Cohen et al., 2000: 178) and this has been an important factor in capturing a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation.

4.5 Selection and ethics

4.5.1 Introduction

As discussed above, in qualitative phenomenological research it is acknowledged that the researcher’s values inevitably impact upon all aspects of the research process. However, whilst accepting that a particular researcher brings something of themselves to the research in the form of their philosophical principles and personal ontology, consideration must be given to the implicit tensions often encountered when a researcher is attempting to balance the demands of research with the rights of the research participants. When one remembers that the pursuit of truth is perceived and interpreted within the researcher’s own epistemological framework, the whole area of participant selection and research ethics becomes less than straightforward.

4.5.2 Recruitment of participants

Three female students – Mel, Sam and Heather – were recruited to take part in the initial gathering of data. At the beginning of the data collection period (September 2004), they were students who had just started the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln. The selection procedure involved a presentation of the project by myself to the whole cohort of 54 students (53 female and 1 male), the distribution of an information sheet (appendix 4.1) to those students who expressed an interest in taking part and an invitation to contact me if any one was prepared to engage with the project. I anticipated interest from between three and five students and Mel, Sam and Heather were the only students who volunteered. They secured support from their workplace quickly and all lived and worked locally, which helped the practical arrangements for holding interviews in particular. Indeed, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) do not dismiss pragmatics when determining the sample to be studied, encouraging the researcher to consider geographical location, travel costs and contacts with personnel as important factors to be taken account of.

It must be remembered that case studies are ‘generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes’ (Yin, 2003: 10) and this principle is of crucial importance when considering selection and size of sample, as it immediately negates the standard criticism of case study research – that statistical generalisations cannot be made from the data. Nevertheless, the size of

sample has influenced some of the ways in which the research design has been practically developed. Three participants have provided some variation in the accounts generated and also facilitated depth and richness of analysis. If more students had taken part, it would have been unmanageable to capture the depth and detail required for the telling of each account.

4.5.3 Informed consent

The principle of informed consent (Cohen et al., 2000; Mason, 2002; Ali and Kelly, 2004) applies to all participants and stakeholders involved in the process. Cohen et al. explain that, within the context of a democracy ‘the principle of informed consent arises from the subject’s right to freedom and self-determination’ (Cohen et al., 2000: 51). Therefore, any limitations on personal freedom need to be justified and agreed to. Gray suggests that informed consent involves explaining to participants the following:

- The aims of the research.
- Who will be undertaking it.
- Who is being asked to participate.
- What kind of information is being sought.
- How much of the participant’s time is required.
- That participation is voluntary.
- That responding to all questions is voluntary.
- Who will have access to the data once it is collected.
- How anonymity of respondents will be preserved.

(Gray, 2004: 59)

In addition, many of these points are echoed in the ethical codes published by research organisations. For example, the ‘ethic of respect’ to participants, cited by BERA (2004:5), implies the responsibilities of voluntary informed consent, the

right to withdraw, privacy, disclosure and responsibilities pertinent to children, young people and vulnerable adults.

Therefore, I felt it was essential to develop secure ethical codes of practice that attempted to put into place a system to protect the interests of participants. In this respect and taking cognizance of the principles of informed consent, participants were given an outline of the project (appendix 4.2) and asked to sign a consent form (appendix 4.3), which was also countersigned by a senior workplace manager. In developing the project outline and consent form, guidance from the British Educational Research Association was consulted (BERA, 2004), as was the research ethics policy at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln (then, Bishop Grosseteste College, 2004). Copies of relevant policies pertinent to the case study students' workplaces, such as those relating to the photographing or videoing of children, were also consulted.

The involvement of a senior manager recognises the role they play as 'gatekeepers'. They are 'the sponsors, officials and significant others who have the power to grant or block access to and within a setting' (Walsh, 2004: 229). Although I did not require access to each of the students' work settings, all three case study participants were situated within workplaces and therefore the management inevitably acted as 'gatekeepers', in terms of potentially being able to withhold consent or, conversely, overtly encourage project involvement (although this variation did not appear to be experienced within the study). In

addition, managers acted to protect the interests of colleagues, pupils and even parents connected to the workplace, by agreeing to 'take responsibility for ensuring that participants (pupils, staff members, parents) not directly involved in the project are appropriately informed' (appendix 4.3). For example, as well as the active participation of the three self-selected participants in data collection, there have also been passive participants, particularly because Mel, Sam and Heather each made a number of DVD recordings of their practice in school to aid data collection. In this respect, a pupil or colleague may have taken the role of passive participant by being part of the context for a student's workplace.

4.5.4 Validity

Questions of validity in research generally refer to the extent that findings can be construed as true (Seale, 2004; Scott and Morrison, 2007) and the two most common forms of validity check are triangulation and respondent validation. Triangulation involves the use of different methods within the research design in order to corroborate findings (Cohen et al, 2000; Seale, 2004; Scott and Morrison, 2007), whilst respondent validation sees the researcher sharing their data and interpretations with participants in order to seek their verification of the findings (Walsh, 2004; Scott and Morrison, 2007). However, I have stated that, within my research design, the notion of the existence of a number of truths, perspectives and interpretations is acceptable, and in this respect Richards (2005) and Silverman (2001) view the validity checks described above as problematic for

qualitative research. In the first instance, Richards reflects on the origins of the term 'triangulation':

The term comes from surveying. By taking two readings with a calibrated instrument from known positions, the surveyor, with mathematical precision, can locate the exact position of a third object. This is not the sort of checking you are doing in a qualitative project' (Richards, 2005: 140).

The qualitative researcher does not align him or herself to an objective view of reality where truth is absolute, and is therefore not able to apply the principles of triangulation derived from a mathematical tradition of surveying. To do so, would be to undermine the context-bound nature of data collected and to subsume all findings within an overarching view of reality. This is not consonant with my epistemological perspective outlined earlier.

Respondent validation typically occurs at the end of a project or at the stage when the transcriptions of interviews are made, with research participants reviewing the research report or the transcriptions themselves. Richards (2005) and Silverman (2001) note that such feedback may be useful but that it should not be viewed as a simple form of validation. Indeed Kvale (2006), in reflecting upon the usefulness of 'member checks' suggests that: 'there may be emotional barriers for the interviewees to accept critical interpretations of what they have told the interviewer, as well as limitations of the subjects' competence to address specific theoretical interpretations' (Kvale, 2006: 485). Mason (2002) asserts that problems with using member checks to support validity go beyond the practical to encompass issues around epistemological privilege – in particular whether the

respondent could be judged to have a greater or more accurate view of ‘truth’ than the interpretivist researcher. Each of these reasons has influenced my decision not to involve the research participants in validating any research findings. However, I accept that in denying participants any epistemological privilege, there is a danger that the researcher may assume to have a greater view of ‘truth’ in interpreting and presenting research data, which should be guarded against by retaining a reflexive approach throughout.

In the context of my study, then, validity becomes more a notion of seeking to act with authenticity within the context of the research approach already outlined in this chapter. In this respect, I turn to Guba and Lincoln (2005) who attempt to ‘locate criteria for judging the *processes* and *outcomes* of naturalistic or constructivist inquiries’ (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 207). These ‘authenticity criteria’ comprise ‘fairness’ (multiple perspectives of participants are represented within the research); ‘educative authenticity’ (research that enables participants to appreciate viewpoints from those other than themselves), and ‘catalytic authenticity’ (where the research process has stimulated activity). When the term ‘participants’ embraces not only the researched, but also myself as participant researcher, these criteria form a meaningful framework within which the authenticity of my research design can be considered. For example, in order to embrace fairness, the case study accounts have retained the individual perspectives of each of the three students involved. Later in this thesis, my own perspectives as a Foundation Degree tutor are incorporated. The research has

enabled me to understand and appreciate student viewpoints related to learning through a Foundation Degree, thus bringing educative authenticity to the process. Finally, the research aims to generate suggestions for how to improve learning through a Foundation Degree (outlined in a new conceptual model in Chapter Nine), thus embracing catalytic authenticity.

In order to scrutinise research processes and outcomes as indicators of ‘validity as authenticity’ (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 207), reflexivity on the part of the researcher again comes to the forefront as a key tool. This is summarised by Mason who advises that ‘validity of method and interpretation therefore must be demonstrated through a careful retracing and reconstruction of the route by which you think you reached them, and there are no easy answers or shortcuts in this process’ (Mason, 2002: 194). For my research this means taking responsibility for how I capture and represent the perceived realities of what it is like to learn through a Foundation Degree as experienced by Mel, Sam and Heather, and therefore it is to choices of data collection methods that I now turn.

4.6 Data collection methods and tools

4.6.1 Overview

Driving my choice of data collection methods was the need to generate accounts that captured the learning experiences of Mel, Sam and Heather whilst remaining faithful to a qualitative strategy founded upon the particular philosophical perspectives, discussed earlier. I needed to choose data collection methods and

tools that would capture what I set out to do and which had integrity in relation to the philosophical foundations of my research (Mason, 2002) – in particular my own views of the validity of constructed multiple realities and the desire to bring richness and depth to the investigation as it unfolded. Therefore, interviews (conducted during three data collection parts – appendix 4.4) were used as the main source for generating the students' accounts, the reasons for which I will expand on in the next section. In addition, student journals and curricula vitae were used both empirically and as a tool to facilitate discussion within interview, and digital video disc (DVD) recordings of the students' own workplace practice were also used as a tool to facilitate discussion within interview. I turn now to a fuller discussion of research methods and tools.

4.6.2 Interviews

Two key factors influenced my decision to use qualitative interviews as a central form of data collection: firstly, my own beliefs and assumptions regarding the nature of reality, discussed earlier and secondly, practicalities. The fact that I value people's knowledge and experiences as worthy of exploration meant that I needed to attempt to capture the participants' own versions of their experiences, or even the raw experience itself. Therefore, preliminary research designs proposed observation within the workplace and during taught sessions of the Foundation Degree within the University College as forms of data collection. However, it soon became apparent that it would be difficult to access the participants' work settings and that it was not ethically appropriate to observe

participants within their academic setting because, as programme leader for the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants, I knew that my status could be perceived as threatening by those being researched. I knew from the outset that power relations between myself and Sam, Mel and Heather were more complex than just the unequal relationship between researcher and researched (Cohen et al., 2000; Roberts, 2002; Scott and Morrison, 2007) as my role as programme leader involved close contact with all students on the course. This included contact with Mel, Sam and Heather through lecturing, personal tutoring and assessing and therefore I was acutely aware of the need to act with the utmost transparency in my dealings with the three students during the project. In particular, I did not want the participants to perceive any inequality of treatment between them and the rest of the cohort, ruling out any research activity on my part that might lead me to make judgements about their academic performance.

Therefore, it was to the qualitative interview (Mason, 2002; Freebody, 2003; Byrne, 2004; Rubin and Rubin, 2005) that I turned. Mason (2002) suggests that, within the tradition of qualitative interviewing, although variations in style occur, core features can be identified, including: the interview being a form of 'conversation' between interviewer and interviewee; relative informality in the execution of the interview; a thematic approach rather than the presentation by the researcher of a scripted set of questions and an acceptance that, in the process of the interview, knowledge will be reconstructed, rather than facts being reported.

Therefore, a key feature of the qualitative interview is that it tends to be ‘semi-structured’ (Mason, 2002: 62; Byrne, 2004: 181), avoiding the use of set questions and instead exploring themes through discursive interaction. For me, the need to use a looser format was reinforced following the trial of early pilot interviews. These early interviews were structured with set questions and therefore did not seem to yield from the interviewees coherent accounts related to their learning experience. Instead, they produced a set of closed disjointed answers. Therefore, in order to have flexibility around the use of a framework for capturing participants’ answers, I decided to use a semi-structured format. Freebody (2003) describes these interviews as beginning with a predetermined set of questions, but with some flexibility in the breadth of relevance. He elaborates:

Semi-structured interviews aim to have something of the best of both worlds by establishing a core of issues to be covered, but at the same time leaving the sequence and the relevances of the interviewee free to vary, around and out from that core (Freebody, 2003: 133).

However, my perception was that the use of semi-structured interviews still constrained respondents in the relaying of their accounts and therefore this was rejected in favour of a more open and unstructured style. In developing my interviewing style, I identified with Rubin and Rubin who have coined the term ‘*responsive interviewing*’ to mean ‘a dynamic and iterative process, not a set of tools to be applied mechanically’ (2005: 15). Within this context, I aimed to use the qualitative interview to allow ‘interviewees to speak in their own voices and with their own language’ (Byrne, 2004: 182) and this was facilitated by using DVDs as a research tool, discussed further later.

However, even open-ended interviewing is still a form of social control (Silverman, 2001; Kvale, 2006). Indeed, Kvale gives an overview of some of the power dynamics inherent in the qualitative research interview by saying that:

It entails a hierarchical relationship with an asymmetrical power distribution of interviewer and interviewee. It is a one-way dialogue, an instrumental and indirect conversation, where the interviewer upholds a monopoly of interpretation (Kvale, 2006: 484).

Therefore, the researcher must accept that participants will be actively constructing their world, and their stories, during the interview situation, resulting in an account that is a particular representation of an individual's story at a particular point in time. Mason underlines this point by stating that the qualitative interview approach is 'thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative and operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual' (Mason, 2002: 62). However, rather than being seen as a weakness this is a positive factor within my research, as the unstructured interview format gives both the interviewer and interviewee opportunities to explore and understand the experiences and practices that are being researched. In addition, the longitudinal aspect of my case study approach means that recurring themes have been able to be revisited at different points within the data collection period.

Asking questions is the most common approach to stimulating talk in an interview (Byrne, 2004; Rubin and Rubin, 2005) but because of my decision not to enter the field of research in a physical sense (in other words, not to observe directly the participants' workplace) I chose instead to use three different research tools to generate meaningful starting points for the interviews. These were DVD clips

and two forms of documentary evidence – students’ own journal entries and their personal curriculum vitae (CV).

Participants were asked to make three short DVD recordings of an aspect of their own work place practice during the course of the study. Mel, Sam and Heather made two DVD recordings each during part one of the data collection period (appendix 4.4), whilst Mel and Sam made one DVD recording each during part three of the data collection period (appendix 4.4). The duration of each recording was around ten minutes and each showed the student working with a small group of pupils within the school context. It was important to emphasise to the case study students that it was never planned to use the DVD material as a tool for the naturalistic collection and analysis of social interaction, rather it was to be used as stimulus material for eliciting discussion between interviewer and interviewee. DVD clips were chosen because ‘visual images can produce quite profound responses and reactions’ (Mason, 2002: 118). In addition, because I could not enter the participants’ workplace, I was keen to use a tool that generated material from the participant in order to elicit a sense of ownership and a feeling that the interview was being conducted on their terms and with the backdrop of a familiar context.

Törrönen suggests that stimulus objects may be used as ‘clues, as microcosms or as provokers’ (2002: 343) and can include items such as photos, films, adverts, news and historical artefacts. In my research, the DVD recordings aimed to

extend the participants' experience back into the workplace, a familiar 'stage' upon which the story could be told. In this context, the DVD recordings were very much 'cultural products' (Törrönen, 2002: 344), used within interview situations (both individual and group) with the aim of bringing something of the outside world, in this case the participants' work places, to the interview. However, the DVD camera was more than a recording device. Just as Shrum, Duque and Brown discovered in their use of digital video, the camera became 'an *actor* in the drama of the project' (2005: 8) and, even more significantly, became a mediator between participant and researcher by bringing part of the participant's workplace into the research forum. The camera took on the role of actor at three points in the research process: when participants made their film in the workplace; as participants viewed their recordings and began to make sense of what they saw, for themselves, and when participants were engaged in discussion with myself, using the film as a stimulus. In making the films themselves, participants were responsible for making decisions about where they filmed, for how long and which camera angles to use. This placed the participants in the role of 'director', thus affording them some ownership over the process, but also meaning that I was reliant upon their decisions, based on their own preferences, upon practicalities, and also, perhaps, upon their interpretation of what I would like to see. Thus, the DVD recordings brought a further dimension to the case study students' accounts of their particular learning experiences by acting as a stimulus for discussion within the interview context.

4.6.3 *Journals and Curricula Vitae*

Mel, Sam and Heather made journal entries (see appendix 4.4 for timings and frequency) and these were used, in addition to the DVD recordings, as additional stimulus material. The journal entries were also analysed using the same analytical framework as the interviews in order to identify additional thematic data. Sam and Heather kept hand written journals, whilst Mel kept an audio journal. Journal entries were neither extensive (sometimes just a few lines), nor regular, but they provided useful data and also facilitated participant reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) by providing familiar territory for the participants when used as starting points, or stimulus texts (Törrönen, 2002), within the interview process. In addition, I hoped that the very act of writing down, or verbalising 'critical incidents' (Moon, 1999) would enable the three students to represent elements of the social and emotional world relevant to them. I was, however, acutely aware that events, incidents and feelings would be reduced to that which could be conveyed by the participant through language, reflecting the power of language as a constructivist tool. Therefore, I could not treat the journals as literal reflections of reality, rather I accepted that both I and the case study students were working within a 'hybrid' reality, where 'experience, discourse and self-understandings collide with larger cultural assumptions concerning race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class and age' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: xvi). Such complex constructions were therefore taken into account during the process of interpretation and analysis.

For part two of the data collection period (appendix 4.4), Mel, Sam and Heather each provided a curriculum vitae as a basis for discussion at interview, and also as a means of collecting data relating to their qualifications and career path prior to enrolling on the Foundation Degree. This information immediately added an extra dimension to the participants' stories, by situating the narrative accounts within the bigger picture of understanding something of the participants' life before they had embarked upon the course. Alongside the journals, which also had the dual purpose of being a form of data collection in themselves and a tool for eliciting discussion at interview, these two forms of evidence can collectively be called 'personal records', a term used by Gray to include 'letters, diaries, autobiographies, biographies and oral histories' (2004: 270). Similarly, Mason refers to documents which may convey 'personal or cultural biographies' (2002:107) and distinguishes between documents that exist already (before the act of research) and those that are generated through the research process, at the researcher's request, as was the case with my study.

4.7 Analytical framework

4.7.1 Introduction

The procedural analytical framework I am using draws upon that outlined by Alexiadou (2001). Similarly to my own study, Alexiadou uses semi-structured interviews in order to capture participants' perceptions. She wishes to capture their sense of reality and seeks to 'allow the interviewees to 'define' the situation on the basis of their own experience and so to focus on what *they* consider

relevant' (2001:52). In Alexiadou's model, eight stages are outlined, starting with rudimentary familiarisation of the data and ending with the construction of accounts which 'provide the researcher with a sense of the 'whole' for every participant' (Alexiadou, 2001: 63). This model has been helpful in supporting my own development of the process of analysis and I have applied it not only to analysis of interview data, but also to analysis of the journal entries generated by Mel, Sam and Heather. The Alexiadou framework is iterative and I recognise that the move from field text to research text should not be viewed simply as a series of steps, but rather that it is 'layered in complexity' (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000:132), demanding an iterative and negotiated processes within the analytical framework.

In analysing sets of data related to the three case study participants, I am aiming to produce an account of each participant's experience of learning through a Foundation Degree. The data collected (summarised in appendix 4.4) has been identified as covering three parts of the Foundation Degree course: part one – year one, semesters one and two; part two – year two semester one, and part three – year two semester two and graduation. The data has been analysed according to the stages outlined below and exemplification of the method of analysis can be found in appendix 4.5.

4.7.2 Stages of analysis

4.7.2.1 Stage one: achieving familiarity

Achieving familiarity with the data was crucial from the very beginnings of data collection. This involved the reading and re-reading of interview transcripts and journal entries as well as listening to the interview data on tape. Alexiadou talks of trying 'to develop a sense of the whole for each interview' (Alexiadou, 2001: 57). Similarly, I was seeking to piece together different forms of data (taped and transcribed interviews; audio and written journal entries) in order to develop an holistic view of the stories being told, without drawing conclusions too early on about significant or critical incidents within the data.

4.7.2.2 Stage two: recognising significance

This stage saw me underlining key parts of the text that I saw as significant. Deciding what to underline was governed by its relevance to the phenomenological focus - in other words, whether there was a direct relationship to the research focus 'Learning through a Foundation Degree' and in particular, to areas that had emerged through 'Mapping the field of inquiry' in Chapter Three. This is exemplified in appendix 4.5 under stage two of the process of analysis, where Sam describes the guilt she feels as a result of trying to manage the conflicts inherent in trying to spend time with both her family and on her studies. Such role conflict was identified in Chapter Three as a thread of inquiry under the sub-heading of 'Being a student: self-theories and identity'. During this stage of the analytical process, I also found myself noticing recurring comments and

looking for strands in the data aligned to these recurrences, such as the students' use of the term 'guilt', also exemplified in appendix 4.5. I recognised, as does Alexiadou that 'at this early stage, such a judgement might be hasty, but, the rest of the data is not being dismissed' (2001: 57). The future reconsideration of the transcripts as whole entities ensures that further identification of pertinent aspects of the text are identified.

4.7.2.3 Stage three: towards thematic development

This stage involves trying to capture the meanings of statements through words or phrases, which in effect become themes (stage three in appendix 4.5). Alexiadou describes this stage as 'an attempt to 'sort out' the data, and reduce, or, abstract from the talk of the participant' (2001: 58). Of course, the danger in assigning themes to units of narrative (sentences, phrases, paragraphs) is that the theme is merely a representation of meaning based on the researcher's interpretation of what is read in the text and the epistemological perspective they bring that influences the 'reading'. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this demands a reflexive approach on the part of the researcher in order to think critically about the task in hand and to challenge one's own assumptions about the data presented. The themes identified at this stage are listed in appendix 4.6.

4.7.2.4 Stage four: thematic clusters

Alexiadou's stage four seeks to cluster together data that represents the identified themes from stage three. She is very clear that 'the problem of overlaps of

meaning between data bits is quite strong at this stage' (2001: 59). My stage four actually has two parts within it, where overarching themes contain clustered data which in itself contains sub-themes, identified more through an iterative rather than systemic process. For example, each case study identifies 'work' as an overarching theme, within which data is further clustered using sub-themes such as 'working relationships with colleagues', 'mentor' and 'role in school'. On the face of it, the reader may perceive overlaps between these headings, but there are still emphases within these areas that are pertinently unique to each one. Alexiadou is keen to 'avoid unclear boundaries between themes' (2001: 59) but, in my view, the overlap and therefore reinforcement of certain themes within the data serves to strengthen the narrative aspect of the account. For example, the sub-theme of 'mentor' is identified under the thematic clusters of both 'work' and 'relationships', underlining the importance of mentoring as a focus for further analysis. The thematic clusters and associated sub-themes and codes are detailed in appendix 4.7 and at this stage show the emergence of the clusters of 'work', 'academy', 'relationships' and 'self'.

4.7.2.5 Stage five: unravelling meaning

Stage five sees Alexiadou gradually 'moving towards the unravelling of participant's meaning' (2001: 59). Her model of critically reading through the data bits related to each theme, with a view to a) describing themes in specific terms and b) attempting to 'discover the 'functions' of the theme in the talk' (Alexiadou, 2001: 60) has been useful in shaping my approach to this stage. I too

have attempted to try and understand the characteristics that participants attached to themes, following Alexiadou's lead in basing the terms used for descriptions of such characteristics upon the participant's words. In addition, I have also considered Alexiadou's second aspect of 'how the theme is used', but have been wary of being led into traditions of detailed discourse analysis for fear of losing overall narrative sense. Rather I have mirrored Alexiadou's attempt to 'understand the various levels of participants' meanings' (Alexiadou, 2001: 60) and this led to the reorganisation of thematic areas, including the rationalisation of four overarching thematic clusters to three (stage five within appendix 4.5). The rationalisation involved the identification of repeated references and the process of doing this showed that all references to specific interview and journal data within the overarching theme of 'relationships' were replicated within the other themes of 'self', 'work' and 'academy'. For example, the references that Sam made to *guilt* under the overarching theme of *relationships* were replicated within the overarching theme of *self* and were therefore consolidated within *self*. Therefore, the remaining thematic clusters became 'work', 'academy' and 'self' (appendix 4.8).

4.7.2.6 Stage six: thematic enrichment

It is at this stage that it is vitally important to continue to relate themes back to original data, in order to ensure adequate analytical coverage of the data. Alexiadou actually includes this aspect within stage five, but I have included it in stage six, alongside a reinterpretation of Alexiadou's stage six, which involves

looking again for further meanings within a theme. Within my stage six (appendix 4.5), I seek to provide an additional opportunity to enrich the identified themes by possibly discovering further characteristics within them that may enhance thematic insight. This is achieved through again viewing the data as a whole in order to extract any missed meanings or newly emerging connections between themes by checking the interview extracts identified in relation to specific themes back to the original transcript.

4.7.2.7 Stage seven: data interrogation

Stage seven demands that I ask more detailed ‘questions of the data’ (Alexiadou 2001: 62). However, in order to safeguard the sense of narrative, I have sought to ask detailed questions of data sections. Within these sections I have investigated aspects such as: choice of vocabulary; the use of metaphors and examples; the significance attached to any emphasised or repeated themes; contradictions, and the possible status of identified themes and sub themes in the context of the research focus. This is exemplified in appendix 4.5.

4.7.2.8 Stage eight: constructing accounts

Alexiadou’s final stage ‘construct(s) an account for each participant in which we depict the main essence of that individual’s experience’ (2001: 63). My accounts seek to provide a holistic overview of each student’s experience of learning through a Foundation Degree and are found in chapters five, six and seven of this thesis.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how my research design was conceived and carried out. I have sought not only to explain what my research design looked like and how it worked in practice, but also to elucidate the reasons why I designed and conducted the research in particular ways. In accounting for how I approached the research design process, I started with an overview of over-riding principles and underpinning perspectives, and then built up a picture that related methodology and methods to these principles and perspectives in order to bring an authentic dimension to the validity of my work (Guba and Lincoln, 2005).

For me, within the context of a thesis that focuses upon capturing accounts of specific learning experiences, the process of developing my research design has felt like a ‘mini-drama’ in itself. For example, I stated at the beginning of this chapter that the process entailed facing ‘difficult questions’ (Mason, 2002:4) around the nature of reality and truth, and demanded a reflexive approach (Mason, 2002; Seale, 2004; Richards, 2005; Scott and Morrison, 2007) in order to secure appropriate levels of authenticity relative to the epistemological perspective that I held to. I have had to balance the need for coherence within the research design, with flexibility in terms of adapting methodology and method in order to retain fidelity to the research aims, context and underlying principles. Indeed, dealing with difficult questions in relation to research design has helped me to understand further that the research process involves unravelling an ‘intellectual puzzle’ (Mason 2002: 17) – the answers to which begin to be revealed in the next three

chapters, which present Mel's, Sam's and Heather's accounts of learning through a Foundation Degree.

PART TWO: The accounts

Preface

Part Two contains the accounts of the three case study students – Mel, Sam and Heather. As already outlined in Chapter Four, themes were identified from journal entries and interviews that seemed notable for their significance for each individual. Concurrent with this identification has been an iterative consideration of relevant literature in order to map threads of inquiry – presented in Chapter Three. The resulting accounts (which represent stage eight of the analytical framework outlined in Chapter Four) are therefore cognizant of both the threads of inquiry and of the analytical stages related to thematic clusters (stage four), unravelling meaning and thematic development (stage five), thematic enrichment (stage six) and data interrogation (stage seven). The presentation of each account includes selected extracts taken directly from both interview transcripts and journal entries. In presenting the accounts in this way, I have tried to retain fidelity to the words of the students themselves and have attempted to safeguard a sense of continuity in the way that each account is told. Therefore, at this stage, commentary is not extensive. Instead, key points from the accounts together with the related threads of inquiry will be drawn together for detailed analysis during Part Three of this thesis.

I was keen to ensure that my initial interviews were not prejudiced by any pre-conceived ideas of the previous life histories of Mel, Sam and Heather. However,

I was also aware that knowledge of their personal biographies could be important in understanding their stories. Therefore, prior to part two of the data collection period in September 2005 (see appendix 4.4 for timeline of data collected), I asked the three students to draft an outline curriculum vitae each. These were used as a basis for discussion and to help me understand what each of the students were bringing both to their course and to this study in terms of their career, academic and personal histories. The results of these discussions have been incorporated into the 'Introductions' to each chapter in order to give the reader a sense of the events that preceded the student enrolling on the Foundation Degree and including pertinent contextual material (for example marital status, job history) as appropriate.

The accounts themselves cover the duration of the Foundation Degree course from September 2004 to May 2006 and also capture reflections from the students following graduation. The accounts are presented separately in order to convey the uniqueness of each student's learning experience, with some limited comparisons made as the accounts have progressed. The comparisons have been kept necessarily brief in order to retain the individual integrity of each account, with key similarities and differences captured through a final synopsis. The accounts are organised chronologically into three parts: starting the course; staying the course and completing the course. These parts are aligned to the data collection timeline, outlined in appendix 4.4, where part one focuses upon year

one of the course, part two focuses upon year two semester one and part three focuses upon year two semester two and graduation.

The specific data extracts used to construct the students' accounts can be traced through the analytical framework to the thematic cluster stage, with the coding system listed in appendix 4.7. Figure 5.1 shows how the coding system used to identify data extracts in the accounts operates:

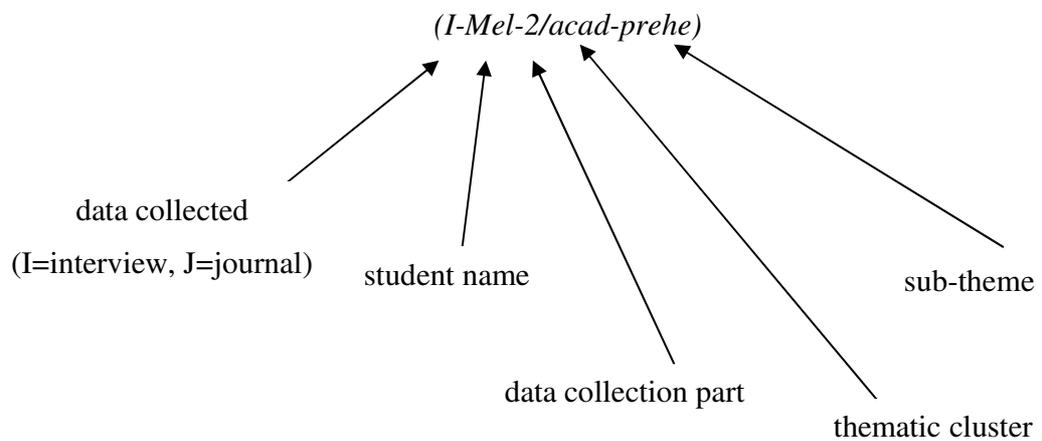


Figure 5.1: The data coding system

An overview for each chapter seeks to capture the character of the account by previewing key themes pertinent to the student. The 'End piece' to each account attempts to distil the account into 'the main essence of the individual's experience and perception' (Alexiadou, 2001: 63) of learning through a Foundation Degree. At this point I return to the themes identified at the beginning, thus making the accounts 'serve as a contextual point of reference against which propositions [...] are reflected upon' (Alexiadou, 2001: 63), and providing a starting point for

detailed analysis and discussion in Chapters Eight and Nine. The synopsis concludes Part Two of the thesis by identifying key similarities and differences in all three accounts, in preparation for further analysis and discussion in Part Three.

Chapter Five

Mel's account

5.1 Overview

Mel's account charts a learning journey that sees her coming face to face with personal learning challenges and with the difficulties inherent in bearing multiple roles as student, employee and parent. The learning challenges stem from a previously difficult encounter with higher education and from coping as a dyslexic learner. These two factors in particular engender within Mel a lack of confidence in herself as a capable learner. However, despite moments of real self-doubt in her capacity to succeed within higher education, Mel also expresses at times a sense of wonder at the learning process – acknowledging that the act of studying has developed her reflective skills and her ability to make connections between work practice and theoretical concepts. This often gives the impression of a learning experience that is potentially transformative for Mel as she uses her workplace experiences as a starting point for reflection and analysis, and ultimately the creation of new meaning pertinent to her working and learning context.

However, the ghosts of her previous experience of education and of her dyslexia never seem to be far away, distracting Mel from attaining belief in herself as a competent learner early on in the course and even recurring towards the end. In addition, Mel struggles with feelings of guilt as she experiences the tensions of

managing different responsibilities, in particular in relation to her parenting role and the conflict between time spent with her family and time spent studying. Thus, Mel's account is one of coping with challenges – the challenge of coming to terms with previous learning experiences, personal learning differences and the development of self-confidence as a learner, and the challenge of managing the student experience in the light of multiple roles and responsibilities.

5.2 Introduction

Mel was 44 years old when she started the Foundation Degree in September 2004. Following an early career in London, working within the design sector and including a post within a museum, Mel and her family moved to Lincolnshire just after her first child was born in order to be closer to the wider family. This marked a change in lifestyle that saw Mel becoming involved in running the local toddlers group and then the playgroup. Soon, with two children, she became a parent governor at her children's school (a medium-sized city primary school) and went on to help voluntarily before securing a post as a teaching assistant. Thus, the family became Mel's 'hook' into schools' work and this developed into a more systematic approach to developing a possible career in education. Mel explained this in an interview halfway through the Foundation Degree course, which explored how she came to work in a school: *I said to [my husband] Mike I wanted to go back to work properly, sort of real work at that point and I thought it might be teaching [...] So I did a few courses for teaching assistants (I-Mel-2/acad-prehe).*

Indeed, once Mel was situated within the context of school she was able to reflect more critically upon her own skills and knowledge and compare what she saw in herself with those engaged in professional teaching activity around her: *Once I was doing the job [...]I looked seriously at teachers and how they were teaching and what they were teaching and stuff and I thought actually I could do this (I-Mel-2/acad-prehe)*. Mel soon realised that not only was she capable within her teaching assistant role, but that she probably could become a qualified teacher and this became an important motivational factor for her as she applied for Foundation Degree study and later when she progressed to a final honours year which incorporated Qualified Teacher Status.

5.3 Starting the course

Yet, even though she seemed sure of her ultimate goal and had been personally proactive in securing the requisite entry qualifications (GCSE mathematics in particular) in order to get to the point of enrolment on a degree course, Mel expressed a mixture of excitement and worry in the first words of her audio journal, completed during September 2004:

So here is my first audio diary and I think the best place to start is by contemplating the kind of thoughts I had before I started the course. I think for the most part I was concerned about whether I'd be able to manage the course from an intellectual point of view, whether I'd find it too difficult. I was certainly very excited about starting something which I'd wanted to do for such a long time and had had to plan for over a long period of time, waiting till my son was a little bit older and had started school. Certainly getting a few courses under my belt, going back and retaking my maths GCSE. So there's been a lot of long term planning to let this actually happen and now that the time had actually arrived it was, it was a very exciting time for me. But there was also a worry or a nag at

the back of my mind about whether I'd have to think about some areas which I hadn't really addressed for a long time (J-Mel-1/acad-uni).

This entry provides insights into Mel's frame of mind at the beginning of the course. Immediately, Mel's learner identity was founded upon a self-perception of academic inadequacy and lack of belief in her ability to cope with the course. The words from the journal were the first thoughts she had recorded, signifying perhaps that the feelings of inadequacy were foremost in her mind, even before the course had started. Self-confidence in her capabilities seemed to be lacking, and this impression was reinforced through comments made during the first interviews a few months later, as she reflected back upon the beginning of the course: *I had an expectation that [...] it would be quite challenging (I-Mel-1/acad-uni).* Mel was never explicit in her journal entries and interviews about why she suspected the course would be a challenge, but there were plenty of clues in the interviews. For example, Mel's concerns may have stemmed from her previous experience of higher education, as she had completed one year of a degree course in fashion and textiles some twenty-five years previously, but had left the course at the end of the first year. Reflecting upon this, Mel remarked in interview: *I think now, knowing what I know [...] I should have taken a gap year. In those days that wasn't done – I was the first one to get to that level of higher education in my family and I think possibly there was pressure there (I-Mel-1/acad-prehe).* As a tutor, I had not appreciated that Mel had engaged (albeit briefly) in higher education previously and the interview suggests that, for her, it had been a difficult experience – one that could mirror the experiences of the

growing numbers of non-traditional entrants to higher education. She was the first of her family to enter university and the implication is that she felt unprepared and under pressure from her family to succeed.

Over twenty years later, as Mel prepared to enter higher education for a second time, she was still expressing self-doubt and the reasons for this are clearly articulated in the next entries in Mel's audio journal (still within the very first cluster of recorded entries) where she refers explicitly to the fact that she is dyslexic:

I had started a course having left art school at Middlesex Polytechnic, yes a fashion and design course, but had left after the end of my first year. And I think for the most part that's because...although it wasn't a particular academic course my dyslexia was certainly a problem. And maybe the course wasn't quite right for me as well. But at the back of my mind there was that little nag about whether I'd be able to complete this course or whether I'd start something and again not be able to finish it. And I think that's probably the only thing in my entire life that I've started and not actually finished and I just wondered how I would feel about that. I've certainly had to think about my dyslexia in a way that I haven't done for years and years really, I've had strategies in place for dealing with that and I've got by but now actually I've had to face it and talk about it again for the first time, really probably since I was at school and it was very difficult to have to think about it, and still is to some degree. It's not something that I'm able to talk about easily. But views have changed a lot and so have the support packages that are in place and gradually I'm beginning to kind of face up to those difficulties and find more satisfying ways of coping and dealing with it than I have done in the past (J-Mel-1/self-dys).

I was aware of Mel's dyslexia – she had disclosed this on entry to the University College – but she never discussed her learning differences with me, apart from through the audio journal and in interview as part of the research. The audio journal seemed to be helpful to Mel in enabling her to discuss her dyslexia. She

appeared more comfortable avoiding face-to-face contact when tackling this subject. Indeed she was open about the fact that it was not something she could talk about easily, preferring to record her thoughts rather than articulate them in conversation with a third party. She referred to her dyslexia as *a problem*, with the inference being that it impaired her capacity to achieve on the first course she enrolled in. This memory had stayed with her and had understandably created self-doubt in terms of whether she was capable of completing another degree course.

However, in later audio journal entries during the first year of study, Mel was clear that doing the course had provided a context for tackling her difficulties and, in particular, Mel's entry of January 2005 revealed that specific module content had been significant in challenging her assumptions about, and attitudes to, literacy skills:

The language and literacy module was very revealing and what I found was all of my, all of my prejudices if you like, all of the things that I felt were really important in terms of being successful at reading and writing I had to really look at those and reassess and that has changed quite fundamentally how I, how I view those processes now. Because of my own shortcomings in terms of being a very slow reader and particularly poor at spelling I'd always felt that really they were the two things that were most important, perhaps because they were areas that I wasn't very good at. But I understand much better now how contextual understanding is key when reading, spelling is not a big deal in terms of being successful at writing and reading and that being able to articulate orally thoughts and ideas is the most critical skill because if one can do that then the rest follows in a quite a natural way and although the mechanics will be hard to come to terms with if, if one doesn't have those good oral skills then the rest can't happen at all. So that's been quite, quite a revelation to me (J-Mel-1/acad-abil).

The use of the term *revelation* seems to emphasise the important step that Mel had undertaken in terms of understanding her dyslexia and how to manage it. In fact, although dyslexia was explicitly referred to by Mel in her first journal entry, it does not appear in subsequent entries. Furthermore, Mel talks about her dyslexia during interview in parts one and two of the data collection, but not at all in part three. The references bring insight into the practical challenges and frustrations that Mel faces in producing written work and the potential effect upon self-esteem that the dyslexia label may have on Mel, but the decline in focus on dyslexia during the data collection period suggests that Mel comes to terms with her learning difference during the course.

Indeed, journal entries half way through the year show a marked contrast to the early entries that revealed Mel's worries about her academic ability. Mel's learning journey became more dynamically developmental, with 'enjoyment' being a feature of her comments: *I've enjoyed everything that I've done so far and that gives me a real buzz (J-Mel-1/acad-uni)* and with the notion of making *connections* identified by Mel: *As time goes on and through experience and through being reflective you see those connections and make those connections more and more (I-Mel-1/acad-con)*. In talking about *connections* Mel is describing her own learning process – the connecting of knowledge and understanding not only within the University College-based elements of the course, but also in terms of applying what she had learned on the course within her workplace, as exemplified in a further analogy she used: *The lights go on,*

because then when you go back into your classroom the next day you think oh I know why that's happening or you know suddenly you can see the relevance of things (I-Mel-1/acad-con). Therefore, for Mel, her work-based experience and the iterative interaction with her studies at the University College seemed to be a powerful element in her overall learning experience.

Yet, during part one of the data collection process, Mel sometimes hinted that her job role limited some of the potential for learning in the workplace. Her job in school was constructed in such a way that meant she worked largely within key stage one across five different classes, focussing upon literacy and numeracy through small group work in the mornings and supporting whole class art activities in the afternoons. Thus, the role was fairly limited in terms of access to the wider curriculum, largely working within the areas of literacy, numeracy and art. However, despite this, Mel appreciated that her role enabled her to work in a variety of ways, thus giving her breadth of experience, not only in terms of the type of activity she engaged with but also regarding the different working practices held by the teachers with whom she worked: *It's always fascinating and working during the week with five different teachers – their styles of teaching are quite different (I-Mel-1/work-role).*

However, when discussing the role of her mentor in school, Mel suggested that the demands of her work as a teaching assistant constrained access to the work-based tasks set by the University College: *I'm fortunate in that I have a really*

excellent working relationship with my mentor in school and she's also my team leader so she, she works really hard to give me the time I need within the constraints of, you know, what we do (I-Mel-1/work-ment). Mel was employed by the school to fulfil a specific role and the implication was that this role did constrain some of the activities she was expected to engage with as part of the work-based element of the course, directed by the University College. For example, some work-based tasks could involve an hour's work in school, (observing a small group of pupils, or investigating resource material) and therefore the role of mentor was important in terms of having someone within the workplace who could negotiate on behalf of Mel to access different work-based experiences in order to complete tasks set by the University College.

The combination of University College-based studies and work-based tasks are designed to enhance the Foundation Degree students' theoretical and practical understanding of school practice and in this respect, Mel was clear in her first audio journal about what she hoped to get out of the course:

I hoped that I'd be able to add to my skills and knowledge in terms of my job [as] any qualifications or any insights or any strategies that I learned would obviously inform my work practice, that was a kind of a given really, but also just the idea of learning something new for the sake of learning is not something I've had an opportunity to do before and this is an area that I am hugely interested in so I hope that I'll be able to achieve something for myself as well as to improve my work practices. And taking it one step at a time if I was successful on this course then ultimately perhaps I would be able to go on, complete the honours degree and then maybe teach. I still don't know about that but ultimately that would be what I hope for, we'll see if that actually happens (J-Mel-1/self-mot).

Mel held two key motivating goals for doing the course. Firstly, a key goal was to develop skills and knowledge to improve her work practice. However, a second goal was to *achieve something for myself* and this seemed to hold more value for Mel, even though it also carried risks, given that her early contemplations had already shown a lack of confidence in her ability to succeed. In this respect, she was quick to affirm that the decision to start the course was the right one, once she found that she could engage at a sufficient level academically: *Actually not only did I want to do it I found that I can do it and I'm reasonably good at it' (I-Mel-1/self-mot)*. Indeed, when reflecting back upon course content at the end of the first year, Mel was extremely positive about her experience: *I had an expectation that it would be quite challenging. I'd expected that I would find a lot of the reading and researching and the understanding of things quite difficult and actually that hasn't been the case (I-Mel-1/self-mot)*.

Mel reflected upon the notion of success at length in the early interviews. For example, she discussed the idea of succeeding at something and how that can create a positive cycle of reinforcement, confidence and success: *[it is important] to know that you can do it [...] and then that gives you the confidence [...] the more success you have the more able [...] I feel I am, to do the next thing (I-Mel-1/self-conf)*. For Mel, building upon success was of great importance in her journey through the course, but she was clear to underline the fact that, for her, success was not always about getting good grades: *in terms of successes, they can be quite small things [...] like in a lecture when you make a connection (I-Mel-*

l/acad-con). This shows, again, that the notion of ‘making connections’ was an important part of Mel’s developing personal learning philosophy. In addition, Mel recognised that success was also about recognising that those pupils she was supporting in school were making progress. For example, in describing the support she was giving to a particular pupil in school, she recognised that she had *contributed in a positive way which possibly I would have been reluctant to do maybe prior to this (I-Mel-I/work-c/imp)*, thus suggesting that Mel’s engagement with the Foundation Degree had some impact with ‘third parties’ within the workplace (in this case, pupils within the school setting).

Mel went further and discussed how the course had helped her in understanding her own children: *I’m actually more aware I think than I would have been (I-Mel-I/work-c/imp)*, a comment related to gender differences and learning styles. However, while this new awareness might have benefited relationships at home, there were also a raft of issues which impacted negatively upon Mel’s family during the first year of the course, as described in this journal entry, completed just after Christmas:

It’s the 19th January 2005 [and] it’s been very difficult completing the last two modules because they continued over the Christmas period. It’s been very difficult to find the time and the energy and the inclination to do what’s been required to get everything done to meet the deadlines. And certainly there was a time over the Christmas holidays when I thought why am I actually doing this I had nearly lost sight of why all of this was so necessary. It becomes so totally consuming that everything is reduced to managing the time available so that completing whatever has to be completed actually gets done. That means that this year Christmas has been quite a low key affair and obviously with two children, one of whom is only seven, I felt quite guilty about that and a bit resentful too – having to put my needs ahead of my children’s is quite a hard thing to do and not

something I'm used to particularly. Up until now everything that I've done, decisions that I've made about work and so on have fitted round what I feel are the best ways of meeting their needs. And actually there's no room for that when you're doing this kind of a course because their needs have to come second and that makes me quite unhappy (J-Mel-1/self-guilt).

Here, Mel described the conflict she felt over the Christmas period – managing course work with family responsibilities. This seemed to have sapped her energy and enthusiasm – she even questioned why she was doing the course and the ‘buzz’ described in earlier diary entries was conspicuously missing. Conflict between coursework and home life resulted in feelings of guilt and resentment, particularly in relation to her role as parent, caring for the needs of her children. Mel returned to the theme of guilt again in her journal entry of April 2005: *Feeling still a little bit guilty about again the time that things are taking to complete, that's taking me away from my children, especially in the holidays (J-Mel-1/self-guilt).* In addition, in June at the end of the year the difficulties of balancing study and domestic responsibilities appeared again:

I haven't quite got the children and study balanced [...] that is the worst thing, the very worst thing [...] you know I really enjoy the course and I've got such a huge amount out of it should I be enjoying it that much and still be away from my children? (J-Mel-1/self-guilt).

The contrast between her enjoyment of the course and her recognition that she had responsibilities towards her children clearly created tension for Mel and her final journal entry of the year gives a sense of relief that there will be a break in the course over the summer and a return to ‘normality’:

I have to say that I'm actually quite relieved now that I've got to the end of this year, it has been sometimes quite a hard slog and I have had to be

very determined throughout the module to ensure that I've completed everything I needed to do in the time. I'm happy to be able now to spend the summer with my children not having to worry about essays and portfolios and presentations, and that's a nice feeling knowing now that we've got a few months to do the normal things that we do (J-Mel-1/self-guilt).

5.4 Staying the course

At the start of part two of the data collection period, just before she returned to the University College for year two of the course, Mel completed the following audio journal entry:

Well here I am 18th September just gathering my thoughts before going back for my second year at college. I'm thinking quite hard about a number of things [and] I have to say I don't have the level of excitement going back for the second year [...]. I have asked myself do I want to go through another year like that year I had last year? And I have thought a little bit about that, now that I know exactly what it means and what studying is going to be required, the amount of reading and the commitment. So I suppose knowing now what's going to be expected, and that its going to gear up again this year has made me a little bit, yeah subdued is probably the right word. So not the huge level of excitement from last year but I still want to do it so there's, I think there's no question of me not going back (J-Mel-2/acad-uni).

This entry in Mel's audio journal was recorded the day before returning for her second year of the course and her tone of voice was distinctly downbeat. Rather than showing enthusiasm for returning to the University College, Mel confessed that she felt *subdued* about going back. She was in a position of knowing what to expect and, rather than this acting positively to boost her confidence in returning to study within familiar systems and surroundings, quite the opposite seemed to be the case – I got the impression that she felt condemned by knowing what was expected of her. This diary entry contrasted significantly with the entry prior to

starting year one of the course, where Mel had expressed excitement at starting the course, without prior knowledge of what was to be expected. At that time, there had been a sense of positive anticipation at starting something that she had planned for and looked forward to for a long time, although it had been tempered by a cautious note in relation to whether Mel felt she was capable of studying at higher education level. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, Mel was able to reflect realistically upon the workload for year two and the realisation that the levels of commitment would have not changed had dampened her spirits. Yet, she was clear that she still wanted to do it and that there was *no question* of not going back to the University College.

As a tutor, I found Mel's comments surprising. I had assumed that familiarity with the course would ease access back into year two, rather than cause continued anxiety. Indeed, I had predicted that the challenges which Mel had faced in year one related to coming to terms with her previous higher education experience and with her dyslexia would dissipate in year two. Maybe these specific challenges were less prominent in Mel's mind, but nevertheless she was clearly not enthusiastic about returning to the University College. Perhaps it was the first hand familiarity with academic practice and expectations that caused Mel's subdued response. After all, as she entered her second year she had formed a clear understanding of the expectations for study at higher education level four and she knew that the workload would have a continued impact not only upon her but also on her family. In fact, it was not as if Mel's fears were unfounded, as,

two weeks after making the above comments and starting the second year, Mel remarked in interview that: *It has been quite hard though getting back into that study routine and I've slightly begrudged it...I'm having to get back in the swing and it's not easy (I-Mel-2/acad-skill)*. She recognised in herself that she was not up to speed with studies. She did not indicate why it was hard *to get back in the swing*, although the following interview extract gives some insight into how Mel viewed the build up of 'pressure' on the course: *Once you kind of get into the course one thing follows another [...] and you don't kind of realise how these pressures build up (I-Mel-2/acad-wkload)*. Here, there is almost the suggestion that academic work is rather a treadmill, suggesting that the motivational factors for doing the course (identified earlier) must have continued to be influential for Mel to keep going.

Furthermore, there was still evidence of conflict for Mel during year two of the course, in relation to balancing the responsibilities of work, home and study. At the beginning of year two, Mel shared with me what her daughter had said to her regarding Mel's imminent return to study: *My daughter said as September approached "Well I'll have to make the most of this because my life is going to end when you go back to college" (I-Mel-2/self-guilt)*. Mel's daughter knew from the experience of the first year what the course entailed for her mother and the effect it would have on the family for a second year. She knew that family life would be different during term time, even if she expressed it rather over-dramatically. Therefore, for Mel, a mature student with family roles and

responsibilities, she had added pressure from her family members to continue to act in the familial role, as well as demonstrate success as a student.

In the context of Mel's return to year two of the course, she was clear that the support of her peer group was vital: *Social interaction is absolutely key to me [...] it is quite reassuring to know that everybody else has very similar concerns (I-Mel-2/acad-peers)*. Mel needed the reassurance of knowing that others had similar issues to deal with (for example, coping with academic conventions in areas such as writing and assessment), and actively engaged with the group in order to seek support. The implication is that the engagement was mutual – she had found out that others had 'similar concerns' so there must have been interactions within and across the group. Mel was also clear about why only fellow students understood, noting that she could talk to her husband but saying *this isn't his area of expertise (I-Mel-2/acad-peers)*. In addition, Mel recognised that *school isn't quite the same because people have their own agendas and their own areas of interest and you know they're very pressured, there isn't always time to talk about things (I-Mel-2/work-sup)*. Therefore, Mel identified a vital and distinct role for the student peer group in terms of providing mutual support.

5.5 Completing the course

Towards the end of the course, during part three of the data collection period, I returned in the interview questions to exploring the challenges inherent in the completion of work-based tasks, Mel replied: *It's not impossible by any means*

but I think you do need to have a very good relationship with either your mentor or [...] whoever it is you're working with (I-Mel-3/work-ment). The mentoring relationship was therefore seen as crucial in terms of facilitating opportunities to complete University College-directed tasks in the workplace and, despite the challenges, Mel was positive about the worth of the work-based component of the course: *It is a really valuable part of what we do for the course [...] it complements the theory because it's ok to understand the theory but until you apply that you can't possibly know how it works in practice and what the difficulties are (I-Mel-3/work-wbt).* Indeed, she went further in her description of the benefits of the work-based elements of the course when, two months before the end of the course, Mel commented in interview that she perceived an increase in levels of reflection, over and above what she may have expected of herself. *I am quite reflective anyway, but not to the extent now that you know that I'm constantly thinking about things...and also in a work place setting there's very little time for reflection [and] this course makes you find time (I-Mel-3/acad-refl).* Mel was sure that the development of her ability to reflect upon practice was facilitated through doing the course, which had made her find time to think and develop new understandings of her practice, thus moving her along a transformative educative path.

Furthermore, Mel felt that the course had impacted upon her professional practice in school, both in terms of her pedagogic and subject knowledge and her effectiveness in the classroom:

It's made a huge difference to how I think about things, how I apply things now, how I approach lots of things, you know I'm much more informed [...]and I'm much less accepting of things as they appear. Now I always want to know why [...] now I'm much more active in looking for all those other possibilities whereas before I didn't have a lot of the skills to be able to do that you know. So on a professional level that's made me a much better, much more effective I think in what I do (I-Mel-3/work-c/imp).

Mel perceives improvement in her professional practice as directly related to a more thoughtful approach on her part. She describes herself as more informed and more active in searching for *other possibilities* – presumably in areas such as curriculum delivery, but also in applying theory to practice in order to develop higher levels of effectiveness, thus pointing to further transformation in her approach to school-based practice.

However, when asked in interview to recount the final stages of the Foundation Degree course, I was unprepared for the negativity of Mel's response. I was expecting an animated account of receiving the final degree result and taking part in the graduation ceremony. Instead, Mel described in detail the difficulties she had found with the final course assessment, which was an examination (the only examination during the course):

Yes that was not a good time for me really. It should have been, but I did so badly in that final written paper that I truly believed that I hadn't done enough, that I hadn't, because I panicked. I was fine - first question was absolutely fine, I was well prepared for that, I got on, I did it, you know in terms of the time that I had, I was absolutely spot on and I got to the second question that I'd chosen to do and I could see that I wasn't as well prepared for that [...] I looked at the text that was supplied and I actually couldn't read it and I was completely stuck so I just had to write and write and write and write and that's all I could do. I was absolutely in a blind panic, absolutely. And then I came out of that and thought well that's that actually, I hadn't done enough. As it turned out I'd done enough by what

2 or 3 marks to squeak [through], and that was awful, absolutely awful (I-Mel-3/acad-ach).

Mel had not coped at all well in the final exam and so the last stages of the course had brought trauma and panic. Reading this as her tutor, Mel's comments provoked extreme disappointment with myself and the system in general. I felt that her experience reflected upon the quality of support that had been provided to the students and regarded it as a failing on my part that Mel had not been better prepared for the examination. Perhaps, though, the examination had once again resurrected Mel's feelings of inadequacy – maybe it had triggered memories of her previous University experience, or perhaps she had convinced herself that, as a dyslexic, she was never going to cope with an examination-based assessment. If there were underlying reasons, I chose not to probe as the whole experience had clearly been extremely painful for Mel. She went on to describe the huge disappointment she felt with her results. It had left her feeling vulnerable and demotivated in terms of progressing to the honours year:

When the results came and I kind of squeaked through I still had really mixed feelings about that then because then I thought... well you know all my family said "Well that's great, you've done it," but that actually wasn't quite enough, I didn't want to just do it, that didn't reflect the massive amount of effort that I'd put in or actually what I could do, it didn't reflect either of those things and so that for me was really crap. So that was really terrible. But the graduation was fantastic and my parents were you know absolutely delighted for me, as was my husband I have to say. But I didn't feel that really. So that was very mixed and I think that kind of made me really kind of undermine my confidence now for this last year (I-Mel-3/acad-ach).

Fortunately, though, the conversation took a more positive turn as Mel shared with me her future aspirations. She was still focussed upon qualifying as a

teacher, but also articulated a heightened awareness of her own developing educational philosophy:

I just have to keep going now, you know I have to just keep the momentum going [...]and I'm thinking that the kinds of teaching that I'm interested in are more child centre in the sense that I can see now, looking at the National Curriculum and how its applied, there are some fundamental things that I don't agree with and so it's making me you know more critical I think. So there are certainly areas that I'm interested in finding out more about, I mean Montessori [...]I've always been interested in and her approach to things[...]I don't know in a wild moment I thought I, you know if this goes well and I teach for a few years I could see myself perhaps doing an MA. Which is surprising, my husband put his head in his hands at the prospect of having to be my sponsor for another three more years but I could see that now as a possibility whereas that would have been you know not a possibility at all a few years ago, I wouldn't have even considered that, you know couldn't have envisaged myself managing anything like that but now I can see I might (I-Mel-3/self-fut).

Mel's ambitions go beyond achieving a teaching position. She recognises in herself that she has developed the skill to think critically about classroom practice and is keen to explore alternative practices. The fact that she even suggests the possibility of studying for an MA is a huge achievement, given the uncertainty and self-doubt prevalent in the earlier part of this account, and even in the part above related to her examination performance. Mel can now imagine herself studying at a still higher level and the image of her 'seeing' herself in that position, is a powerful one. Mel also describes a rise in self-confidence that she has perceived over the duration of the course:

I am more inclined to take a risk now, I'm less worried about failing I think. I mean it is still an issue because that's you know self esteem and all those things but I feel perhaps better equipped now to kind of rationalise it whereas before I [...] would have avoided situations or things rather than risk the possibility of criticism or implying that I wasn't competent (I-Mel-3/self-conf).

5.6 End piece

Mel impressed me with her commitment and fortitude throughout the course. During interviews and through her orally recorded journal entries she revealed to me significant details about her hopes and fears in terms of academic study. She was acutely aware of the challenges of academic study and set high expectations for herself in terms of what she hoped to achieve. She also became very open about her dyslexia and the practical issues that the condition presented to her – a subject that Mel could quite easily have wished to avoid, given the impact it had had on her previous foray into higher education twenty years previously. In addition, she grappled throughout the two years with the tensions presented to her as she took on board the multiple identities of parent, student and employee, and, graciously, she allowed me some insight into how painful those tensions were at times.

Throughout the two years, I formed the impression that, for Mel, completing the Foundation Degree was not just about working towards an honours degree and qualified teacher status, but it was also about unfinished business – about proving to herself, first and foremost, that she could study successfully at higher education level. This she did, and in Mel's account there are glimpses of the transformative nature of learning as she recognises in herself the development of reflective and analytical skills and the creation of new understandings or 'connections'. However, this is not without painful engagement with a series of challenges related to coming to terms with previous learning experiences, her personal

learning differences and managing her learning in the light of multiple roles and responsibilities. Finally, Mel's highly stressful encounter with the final course examination meant that, for both her and for me, the overall achievement of completing the Foundation Degree was clouded by bitter disappointment with the examination result.

Chapter Six

Sam's account

6.1 Overview

Sam's account also contains recurring themes related to self-doubt and academic inadequacy; the difficulties involved in managing multiple roles as student, parent and employee, and contrasting experiences in the workplace, ranging from full mentor support to negative and even prejudiced treatment from teaching assistant colleagues. Nowhere is the self-doubt in her ability to succeed academically made more obvious than in the way in which she actively limits her capacity to achieve by labelling herself as 'always a C' at several points during the first year of the course. Throughout, Sam is unable to hide the feeling of guilt and associated tensions that are evident in relation to managing time with her family and time on her studies, and this presents ongoing challenges for Sam in relation to her identity, belonging and self-esteem. However, Sam has good support from her workplace mentor and this seems to be an important factor in mitigating the other challenges that Sam faces – not only the challenges related to her sense of self, but also in relation to the multiple roles she holds, and even regarding her relationship with colleagues in the workplace who are less than supportive.

Overall though, Sam's approach is that of 'one step at a time'. She handles difficulties pragmatically and optimistically, giving a sense of 'moving on' in her learning, her self-confidence, in her professional practice and in her relationships

at home and in the workplace through the duration of the course. Towards the end of the course, Sam's account exudes optimism and a sense of achievement, as she glimpses the prize to which she aspires – the status of qualified teacher.

6.2 Introduction

Sam was 28 years old when she began her Foundation Degree studies – the youngest of the three case study students, but still a mature learner. Sam achieved a reasonable spread of GCSE passes at school, and then went to hairdressing college for a year and a half. In Sam's words, she *hated it, absolutely hated it (I-Sam-2/self-pre)*. She had drifted into a place at hairdressing college because she had a Saturday job at a hairdressing salon. Almost without thought, Sam had followed that path *it just seemed natural to go into it (I-Sam-2/self-pre)*. Following this, Sam married relatively early (Sam describes this as *foolish* during the interview when we discussed her life experience prior to enrolling at the University College), had two children and combined home life with work in nursing homes and hospitals when she realised that a career in hairdressing was not for her.

It was a point of crisis in her life – a diagnosis of diabetes plus her marriage break up that caused Sam to reconsider her future. The diagnosis precipitated instant reflection:

When I first got diagnosed with diabetes it suddenly makes you stop and think I've got to do something with my life you know. Yes, I had two wonderful children and that was it really, you know my marriage was finished, it was over, I thought right I've got to get off my backside and do

something before it's too late which is why I thought 'I love working with kids' you know I love my kids and I looked into doing, you know, some sort of children's course (I-Sam-2/self-pre).

For Sam, a pivotal moment in her life forced her to reflect on her personal situation and future prospects. From then on it seemed a natural progression to turn her thoughts from doing 'some sort of children's course' to actually considering a career within teaching, inspired by observing a colleague:

I did initially think yeah I'll just work in a nursery this is fine. And then I looked at Open University I thought 'well actually I can do a degree and become a teacher' er so I did, I think it was while I was doing the CACHE⁵ level, at the school placement [...] I was with the Year 1 teacher and she was fabulous and I thought I could do this you know never mind just being a teaching assistant I could do what she's doing (I-Sam-2/work-pre).

The work-based Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants was a highly appropriate choice for Sam. It allowed her to continue in her classroom assistant role alongside studying at higher education level and provided a potential route into teaching – the goal to which she aspired.

6.3 Starting the course

To even apply to university was a big step for me, let alone getting in. The day I received the letter informing me that I had been offered a place at BG I could have cried. I'm nearly 30 years old and the first person I rang was my mum. I was, and still am, really proud of myself. The first day at college I was really nervous. I was excited but I worried about what to expect. The thought of meeting new people didn't worry me as I am quite an outgoing person, it was the course itself. Was I clever enough to

⁵ CACHE is the Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education. It dates back to 1945, when it was known as the National Nursery Examination Board – NNEB.

complete a degree? Was I just kidding myself? What if I don't understand what they're talking about? These were just a few of the thoughts going through my head (J-Sam-1/acad-uni, self-anx, acad-abil).

Sam's first words in her handwritten journal gave an insight into her earliest experiences of choosing to study at the University College. For Sam, the first hurdle (or first step) was to apply. Subsequently, the moment she heard that she had a place to study at University College seemed to be of critical importance in building up her confidence and a sense of pride in herself. Yet, even having been accepted onto the Foundation Degree, Sam candidly confessed in her journal that she had considerable doubts about her capacity to cope with the course. Indeed it seemed that Sam was facing a number of unforeseen challenges to her sense of identity, belonging and self esteem and had constructed for herself a belief that, whatever higher education study entailed, it was not an activity that was self-evidently easy for her to engage with.

Furthermore, Sam's concern with ability and worries about the adequacy of her ability recurred throughout subsequent interviews during part one of the data collection period. For example, in February 2005, Sam stated that *It's just huge for me personally to be able to do anything like this. I mean I always thought at school no way am I ever going to get into university [...] I always thought university was so far above me, you know, why would I even ever think about it? (I-Sam-1/self-iden/st).*

It seemed that these perceptions of ability to achieve at university were self-perpetuated, as Sam was clear that she had reached this view *not through what anybody had ever said to me it's just I had got it in the back of my mind, you're not good enough for university (I-Sam-1/self-con/abil)*. Then, during the February 2005 interviews, held at the start of semester two of the first year, Sam's comments gave further insights into how she had come to perceive her own ability: *I just seem to be a C sort of person [...] I do seem to be homing into what grade am I going to get. But again that stems back [to] is university too good for me? Can I keep the grades, can I get the grades to get through the course? (I-Sam-1/acad-stu)*. Sam focussed on the grades that she received and used them to describe her academic identity as a *C sort of person*. In doing so she seemed to hint that her grades were not good enough for university and betrayed some anxiety in terms of her ability to succeed on the course. In fact, in June, at the end of the first year, Sam was still using the language of graded assessment to make judgements about her ability, measuring herself against the grades achieved:

I got the best mark of the course on my ICT – I got the B I was so desperate for [...] I was really pushing those last three modules to get good marks on them [as] I want to know that I can get more than a C. But I thought well if I get C I get C – I'm still, you know, passing everything (I-Sam-1/acad-stu).

At the end of the first year (and therefore at the end of part one of the data collection period), despite previously talking about grades at length, Sam insisted that she was not so obsessed with grades: *Now I don't seem to be hung up on grade – it's the feedback I'm more interested in (I-Sam-1/acad-stu)*. It was not clear from this comment whether Sam's self-perception of her ability had actually

changed. It can be argued that Sam's comment relating her interest in feedback rather than a grade does perhaps suggest that her view of ability had changed as an interest in feedback implied that she could use that feedback to improve her performance, rather than relying upon a 'fixed' perception of ability which would limit any potential for improvement. A further illustration of Sam's growing confidence in her abilities arose in the interview towards the end of the first year, where she continued to reflect upon her initial achievement of securing entry to the University College in the first place:

I was proud of myself for getting in [...], to be able to say "I'm at university tomorrow" you know and feel quite proud about it. But actually I've completed my first year at university and I feel I've got better as I've gone on (I-Sam-1/self-conf).

Part of the support that Sam was able to access which seemed to contribute to her progress through the course was situated in her workplace. She described very positive attitudes from teaching colleagues at school towards her studies including to the work-based elements. Towards the end of the first year, Sam stated: *All the teachers at our school have been so supportive (I-Sam-1/work-sup)*. The nature of support seemed to be practical and responsive to Sam's needs in relation to the course, and to work-based tasks in particular: *The Year 6 teacher I worked with last year she's always trying to find out how I'm getting on. I'll nip up to see her [and ask] can I borrow children for an interview and things like that (I-Sam-1/work-rel)*. There appeared to be a willingness from all staff to take an interest in what Sam was doing and this was aided further by the experience of Sam's workplace mentor. The mentor had already seen a student through the same

Foundation Degree (that student is now a qualified teacher in the school) and clearly understood what the course entailed, particularly in relation to the work-based tasks. Sam explained that: *She has actually said a couple of times “I’ve got a great task coming up if you need anything to do,” because she knows (I-Sam-1/work-ment)*. ‘Knowing’ was the key thing for Sam here and my interpretation of this went beyond the mentor’s knowledge of the course as described in the course handbook, but further to embrace some knowledge of what it meant to engage in the course – of what it really meant to learn through a Foundation Degree.

For example, this ‘knowing’ was further exemplified when the mentor facilitated access to additional curriculum areas, as described by Sam: *I don’t normally do ICT either and she has said “Come and watch us do ICT and get a bit of insight into it” She is quite helpful in that sense (I-Sam-1/work-ment)*. In this example, the mentor’s ‘knowing’ appeared aligned with helpfulness and understanding – instrumental helpfulness in accessing workplace experiences and understanding for the course as a whole: its structure, content and demands on the student.

However, despite painting a positive picture of the support she received from school (particularly through her mentor) a recurring theme that emerged during part one of the data collection period pointed to the difficulties that Sam encountered in trying to juggle and balance the differing demands of study, work and family. In this respect, the notion of feeling guilty appeared several times:

But I just found at the beginning I felt guilty when I was with my family because I couldn’t be doing the college work and I felt guilty doing my

college work because I couldn't be with my family – I just constantly felt guilty (J-Sam-1/self-guilt).

I do feel guilty because yesterday the school was closed and we had a day off school, my children's school was closed and I thought right that's good I can get some college work done. And I thought no, stop. I've got all day tomorrow to do college work and I spent the day with the girls which was great (J-Sam-1/self-guilt).

My family like me again! Spent lots of time with them this week – felt guilty over Christmas and New Year – hardly spent any time with them and when I did I was so stressed that I moaned at them or was generally just mardy. They have forgiven me. Thankfully (J-Sam-1/self-guilt).

Sam found it difficult to come to terms with the choices she was faced with and the decisions she had to make in order to balance the time spent with family and study. Such decisions would also have added to the general anxiety that Sam was feeling around her academic ability. Therefore, Sam's motivation for completing the course must have been considerable, given the internal and external pressures she was under.

6.4 Staying the course

Sam's journal entry just before the start of year two gives the impression that she had welcomed the summer break, and, despite the pressures of juggling multiple roles (already discussed, above) in relation to being a student, an employee and a parent, in contrast to Mel, she looked back on the first year of the course very positively. Sam also suggested that she felt better equipped to succeed during year two, because she knew what to expect:

Starting back tomorrow! It has been really good to have a break, I was beginning to feel quite drained. Keeping up with all of the tasks and essays was hard work, and having to work as well meant not having

hardly any spare time. However, I have loved it. I have made some great friends and found during the summer I even missed having to meet those deadlines (well just a little). I feel much more positive and focussed this year. Perhaps it's because I know what to expect. I know I will get lots of support at home and at work, especially since I am now a TA for 'A', having successfully completed this course I know she will be a tower of strength to me (J-Sam-2/self-conf).

The journal entry suggests that Sam not only felt more confident about the academic side of the course, but also about the work-based elements, particularly as she was now working as a Teaching Assistant alongside a teacher ('A') who had previously completed the same Foundation Degree and who had progressed to achieve qualified teacher status. This teacher would have been able to give Sam practical support in completing work-based tasks and access to opportunities to extend the scope of her professional practice. However, Sam had enjoyed this support during year one, so perhaps of more importance was the fact that 'A' knew the course structure, tutors, levels of study and expectations set out by the University College. Therefore, Sam occupied a unique position amongst students studying for this Foundation Degree at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln in that she was able to access support within the workplace from a colleague who could fully identify with Sam across the multiple roles of employee, student and parent. The situation gave Sam's confidence a huge boost because she knew she could rely on this teacher to fully understand the practicalities of doing the course: *I suppose this is another thing why I feel so confident this year because I know I can just say " 'A' please give me half an hour to sort this out ."* *She'll be like "Yeah, go, you know it's fine."* (I-Sam-2/self-conf).

Despite the tension and conflict that Sam had experienced through juggling multiple roles during year one, she seemed to recognise that the deadlines which had structured her academic life during the first year had been an aspect of enabling her to come to terms with her identity as a student, as well as gaining familiarity with the ‘academy’ – its people and practices. Although slightly tongue-in-cheek, Sam’s comments about deadlines revealed a growing contentment with her engagement in the academy. This seemed even clearer during interview a few weeks after her return to the University College for year two:

It didn’t feel anything like last year at all because I knew what to expect. I knew where I was going, what sort of people were there[...]I knew what I was coming back to, I knew the type of work, things we were going to get, I knew the students on the course as well as the tutors (I-Sam-2/acad-stu).

Sam expressed a sense of security with not only the academic systems and expectations held of students, but also with the fabric of the institution. Her levels of familiarity and understanding had ‘moved on’, in this respect. Sam knew where she was going and was familiar with the geography of the institution and with the people who were there. These points were of great importance to her, as they clearly eased her induction back into the University College after the summer vacation and marked another step in her learning journey. Indeed, Sam’s response at the start of year two was nearer to what I was expecting as her tutor and contrasted with Mel’s reaction, described in the previous chapter, where she confessed that she felt ‘subdued’ about going back because she knew what to expect.

However, despite the positive comments made by Sam, she did express some worry about progression following the Foundation Degree. Sam's central aim in doing the course had always been to progress to an honours 'top-up' year with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). However, on return in the second year, the students were told that places were limited for the QTS 'top-up' route and Sam expressed concern in her journal about being able to progress as she had hoped: *I would be lying if I said I wasn't worried about getting in to the 3rd year, but I will try my best. [...] I feel more prepared this year. Just going to go for it this year and hope for the best (J-Sam-2/self-fut).*

Sam was resigned to trying her best in order to progress to the third year, alongside around 80% of the cohort (around 40 students) who also had the same goal. With only 30 places on offer for the Primary QTS route (Sam's preferred option), her place was by no means guaranteed. Perhaps her worry stemmed from the already low levels of self-belief she possessed in terms of her ability (discussed earlier), but this could also have been exacerbated by the fact that Foundation Degree literature promotes the notion of progression to honours level (QAA 2004) and therefore raises aspirations and expectations for some students – although nowhere does the policy rhetoric suggest this as the desired route for all. Yet concern over progression to the third year brought back Sam's focus on her grades:

So I've got everything that I need it's just my grades this year you know I'm going back to I think just a C person again [...] because I've always got Cs as I've gone along really, no matter what I've done, I've been like a B or a C. And no matter how hard I try I can't seem to get any further,

[although] you know, doesn't matter what I'm getting, I'm getting through it. But of course now I'm thinking mm need to up a bit now to have any chance of, you know, being looked at for the third year if you like. You know I'd be lying if I didn't say it was preying on my mind (I-Sam-2/acad-stu, acad-skill, acad-uni).

Sam almost seemed to have reverted to a fixed view of her ability and there was even a hint that she used this view to rationalise her perceived under-achievement. Yet there was also a suggestion that she could (and needed to) improve her grades and evidence that she was actively trying to improve through the way she had prepared over the summer vacation for entry into year two by accessing library texts and trying to be as prepared as possible. Even over the summer vacation, Sam was playing the part of student – inhabiting the role and being proactive in trying to ‘get ahead’ with her studies:

Actually it was quite strange because I think we'd only split up may be a couple of weeks [...] and I came back, I thought I'll just have a look at some action research books because I didn't have a clue of where to even start. So I got quite a pile of them and even the lady in the library looked at me. I thought I know I'm sad, we've only just broken up [...] “A bit of light reading,” she said, I said “Yeah.” But then of course when we got the list of what we was going to be doing I thought right I'll get ahead, I got myself some books and I did get all the ones I needed which was fabulous (I-Sam-2/acad-stu).

6.5 Completing the course

At the start of the third part of data collection, over half way through the second year of the course during March 2006, Sam was still remembering the difficulties of organisation – especially over Christmas, when the conflicting demands of family and study were particularly acute. This had encouraged her to be more organised, because she knew that good personal organisation was essential for

success over the Christmas period: *I still felt the strain of it but I really learnt my lesson last year – I did struggle over Christmas last year and I thought I’m not doing it this year. I was more organised this year and that did help definitely (I-Sam-3/self-time).*

However, despite seeming to cope better with the Christmas period, Sam still accepted that in work she had felt stretched. She revealed that she had actually taken on some extra hours at work, making it even more difficult to safeguard time for study and for completing work-based tasks:

I work Mondays, Thursdays and Friday afternoons, it’s only three afternoons but obviously the Tuesday I’d be here [at the University College], the Wednesday I try and get some work done and I just think I’ve struggled a bit this year fitting everything in. Just things like shopping [laughs] “When are we going to eat?” [laughs] “I haven’t been shopping this week.” “Mum we’ve got no yoghurt for pack up.” “You’ve got no crisps or bread either, never mind we’ll have to go to the shop.” But, so I suppose in that sense I need to be a little bit more organised (I-Sam-3/self-time).

Sam’s additional commitments within the workplace had the potential to afford her wider opportunities to develop her professional role, but at the expense of her role within the home. Domestic activities (even a basic activity such as food shopping) had become second place for the duration of the course and this had perpetuated further tensions within Sam’s family:

I would feel better if I had my afternoons free, apart from the odd PPA⁶. I just, I know my husband has said to me “You’re always doing something.” And I said “I know I’m sorry.” And I have done myself a timetable at the minute “Look if you let me study here and here and I’ve got these

⁶ PPA: Planning, Preparation and Assessment. Primary teachers are entitled to 10% release time from normal teaching duties in order to carry out PPA. Sam was being used to cover classes when the teacher was engaged in PPA time.

afternoons here.” And I’ve even written in family time you know because I’d had to because it all went a bit crazy and the children want to do this and they want to do that and you know (I-Sam-3/self-time).

The conflict inherent in dealing with multiple roles has already been alluded to throughout this account, as it was in Mel’s. Sam not only struggled to give the support that her family expected, she probably actually needed that practical support given to herself as Sam’s life was one of complication and conflicting demands.

During the final interview, towards the end of the course, Sam and I entered into a fairly protracted discussion around the different awareness levels held by Sam’s colleagues towards the Foundation Degree that she was undertaking. One of Sam’s responses caught me by surprise when she said: *The TAs haven’t a clue really I don’t think they want to know either (I-Sam-3/work-rel).* This comment was in relation to the other teaching assistants’ understanding of what Foundation Degree study actually entailed. Throughout previous interviews and journal entries, Sam had painted a picture of good levels of support within the workplace. Yet, within her immediate job-role group, there had been very little interest. Perhaps Sam was now perceived by the other teaching assistants as working beyond the ‘normal’ teaching assistant role. After all, Sam had made it clear to those around her that her ultimate goal was to qualify as a teacher and her view was that her teaching assistant colleagues were content to remain in their role: *You know it’s just they’re quite happy to do what they’re doing, you know that’s*

fine [...] but they've got to understand I'm not, I want to go [on] wholeheartedly and become a teacher (I-Sam-3/self-fut).

Sam felt that there were different levels of awareness of the course within her workplace. In particular, it seemed that those who had engaged in study themselves showed real empathy for the academic side of the Foundation Degree, whilst others appeared disinterested. However, despite some disinterest from certain colleagues, Sam was still very happy with the support she received from her mentor: *It's brilliant working with her, because I can just fit everything in. If it's nothing to do with the lesson it doesn't matter, I can just fit it in somewhere, she's very accommodating (I-Sam-3/work-ment).* Sam's mentor was prepared to allow elements of flexibility within the workplace, because she understood what was required of Sam to be successful – particularly in the work-based tasks. In addition, Sam's mentor acted as Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) in the school and Sam saw this as an advantage to her, particularly during the 'Inclusive Education' module, completed at the start of year two: *Yes I do feel [it's a strength] because I work closely with 'F' [SENCo] (I-Sam-3/work-ment).* With a mentor who was also SENCo, Sam had direct and seemingly unlimited access to specialist expertise and specialist opportunities within the workplace. In addition, the fact that Sam worked closely with 'A' (a former Foundation Degree student) seemed to be a significant factor in the high levels of confidence that Sam appeared to feel when trying to access work-based tasks: *Again, working with 'A' I can near enough fit in anywhere I want really (I-Sam-3/work-wbt).*

At the end of the third and final part of data collection, when Sam reviewed the DVD clip of her working with a small group nearly two years previously, she reflected on the activity and came to the conclusion that the group *would find that quite boring (I-Sam-3/acad-refl)*. She recognised that, not only had the children moved on, but that she had too: *I think I'd maybe be a bit more creative with it now [...] because we've all moved on it would be something different (I-Sam-3/acad-refl)*. Sam recognised that she now possessed enhanced skills to those she had when the course began and when asked about how the Foundation Degree had impacted upon her and the workplace, she was clear that the Foundation Degree qualification had opened up further opportunities for additional hours in the workplace covering PPA time. In addition, the qualification had given her a new identity – she was ‘seen’, or noticed in the workplace:

I am actually seen now, as I've got a qualification. I've been offered some PPA hours and there was a bit of a hoo-hah about it. They were offered to numerous TAs [but not all] and obviously I straight away jumped on the head teacher and said 'yes I'll do them' (I-Sam-3/work-c/imp).

Also, Sam felt that the Foundation Degree had a positive impact on preparation for the progression route to honours with qualified teacher status. In particular she felt that the work-based route was ‘very much better’ than the regular undergraduate or postgraduate route which would have had a sequence of school placements, rather than integrated workplace experience as with the Foundation Degree. Sam felt that the qualification had given her a solid professional, practical and academic foundation upon which to build, a feeling exemplified

when she received the booklet which outlined the standards for attaining qualified teacher status:

To me it was like “oh blimey” you know. But she [the tutor] said “You can do most of that now if you look, you know throughout the Foundation Degree you’ve already done a lot of this.” And actually looking through you think, “oh actually I have”, some of the tasks and things what we’ve had to do through the Foundation Degree have helped enormously and really I don’t know how other students have coped who haven’t done the Foundation Degree and done something else, and never, never been in a school. You know, at least we have some sort of idea of what they [the standards for QTS] mean so it’s very much better doing it the way we’ve done it, definitely (I-Sam-3/acad-ach).

When asked to reflect upon completing the Foundation Degree, I could sense the relief as Sam recounted the specific moments of coming out of the final examination, and then receiving notification that she has achieved her Foundation Degree:

It was huge, just really huge [...] when we handed the final piece of work in and we did the final exam that we had it’s like I’ve finished, I’ve done it, that’s it. As long as I’ve passed what I’ve just done, I’ve done it. And I think quite a lot of us felt like that, we was all like, oh a big sigh of relief as everybody you know came out of the exam room. But, when you get the letter through saying you know congratulations and you know blah blah and it’s like I’ve done it you know and I think the same person I phoned again was my mum “I’ve done it,” you know she was like “Yes, I told you you could.” (I-Sam-3/acad-ach).

At the beginning of Sam’s account, she had phoned her mum as soon as she heard she had gained a place to study at the University College, and she did so again when she got her degree result. Sam also recounted how significant the actual graduation ceremony was. It really did seem to be a symbol of all she had been working towards. For her, being at the ceremony signified the pinnacle of her achievement:

But then the graduation was coming up and I think that the first day I'd got all the information for the robes and everything like that, everything was booked, photos the lot, straight away. I mean a few people thought I was mad but I was just like, "no" I was so keen to actually get to that day, I was wishing my life away a bit really just to get to it because it's something that we'd never experienced before, er and I just was quite overwhelmed by it really [...] but I just think it was a huge achievement really (I-Sam-3/acad-ach).

Sam also seemed to be free of the disabling view of herself as possessing limited ability, as she had proved she could do it. She remembered her first comments to me, which had expressed hesitancy and lack of confidence in whether she could achieve at higher education level and now she articulated 'overwhelming' feelings of positivity in terms of what she could potentially achieve:

I actually believe now that I can do it where I think when I first spoke to you I was a bit like not sure whether I can you know. It was always a doubt [...] can I actually get through this [...] but I think once the course had finished it was like I can do it. I do feel I can go on to do others. It's quite an overwhelming feeling really (I-Sam-3/acad-ach).

This new found confidence had also been identified by Sam's husband:

My husband often says "er you know you seem a bit different", I said "what do you mean?" "I don't know," he says "you just seem keener to do things." He says I've got more confidence than what I had before and I feel as though I have er simply because I now believe in myself whereas when I first started [...] I didn't particularly think I could do it. But I think it has boosted my confidence in that way – if you believe in yourself I think you can pretty much achieve what you like (I-Sam-3/self-conf).

It seems that Sam was now in a positive cycle of self-confidence and achievement. She had been awarded the Foundation Degree and that had given her confidence and a keenness to do things. Her self-belief was now a powerful driver in achieving future goals, which she articulated later on in the interview:

I'd like to have a good NQT⁷ year – you know I want to really get my teeth into it. I think I'm just raring to go now, and I sometimes have to stop and think 'no you know you're not ready yet, no you're not ready yet, just wait, you're not ready yet'. But I just think [like that] because it's just in reaching distance now and I can't quite get there. But it will come (I-Sam-3/self-fut).

Sam almost expresses impatience at not being qualified just yet. She is *raring to go*, as she can see the final goal of qualified teacher status within reaching distance. Yet, even beyond that, Sam expresses further aspirations to take a Masters level course and specialise as an Early Years practitioner:

Well, it's quite funny really because I keep thinking I wouldn't mind doing my masters [...], I mean I want to specialise in the Foundation Stage, just to specialise in the early years really because I just think it seems to be the most important part of school life really [...] being able to have an impression on children at that age so they can carry that through school with them, I just think is huge. So I would love to actually become an early years specialist in that sense. And then I don't know maybe teach for a few years and I would love to end up somewhere like this, actually teaching others how to teach children (I-Sam-3/self-fut).

6.6 End piece

For Sam, gaining a place at University had been an incredible achievement in itself. Significant incidences in her personal life had imbued in her a desire to think more purposefully about where her life was going and had precipitated a change in direction. Her determination to succeed at University was an important factor in her success, yet throughout the two year course she was dogged by periods of unbelief in her ability and a preoccupation with grades. Sam shared these concerns with me openly, during interview and through her journal, and also revealed concerns about whether she would be able to progress to qualified

⁷ NQT: Newly Qualified Teacher. All NQTs have to complete a probationary period before being confirmed as fully qualified teachers.

teacher status – her ultimate goal. To this effect, I got the impression that she was never sure throughout the course, whether she would achieve her degree. To continue amidst such uncertainty, therefore, demanded strength of character and extreme determination, and in this respect, Sam’s step-by-step approach to ‘moving on’ seems to have been effective.

Similarly to Mel, Sam also struggled with the practical demands of being a parent, a student and an employee, and allowed me a small insight into how her Foundation Degree study demanded commitment and understanding not only from herself, but for her immediate family too. Yet, throughout the two years, Sam ‘moved on’ – both in herself, by facing and overcoming challenges to her identity and self-esteem in order to form a more secure self-concept regarding her ability, and in her professional confidence within the workplace.

Chapter Seven

Heather's account

7.1 Overview

Heather was actively looking for a personal challenge and possibly for a new direction in life when she enrolled in the Foundation Degree, so her account describes the challenges that she did indeed encounter. Throughout the first year of the course in particular she was keen to understand the academic practices that she had not previously experienced and the account shows a developing understanding and appreciation of these practices on Heather's part. When specific challenges came her way, Heather sought a pragmatic approach to coping with the challenges. For example, she experienced the same difficulties and tensions described by both Sam and Mel in terms of managing parent and student roles, but actively sought to change routines at home in order to manage the situation positively. Yet, in many ways the Foundation Degree experience reads as a rather isolating one for Heather. Support within the workplace was distinctly lacking throughout, with the workplace even becoming a barrier to progress for Heather at times. To continue on the course when faced with indifference from colleagues within the workplace is testament to Heather's determination to continue and to the support of her family and friends.

Heather deals with these challenges through taking a series of steps, as did Sam. Part way through the course, having suffered within the workplace from lack of

recognition that she was doing a Foundation Degree, Heather's position as a Foundation Degree student was recognised by a colleague – a moment she described as *One giant step for a TA* in her journal entry at the start of year two (*J-Hea-2/work-sup*). In addition, it took several steps for Heather to unravel academic conventions and practices that are so often taken for granted by those immersed in the higher education system. More than once in her stories, she refers to the notion of 'taking a step' and, importantly, she saw the opportunities presented by the Foundation Degree as a 'step up'. In other words she viewed the Foundation Degree as a mechanism for achieving upward mobility – even transformation – in terms of her own academic and vocational achievement.

7.2 Introduction

Heather was 41 years old when she began her Foundation Degree studies. Her early home background in Ireland was, in her account, one of low expectations for individual achievement, within a poor socio-economic framework. Growing up in Dublin, Heather went from comprehensive school to secretarial college to gain typing and shorthand skills. When discussing her education path, Heather was quite clear about the reasons why she followed in this direction:

*To kind of become a teacher or a doctor or whatever in Ireland you had to have really, really high results and an awful lot of money, so coming from the background I come from we didn't have that so you didn't have much choice but to go and do your secretarial course – and then try to get into an office (*I-Hea-2/work-pre*).*

In the early 1980s, Heather worked in Israel for two periods of six months and in 1984 returned to Britain to work as a nanny. She then took different jobs in a

variety of sectors, including catering and sales. In Heather's words she 'just drifted to jobs'. In 1993, Heather left work to look after her son and then daughter, moving with her husband and children to Lincoln in 1998, due to her husband's job relocation.

Heather got involved in the local primary school as a volunteer in order to learn more about what her son was learning within the English education system, and also to build up a social network within the community:

One of the reasons why I really decided to go and work and help in the school was to find out what Andrew was supposed to be doing because obviously I didn't know the [English] education system at all, and also it was helping me kind of get into getting to know people and that so I just kind of felt part of the community (I-Hea-2/work-pre).

Her involvement increased as more and more opportunities came up. In this way, Heather created her own progression route into employment, moving from volunteering in class to completing an NVQ⁸ and securing a paid position as a primary school teaching assistant:

Andrew started school and they asked for people to come in and help tidy the library and I started going in doing that. And then they said would you do lunch time and then you know it just started to build up from here (I-Hea-2/work-pre).

When asked why she decided to do the Foundation Degree, Heather replied: *Well I felt that was the next step up – I kind of felt the Foundation Degree would bring me up to that level (I-Hea-2/self-pre).* Thus, a sequence of events had led Heather to the point of applying for the Foundation Degree. The events had not been

⁸ NVQ: National Vocational Qualification. Heather had achieved the NVQ Level 3 for Teaching Assistants.

planned by Heather, rather she had responded to circumstances as they unfolded around her and now found herself ready to make a positive decision to enter higher education in order to take *the next step up*.

Unfortunately, due to difficult personal circumstances⁹, Heather was unable to provide any interview or journal data relating to the third data collection point during semester two of year two, but did engage by providing journal entries and being interviewed at the end of part three of the data collection period. However, despite the small gap in data during the second half of the second year of the Foundation Degree, the account that follows still gives a rich insight into her Foundation Degree learning experiences.

7.3 Starting the course

Heather's first journal entries at the start of the course, made in October and November 2004 at the beginning of part one of data collection, describe the motivating factors that led her to apply for the Foundation Degree:

When I applied for the course I felt it would be a personal challenge to achieve a third level education, a continuation of my learning from my NVQ3 course and an opportunity to pick up some tips to help in work. I did think this course would help me decide if I wanted to become a teacher or take another direction in life (J-Hea-1/self-mot).

The factors were threefold. Heather wanted to continue her learning beyond NVQ and recognised the opportunity for a *personal challenge*. Perhaps she wished to prove that she was capable of studying at higher education level, having

⁹ Due to the nature of the circumstances in which Heather found herself and the difficulties she experienced it is not appropriate (nor necessary) to disclose the details here.

not been afforded the opportunity to pursue that path as a school leaver. In addition, Heather wished to improve her work practice. She had found herself employed as a teaching assistant through a series of circumstances that had enabled her to begin to build up knowledge and understanding about primary level education. It seemed that now was the time to formalise this knowledge and understanding. Finally, Heather saw the course as an opportunity to discern whether a teaching career was a possible direction for her, as there were opportunities to progress to a teacher training option as a third year honours-level 'top up' to the Foundation Degree.

A subsequent journal entry (also made during October/November 2004) conveyed Heather's enthusiasm for learning new things pertinent to her role in the workplace, particularly the relevance of educational theory for aspects of practice:

During the first couple of weeks I drove the staff potty, "I did this on my course" "I did that on my course". The first time I really used/understood Vygotsky I was teaching the sound 'u' to a group of lower ability year ones. I had opened the dictionary to the page showing 'u' and started to point to the pictures and saying the word when I realised they needed to discover what the word was for themselves, so that they could learn. I had felt that my training to teach children had been good but now I realise it had been adequate and that this course will polish my teaching style (J-Hea-1/work-c/imp).

Not only did this comment evidence Heather's hopes for the course becoming a reality, in terms of supporting the gaining of knowledge, improving her work practice and helping her envisage the possibilities of a career in teaching, it was also illustrative of the way in which the University College-based elements of the course were having an impact upon work-based practice.

A few months earlier, in December 2004, Heather still came across in her journal entries as ‘fired up’ – enthusiastic about the course and excited about the links being made between her practical knowledge and work covered during the course related to theory and educational policy:

Today’s staff training was about TASC¹⁰ and how we are going to use it. I could join in the discussion because I had talked to other TAs on the course about TASC. I knew that Vygotsky had talked about scaffolding and what the term means. I could also follow how to use the KWL¹¹ grids because we had talked about learning grids last week in class. I also knew that the Literacy Strategy was not compulsory, after three months of being on the course I can see the jigsaw pieces joining together (J-Hea-1/acad-con).

The image of the *jigsaw pieces joining together* was a powerful one (indeed, a similar idea had been identified by Mel, who discussed the notion of *making connections* during her interviews). The implication from the journal entry was that the jigsaw pieces related not only to Heather’s practice, but to how the practice was justified through the knowledge and understanding gained through the course. Heather also seemed to be integrating more confidently into the wider staff group at school, through the use of shared discourse and knowledge pertinent to very specific workplace situations (for example, in the above extract from Heather’s journal – TASC, KWL grids and the National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 1998b)). In addition, Heather’s goal of taking *the next step up* in her learning journey had been validated by her recognition of the worth of practitioner knowledge, supported by theoretical understanding.

¹⁰ TASC: Thinking Actively in a Social Context (see www.nace.co.uk/tasc).

¹¹ KWL grids are designed to help teachers activate pupils' prior knowledge by asking them what they already **K**now; then pupils set goals specifying what they **W**ant to learn, and then pupils discuss what they have **L**earned.

Yet this example of Heather's participation in the wider teaching community of the school seemed an isolated one that ran contrary to the key message which was evident through her early interviews and diary entries – namely that, for Heather, the work-based elements were rather isolating. For example, it appeared from the first interview that there was only limited understanding from workplace colleagues about what Heather was engaged in. She remarked that *I don't think actually the other staff realise what it is I'm doing either, you know it's just kind of like this really well-kept secret between the Headteacher and myself and the teachers, the people I actually work with (I-Hea-1/work-rel)*. The result of Heather's experience was dichotomous in terms of the impact that engagement with the course may have had within the workplace. On the one hand, Heather was already aware, and reflecting upon, the positive influence upon her own professional practice that the course was having. On the other hand, the wider school community seemed unable (or unwilling?) to seek additional benefits from Heather's engagement with the Foundation Degree. Consequently, Heather perceived a gap between her expectations of how the workplace may benefit from her learning and the actual reality of what was happening: *I am benefiting myself but I did feel that the school were going to benefit as well you know (I-Hea-1/work-c/imp)*.

The situation was exacerbated by the lower levels of effectiveness in mentoring practice perceived by Heather in her own workplace – perceptions she had developed through talking to other Foundation Degree students within her cohort:

When you talk to other people you think “mmm, you know they’re getting quite a lot of support aren’t they” (*I-Hea-1/work-ment*). Mentoring in the workplace is a key source of support for Foundation Degree students, but for Heather, such support appeared limited or even non-existent compared to fellow Foundation Degree students. Therefore, Heather had to look elsewhere for support and, for her, the student peer group became very important. She wrote in her journal (towards the end of year one) that other classmates at the University College had been *interesting, fun, supportive* (*J-Hea-1/acad-peers*). During interview, Heather further described relationships within the peer group, saying that: *we’ve fed off each other – we got better at working as a team for our presentations [...] you always pick up new ideas from them* (*I-Hea-1/acad-peers*). Heather therefore viewed learning within the group as an active and social experience, with the sharing of ideas a priority.

Overall though, Heather was enjoying the course, stating in the interview conducted at the end of year one (June 2005) that: *I still enjoy the course and I still feel [...] I’m going to benefit from the course, even if I didn’t go onto year three the course had been good for different things* (*I-Hea-1/work-c/imp*). Heather perceived benefits for herself, although in this response she cast some doubt on progressing to the third year honours ‘top-up’ to the Foundation Degree. Non-progression would imply a non-completion of the necessary requirements in order to meet Qualified Teacher Status, meaning there would be no career in teaching, something that Heather had suggested as one possible motivating factor

for completing the Foundation Degree. However, Heather also stated the importance to her of the pupil benefiting from her improved knowledge and understanding of classroom practice and curriculum content: *At the end of the day it has to be the child that you're working with that's benefiting isn't it? (I-Hea-1/work-c/imp)*. Therefore, she was also clear that through the benefits that she enjoyed (such as gaining specific knowledge and understanding more effective teaching skills), the pupils would benefit too.

Despite the perceived benefits and the fact that she was enjoying the course, not all aspects of study at higher education level had been straightforward for Heather. For example, she wrote in her journal about the act of essay writing – an area that seemed to be quite an important aspect for her to comment on as she gained knowledge and understanding of the conventions of academic practice. The following entry was undated, but was probably written during January 2005, just before semester two of the first year:

Essays are becoming easier to write/plan. They have been a huge learning curve for me, I find them hard to write in the third person, I always give a personal view (not deliberately). I think I'm getting better at analysing, it's still hard to find a quote that suits the theme of the essay. Finding quotes involves reading a lot and this can be distracting as I start reading books, find them interesting and then realise that I haven't actually achieved anything for the essay. Extremely time consuming!! (J-Hea-1/acad-uni, acad-ach).

Heather had identified essay writing as one particular challenge within her learning journey. The implication was that she seemed to understand the conventions expected of her – for example not relying on a personal view and

using analysis. However, it was not clear whether she really understood the terms she was using. For example ‘analysis’, in Heather’s journal entry, appeared to be synonymous with ‘finding quotes’, which suggested an instrumental and formulaic approach to academic study. Heather’s goal was to produce an essay that contained relevant quotations. In fact when she became absorbed in a subject and read more widely around it, she saw that as a distraction, with the implication being that time had been wasted, rather than time used to enrich her studies.

In addition, Heather identified aspects of academic practice that she appeared to view as unfair. For example, the marking of group presentations:

We got better at working as a team for our presentations and then we thought we’d sussed how to do a presentation as a team and then we got marked differently [...] but it’s just tutors mark you differently and kind of that’s quite hard because you kind of think “well we’ve always worked as a team within our presentation, we’ve always done them together” which isn’t easy considering one is from Sleaford and one is from Grimsby and then to be marked separately and to be pulled up for bits that although you didn’t say but somebody else had said [...] there was kind of a downer put on to be honest with you (I-Hea-1/acad-uni).

Heather seemed genuinely disappointed about the way the presentation was marked, and attributed this both to differences in practice between tutors’ marking and perhaps, by implication, to a different view on her part of how the group effort should be assessed. This again highlighted the difficulty that Heather had in accepting aspects of academic practice – even those designed with the specific features of the Foundation Degree in mind, such as the assessment of work-based learning using a range of assessment methods. Perhaps in Heather’s case the assessment criteria had not been clarified, or perhaps she felt that the assessment

had not afforded sufficient opportunity for her to demonstrate development within her practice. Whatever the reason, Heather was disgruntled with the outcome.

Heather clearly took her family responsibilities very seriously and these became a source of emotional, physical and practical difficulty during the course – just as they were for Mel and Sam. For Heather, role duality caused feelings of guilt, particularly in relation to spending time with her children – explicit in this comment during an interview conducted during part one of the data collection period: *I have felt guilty sometimes you know seven days on the trot without actually doing anything with them during the holidays was really hard (I-Hea-1/self-guilt)*. Both Mel and Sam identified Christmas as a particularly difficult time in terms of managing their studies and family responsibilities, and it was no different for Heather. Implicit feelings of guilt were evident in the following extract from Heather's journal: *Working on homework over Christmas was hard going, even Christmas Day was interrupted by thoughts of what I needed to do (J-Hea-1/self-guilt)*. Whilst, in addition, the course had physical as well as emotional implications for Heather: *You're kind of working [studying] for maybe two hours after you come home, sometimes three, after coming home from a day's work and then getting the kids sorted and that you do constantly feel tired (I-Hea-1/self-time)*. She described the days when she was at the University College (Tuesdays, 1 – 8pm) as particularly tiring: *On Tuesday, we [don't] finish here some days till 8 o'clock [...] it's been quite a long day in itself [and] there's so much going on in our head that it's really hard to relax (I-Hea-1/self-time)*.

Yet, Heather took a pragmatically reflective approach to the situation she found herself in. She was absolutely clear that her first priorities were to household and parenting tasks and, although Mel and Sam also showed a clear commitment to their families, Heather was far more definite than they were about where her priorities ultimately lay. She recognised her role as ‘mum and wife’ and that she had gravitated into school-based work through a series of opportune circumstances, rather than planned endeavour. Therefore, she was not fully aligned with the identity of ‘student’, rather she was trying to maintain the *status quo* role at home as well as engage fully with her studies and this came across very strongly in the following journal entry, written during year one, semester two (between March and May 2005), when Heather recounted an exchange between herself and her husband:

Quote of the semester “Your time-management is your own business”. Obviously the person saying this doesn’t know the effort that goes into his tea and toast in the morning. My ‘time management’ is based on the time that shopping, cleaning, kids delivered and collected and whatever/whenever, dinner and lunches organised, uniform sorted, work, leaves me to study. To be fair to my husband he is supportive and the kids try to help but there’s always something that just needs to be done. Part of it (my attitude) is [that] being a mum and wife has always been a priority. Work just happened – I got the job on the tail end of ‘Mum’s Army’¹², it fits around the holidays and school times and is child friendly. Part of it is guilt, I’m doing this course and want to keep things functioning as normal as possible at home (J-Hea-1/self-tim, self-iden/par, self-guilt).

¹² The ‘Mum’s Army’ is a reference to the phrase used by the General Secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) at their annual conference in 2002 in relation to the increase in the numbers of Teaching Assistants. The phrase was interpreted as a suggestion that TAs were not sufficiently qualified to take on additional responsibilities as they represented a ‘Mum’s Army’ rather than a professional workforce.

Heather had the emotional and practical support of her family, but despite this, Heather felt guilty as she believed that it was her job to keep things running smoothly in the household and the course was interfering with that role. Mel and Sam, on the other hand, seemed to view the situation more holistically, accepting that a degree of 'juggling' was needed in order to manage their studies, work and family life.

7.4 Staying the course

However, despite Heather's feelings of guilt towards the end of year one, at the start of year two, her mood seemed quite different:

How do I feel about going back this year? This year I have really tried to be prepared for the impact going to college makes on my life. I've sorted an area to do my work, posted my xmas parcels to Australia, (even started on the kids' lists) and have several dinners in the freezer. Apart from home life, I have read the booklet for the year, checked the reading I need and hope to visit the library to get some books before the course starts. So I'm feeling pretty optimistic about my ability to control/balance the course's impact this year. I also feel [better about] my ability to understand what the lecturers are talking about and follow it through with the portfolio tasks and essays [which I think will be] around the C/B standard (J-Hea-2/self-time, acad-skill).

This journal entry was written by Heather during September 2005, at the start of year two of the course and is in contrast to the journal entry written at the end of the first year. Then, the tone was guilt-ridden and stressful. Now the entry seems more positive and optimistic. Heather's approach to preparing for the second year had been a systematic one. She had made extensive practical preparations in order to control and balance the impact of the course upon her wider commitments to family and home life. She now had a dedicated study area at

home, suggesting that she had come to terms more with the idea of being a student – even self-validating her student identity through allowing herself the study space.

In addition, Heather felt that she now understood *what the lecturers are talking about* and how that related to the assessed work in portfolio and essay form in particular. She even felt able to predict that her academic performance would be *around the C/B standard* implying that she had come to terms with assessment and marking criteria, and felt confident in pitching her work correctly. Heather seemed content with the prospect of C/B grades and made no comment about her ability to cope academically. Rather, what did seem important to her was an understanding of how the University College sessions related to the assessed work she was expected to produce. In this respect, Heather had articulated her understanding of the coherence between teaching strategies, subject content and assessment strategies within the Foundation Degree course.

In addition, during the subsequent interview, Heather expressed optimism about returning to the University College: *[I feel] quite optimistic [...] I was looking forward to coming back and just kind of getting back into the routine and getting on with it basically (I-Hea-2/acad-stu)*. Heather wanted to get back into the routine, which suggested a comfortable familiarity with academic practice. Furthermore, it was not only Heather, but also her family who understood what doing the course meant for them all, particularly practically: *I think this year*

everybody in the family kind of knows “well, Tuesday, just get on with it” [...] I’ve got myself a little area to study now [and] they also know if I’m sitting there not to disturb me so it works out quite well at the moment (I-Hea-2/acad-stu).

Heather had come on a significant journey. In year one she had believed that she could fully retain her familial identity and still manage the demands of the course, even though she felt guilty and under pressure. Here at the start of year two, she had accepted that change was necessary. The study area at home represented a practical and physical way of attaching validity to Heather’s studies and she had trained her family to understand and respect her study routine. Heather really did appear to be exuding a ‘full steam ahead’ newly energised self as she entered year two of the course.

As well as the positive frame of mind that Heather brought to year two and the enhanced support from her family, there were signs of changes in the workplace which had the potential to be positive for Heather. References to Heather’s workplace situation featured heavily in the interview conducted at the beginning of part two of the data collection framework, a few weeks into year two of the course. There had been a change of headteacher at Heather’s school and, initially, Heather seemed positive about the new headteacher, commenting that: *One major plus this year is a new head teacher (hooray!!) who actually is interested in people going on courses. I feel as if someone recognises the job/course I’m doing for the first time in ages (J-Hea-2/work-sup).*

Throughout year one, Heather had experienced disinterest within the workplace regarding her courses, but at the start of the second year she expressed delight at realising that someone in the school finally recognised what she was engaged with: *During this week our new Head was walking through school with her mentor and introduced me saying “this is the TA doing the Foundation Degree”. It felt great. (J-Hea-2/work-sup).* The recognition from the new headteacher, manifest through introducing Heather to a stranger as *the TA doing the Foundation Degree*, appeared to have had a profound effect upon Heather. It meant a lot to her that her efforts were being recognised. Heather had craved recognition from the workplace about what she had been doing and it seemed now that the new head teacher showed real potential as a source of support and a ‘champion’ for the Foundation Degree. Most importantly, Heather glimpsed possibilities for more effective support within the workplace through the mentoring model.

However, the first impressions soon changed. The arrival of a new headteacher at school led to ‘positioning’ amongst colleagues – with the implication being that certain individuals were jostling to curry favour with the new headteacher. There was no explicit reason given by Heather for why she had brought this point up in interview, but the suggestion was that she found such activities a distraction from the business of learning and teaching: *The school politics are coming into it again [...] we’ve had a new head coming in and they’re very easily influenced by the new people (I-Hea-2/work-rel).* In addition, Heather described perceived

inequalities within the workplace regarding remuneration and this seemed to add even more negativity to the workplace environment: *We've just found out, which is quite frustrating, the two TAs in reception are paid thirty nine hours a week and Year 1 and Year 2 TAs are paid twenty seven hours a week [...] I know the Reception teachers have a lot of clout (I-Hea-2/work-rel).*

Therefore, Heather found herself in the midst of a workplace where conflicting and contrasting practice seemed to be the norm. On the one hand, a new headteacher offered promise to Heather in terms of the recognition and support she may receive for the course; on the other, colleagues within the workplace, together with the unfolding of facts about pay and conditions seemed to threaten the equilibrium of the working community of practice, causing Heather anxiety and frustration. Thus, the relationships between colleagues (teachers, teaching assistants, headteacher) became a sociocultural factor which impacted upon the learning potential of the workplace.

Difficulties in the workplace featured again during the interview in October 2005, when Heather referred to the current module being studied – Inclusive Education. This module covered knowledge related to the education of children with special educational needs and the application of such knowledge within the context of the teaching assistant role in the workplace. Heather expressed some frustration in not being able to apply the contents of the module to her classroom practice: *I have tried to apply quite a lot of it but obviously being just a TA in the classroom*

you don't always get that opportunity to do it (I-Hea-2/self-iden/TA). Heather recognised the importance of the module and was keen to apply the learning undertaken at the University College to her classroom practice. However, there was a significant barrier to achieving that, which appeared to be Heather's own perception of her work-based role – that of being *just a TA* and not always having breadth of opportunity within the classroom. Presumably, this perception had arisen from Heather's own experiences in the workplace, where she may have been restricted to certain work practices because of her role. For the work-based elements of the Foundation Degree, there was a danger that this perception would restrict Heather's involvement in further work experiences and potentially disadvantage her learning.

Despite the workplace difficulties described earlier and Heather's obvious disappointment with the political manoeuvring amongst staff and the inequalities in remuneration, Heather was still clear that the course benefited her greatly. In particular, there were tangible benefits for her in terms of being able to 'hold her own' when contributing to professional discussions within the workplace:

For myself [...] it's really benefited me. Even like I said going back to Friday they were talking [in the staff room] and you know eighteen months ago I wouldn't have had a clue but at least I could stay on a par because there are only six people and four of them were teachers and I didn't feel completely swamped [...] I could hold my own which was quite good. But obviously it's only because of, you know, being on the course (I-Hea-2/work-disc).

Therefore, Heather believed that it was engagement with the Foundation Degree that had empowered her to contribute to discussions in the workplace, using appropriate educational language confidently and knowledgeably.

7.5 Completing the course

Heather successfully completed her Foundation Degree, attending graduation in July 2006 and meeting up for a final interview in October 2006. Upon reviewing the first DVD clip that Heather had provided at the start of the first period of data collection, she reflected upon some clear improvements in her practice since. Heather identified that she now took a more consistent approach generally to her work with children in the classroom and a more detailed consideration in particular of the language that she used. She recognised that her practice had developed and was now more beneficial to the children. However, we soon moved onto discussing how she was able to apply her Foundation Degree in the workplace, a theme we had explored during parts one and two of the data collection framework. A key hallmark of the conversation was the disappointment that Heather clearly felt about not really being able to use her Foundation Degree in the workplace: *These last couple of months it has been hard to find a use for my degree apart from that I can go into the staffroom and I know what they're talking about [...] I think that's a problem with a lot of TAs (I-Hea-3/work-c/imp).*

Unlike Sam and Mel, Heather had chosen not to apply to progress to the honours year with qualified teacher status. She did not seem to have gained recognition in the workplace for her achievements and attributed this to the poor status that TAs generally had. Heather continued, pointing out that she did change roles part way through the course: *In my work situation because I changed jobs halfway through I don't actually use the benefit of it [the degree] at all [...] I feel I've let myself down by not kind of using my teaching assistant's degree at all (I-Hea-3/work-c/imp)*. The role she had moved to involved working solely with one pupil, and this had severely restricted the opportunities for her to apply what she had learned from the Foundation Degree within the workplace.

When asked to identify how the Foundation Degree had benefited her, beyond the workplace, Heather was much more positive and identified three areas where the course had not only brought personal benefit to her, but also to her family:

In home life the benefits have been [in] three different ways. First of all it made me kind of wake up a lot and you have these strategies and things like that there [...] With the children I knew what they were going to do in secondary because never having experienced English education, you know, I wasn't aware of what GCSEs are, Keystage 3 was, things like that [...] But also the curriculum, when my son is doing his homework I know I have to help him find the information because that's been kind of really good and also how to help him understand what he's supposed to, you know how he's supposed to do it and break it down, kind of use mind maps for his homework and different things like that, before I wouldn't have done...and the third one is my husband has started an OU course and I'm saying "You should be writing however there," and things like that...that's been quite good as well because he's been going you know I mean obviously he's quite used to writing reports and that, more than I would have been but I'm trying to think well you need a balance, you know to balance the argument and you have to put that in and then say however things like that. So that's been quite good as well (I-Hea-3/self-imp/fam).

Heather identified that the course had made her *wake up* to the range of strategies in use in English schools. In particular she was now more aware of school systems and educational language (such as GCSEs and Keystage 3), and also of pedagogical techniques. For example, she described how she was able to help her son with his homework, not in a purely instrumental way, but by helping him through the learning process. The third area identified by Heather was that her husband has started a course of higher education and she felt able to support him in terms of using academic conventions, such as writing essays.

She also recounted the lack of opportunities for her to attend university as a school leaver:

Well it's been really good because I started off, basically I gave up work when my son was born and even though I always got involved with like toddler groups and things like that until I started working in the school I kind of never really thought about working in a school. I mean when I was in secondary school you kind of, you could go three ways and that was it. You either had a lot of money to go to university or you went and did a trade, worked in a shop or you just worked in an office. And the opportunity to go to university just wasn't there so it's been really nice for us to go to university (I-Hea-3/self-fut).

Heather appeared genuinely grateful for the opportunity to attend the University College, having been denied the chance due to socio-economic reasons as a school leaver. These comments reflect the part that Foundation Degrees can potentially play in widening access and participation. In addition she articulated that she was ready to go to college, due to the systematic approach she had taken to taking training opportunities to support herself in her TA role:

When I started helping in school when my son started school it's, obviously that's just kind of you know you start going into help, well I started helping with the library then it grew to do dinner times then it grew to a couple of extra hours a week to full time which was really good. But all the way through that, at every stage I did go on training and I do feel I learnt quite a lot from kind of doing that training, but also it prepared me for coming to college. I was ready I think to come to college. It has been difficult I have to say to decide where I'm going to take it because at the back of my mind although I've always worked in Keystage 1 and then moved to Keystage 2, I actually think I want to work in Keystage 3 (I-Hea-3/self-fut).

However, Heather was still unsure about what the future held. She had broadened her school-based experience by seeking a new position in Key Stage 2, but was also considering working in Key Stage 3. Despite this uncertainty over where the Foundation Degree may take her though, Heather was thrilled to be able to take part in the graduation ceremony and reiterated the impact that doing the course had made upon her family:

Well yeah that was really good, it was really, really pleasing. I'm actually the first person in our family to actually go to university so my dad was really pleased. But I think also it's kind of impacted on [my husband] as well because when he finished school he had no choice because our parents couldn't afford to send us to university, just went into a local kind of work. So kind of I think he decided well I might as, you know, might as well do it as well. So it's been, you know from that point of view he's pushed himself forward a bit more and got on with it as well in a sense (I-Hea-3/self-imp/fam).

7.6 End piece

Heather had clear reasons for embarking upon the Foundation Degree. She was looking for a personal challenge and possibly for a new direction in life through a career as a qualified teacher and the account shows a student who embraced the new challenges of academic study wholeheartedly. In the workplace though,

Heather found it difficult to access support, in contrast to both Mel and Sam who were able to engage effectively with workplace mentors. However, Heather describes the same challenges identified by Mel and Sam associated with managing multiple roles of parent, student and employee.

Over the two years then, the steps that Heather took, starting with 'one step up', led her to feeling she was able to 'hold her own' in the workplace – perhaps that in itself was the measure she was looking for in terms of doing something for herself. Heather did not progress to a course leading to qualified teacher status, but appeared comfortable with her successes. She had unravelled the mysteries of academic practice and had gained the knowledge and understanding that she was looking for in order to develop her professional classroom practice. Perhaps of most importance to Heather was that she had acted as a role model to her husband who had witnessed first hand the potential for education to transform and was now engaged in higher education.

Synopsis

Mel's, Sam's and Heather's accounts of their experiences of learning through a Foundation Degree have been presented separately in order to convey the uniqueness of each of their learning journeys, from applying and enrolling upon the course, through to graduation. As the accounts have developed, some limited comparisons have been made, but these have been kept necessarily brief in order to retain the individual integrity of each account. Now, this short synoptic overview draws together key areas where there is both congruence and variation in the three accounts. In particular, it considers the learning challenges faced by Mel, Sam and Heather; the tensions inherent in dealing with multiple roles as student, parent and employee, and the support that each of the three students experienced within the workplace for the duration of their Foundation Degree studies.

At the beginning of each of their accounts, the three students all convey a lack of confidence in relation to their status as learners within higher education. Mel's previously unsuccessful encounter with higher education study some twenty years earlier had left her wondering whether she would be able to succeed at University, whilst being dyslexic presented her (in her view) with another barrier to learning. Sam too, doubted her ability to cope at higher education level; although unlike Mel, this was not based upon a previously unsuccessful experience of higher education nor upon a diagnosed learning difficulty, but was founded upon a

limiting self-perception that she was not good enough for higher education in terms of academic ability. Thus, both Mel and Sam were grappling with issues of how they saw themselves academically – a theme developed further through discussion of self-theories and identity in Chapter Eight. However, whilst Mel and Sam expressed apprehension at starting a high education course, the early parts of Heather’s account conveyed enthusiasm for the course with no hint of apprehension. Rather, in contrast to Mel and Sam, although Heather still lacked confidence, she seemed to take a more measured approach to academic study – developing an understanding and appreciation of academic practice as she progressed through the course and made sense of the academy. Therefore a focus upon ‘Making sense of the academy’ also appears in Chapter Eight, covering not only Heather’s development in this area, but also the struggles that Mel and Sam faced in developing their academic literacy.

As parents, with key roles within their families, all three students show through their accounts the difficulties faced by mature students managing multiple roles and responsibilities. Mel, Sam and Heather each independently discussed through interview and in their journal entries, the feelings of guilt they experienced when being torn between caring for children and engaging with their studies. They were each very open about the tensions created within their families due to the demands placed upon them as parents, students and employees. Yet, they each tackled these difficulties in slightly different ways. Heather, for example, actively sought to change routines at home at the start of the second year of the course in

order to pragmatically and proactively deal with the difficulties she faced. However, Mel seemed to accept that many aspects of the course would have to take priority over time with her children, even though she found this idea difficult to come to terms with. Sam actually took on more responsibility at work during year two of the course, adding to the pressure she was under. Despite this, though, Sam insisted that she would be well supported both at home and in the workplace – a factor that she relied upon throughout the course, but an aspect with which Heather could not have so much confidence. The notion of role conflict is therefore a key theme throughout each of Mel's, Sam's and Heather's accounts and is explored further in Chapter Eight through a consideration of the conflicting responsibilities they faced and the role that motivational factors had in ensuring that they each completed the course.

Of the three students, Heather seemed to have the most challenging time within the workplace, often coming across in her account as feeling isolated and unsupported in terms of support for her studies and for the work-based elements in particular. Mel had more support in the workplace and recognised the importance of the role of the mentor, but still found it challenging to find time to engage with work-based tasks on occasion. In contrast, Sam enjoyed unparalleled support from her mentor (a colleague who had already supported a previous Foundation Degree student through the course) and seemed comfortable with the prospect of completing work-based tasks. Work-based learning comprises a fundamental part of the Foundation Degree and therefore the case study students'

accounts are used in Chapter Eight to develop understanding of the theoretical ideas and models related to work-based learning. The accounts have also afforded an insight into the students' personal learning (rather than the learning explicitly situated within the workplace) and therefore this theme is also considered in Chapter Eight, within the contexts of forms of knowledge; experiential learning, and the part that reflection plays in learning.

Having presented each of Mel's, Sam's and Heather's accounts and drawn out some similarities and differences, the thesis now moves towards Part Three. This part seeks to use the accounts in two ways: firstly, to analyse and further understand the learner experience in the light of the case study accounts and of theory, and secondly to inform the development of a new conceptual model related to learning through a Foundation Degree and designed to improve course design and delivery.

PART THREE: Using the accounts

Chapter Eight

Understanding the learner experience

8.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to use the three in-depth students' accounts to illuminate understanding of the theoretical aspects of learning through a Foundation Degree as set out in Chapter Three in order to inform the development of a new conceptual model, presented in Chapter Nine. The areas I discuss in this chapter mirror the 'threads of inquiry' identified in Chapter Three and have been chosen as worthy of further analysis due to repeated identification during stages four to eight of the analytical framework. The areas identified are shown in figure 8.1, which tracks the threads of inquiry from Chapter Three to Chapter Eight:

| Chapter Three | Chapter Eight |
|--|---|
| 3.3.2 Being a student: self-theories and identity | 8.3 Self-theories and identity 8.5 Making sense of the academy |
| 3.3.3 Being a student: will and motivation | 8.2 Motivating factors and conflicting responsibilities |
| 3.4.1 Learning in the workplace: learning as social practice | 8.6 Understanding work-based learning |
| 3.4.2 Learning in the workplace: experiential learning | 8.4 Understanding personal learning |
| 3.2 Forms of knowledge | 8.4 Understanding personal learning |
| 3.3.1 Being a student: adult learners | |

Figure 8.1: Tracking the threads of inquiry (part a)

This chapter brings together material from all three case study student accounts, not to generalise key points made, but rather to combine evidence from each student and to identify differences and commonalities between the students in order to construct a rich understanding of what an authentic student experience is (Barnett, 2007). It begins by considering the motivating factors that led to Mel, Sam and Heather applying to the University College and staying the course, and will also consider the conflicting roles and responsibilities they faced and the potential such difficulties had for undermining their motivation to engage in higher education. This is followed by analysis of how Mel, Sam and Heather learn, scrutinising adult learning theory in particular and examining its outworking in practice. The students' self-theories and identities (as students, parents, employees) are investigated next and this leads into a consideration of how Mel, Sam and Heather view the academy, including academic practices and academic literacy. Finally, the chapter seeks to understand the nature of work-based learning by examining the experiences of Mel, Sam and Heather in relation to learning as social practice in the workplace. The threads explored in this chapter will further inform Chapter Nine, which presents a new conceptual model related to learning through a Foundation Degree and considers the implications of such a model for Foundation Degree delivery.

8.2 Motivating factors and conflicting responsibilities

Given that adult learners tend to be busy people, with responsibilities beyond their learning environment (such as families and jobs) it may seem remarkable that any

choose to be engaged in higher education at all. In this respect, the accounts presented in Part Two of this thesis illustrate vividly the practical difficulties and tensions created by the conflicting roles and responsibilities that Mel, Sam and Heather all faced when entering higher education. By implication, therefore, their motivating factors for engaging in higher education must have been overwhelmingly strong, a trait identified by Knowles (1978) as particular to adult learners (discussed in Chapter Three) and by Bainbridge (2005) in relation to non-traditional, female Foundation Degree students. This section considers motivating factors, using Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' motivational framework (1970) and Barnett's notion of 'a will to learn' (2007) – both first introduced in Chapter Three – as lenses through which to view the case study students' experiences. Then, I consider how motivation to succeed may be undermined by conflict in relation to the multiple roles that Mel, Sam and Heather held as parent, student and employee.

The motivating factors for all three students are consonant with those found within Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' (1970). Traditionally depicted as a triangular hierarchy, the foundational needs relate to physiological aspects such as hunger and thirst. The next level outlines safety needs – security and protection, including the need for employment. Now, although all three students were in employment and thus had this basic need met, Mel and Heather in particular articulated a desire to improve their work, with the potential of feeling more secure in employment and possibly more fulfilled. However, more importantly,

all three were explicit in aiming to seek or consider teaching as a career and this is perhaps not surprising, as the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants provided an opportunity for many students to progress to an honours year with Qualified Teacher Status. As teachers, they would command higher wages than as teaching assistants, thus increasing the income they may be able to provide for themselves and their family, a motivating factor also identified by Bainbridge (2005) in a study of mature, non-traditional female students studying for a Foundation Degree:

Vocational and monetary reasons for following the course were more common than would have been expected and it is highly probable that this is due to the fact that these women were already in work, and as such they could actualise the potential career possibilities such a course offered (Bainbridge 2005: 5).

Interestingly, though, none of the students articulated during interview or within journal entries the motivating factor of higher earning power. Rather, both Sam and Mel had their eye on a teaching career because they believed they could do it, thus suggesting affinity with an even higher level of need within Maslow's model – that of self-esteem.

For Mel, then, motivation was threefold, as illustrated in her first audio journal entry of September 2004 (*J-Mel-1/self/mot*) which outlined that, firstly, a key goal was to develop skills and knowledge to improve her work practice; secondly, she wished to learn something *for the sake of learning* (*J-Mel-1/self-mot*), and thirdly, Mel had a longer term goal of qualifying to teach. Similarly, Heather's motivations appeared to be threefold, as described in her first journal entries,

completed during October 2004 (*J-Hea-1/self-mot*). As with Mel, Heather wanted to improve her work practice and personally challenge herself by learning at a higher level. However, unlike Mel, Heather had not firmly decided upon teaching as a career, but saw higher education study as one way of ascertaining whether a career teaching was the right decision for her. In contrast to both Heather and Mel, Sam's motivational driver was singular and pragmatic – the desire to become a teacher: *'I really do want to be a teacher and the only way to do that would be to come to university'* (*I-Sam-1/self-iden/st*).

Mel and Heather say that they wish to engage in learning for the sake of learning and to be personally challenged in learning, so it could be argued that all three students aspired to meet the highest level of need within Maslow's hierarchy – that of self-actualisation, or the fulfilment of a person's desire to become all that he or she may be capable of becoming. In Barnett's words:

In a genuine higher education, the student not merely undergoes a developmental process, but undergoes a continuing process of becoming. This becoming is marked by the student's becoming authentic and coming into herself, which are two depictions of the same phenomenon. In this coming into herself, the student finds for herself a clearing that is hers (Barnett, 2007: 62).

Barnett's notion of 'becoming' encapsulates the complex process of personal and educational development that is an expected part of a higher education experience and a component of 'a will to learn' – the trait that enables students to pursue and complete their studies. He uses the analogy of the bungee jumper (taking a courageous leap into a void in order to experience something new and discover

more about him/herself) to illustrate the act of becoming for the student – an act that creates anxiety on the part of the student and that demands from them courage and resolve. Thus, the notion of ‘becoming’ seemed to have meaning for Mel and Heather in particular – they were prepared to embark upon the challenge of higher education study not just because the end result may be material reward, but because they could see opportunities for personal challenge and discovery. That is not to suggest that the notion of ‘becoming’ may not have had meaning for Sam, rather she appeared to be more solely fixed upon the idea of qualifying to teach and did not articulate through her accounts any other motivational factor. Indeed, perhaps her sense of ‘becoming’ was just more focussed upon becoming a teacher – a role with which she identified and was striving towards.

The high levels of internal motivation and sheer determination demonstrated by Mel, Sam and Heather are given further credence when it is clear through their accounts that they all struggle with feelings of guilt whilst trying to manage conflicting responsibilities at home, work and with their studies. For example, under the thematic cluster of ‘self’ and the code related to ‘guilt’ (self-guilt), nine references appear within the interview data and seven within the journal data, a total of sixteen references overall. Mel’s accounts contain the most references, with five references within the interview data and three within the journal data – thus half of the references are attributable to Mel. Sam’s accounts contain three references within the interview data and one in the journal data, whilst Heather refers to notions of guilt once during interview and three times within journal

data. Heather's references all occur within the first part of data collection, whilst Mel's and Sam's references are spread across all three parts of data collection. For all three students, 'guilt' was a factor that featured during the early stages of the course and a factor that continued explicitly for Mel and Sam for the duration of the course.

The particular tensions experienced by mature female students when managing multiple roles and responsibilities have been identified in a number of studies (Justice and Dornan, 2001; Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002; and Goddard and Penketh, 2007). The accounts by Mel, Sam and Heather corroborate these studies by unanimously identifying tensions particular to the mothering role and the difficulties inherent in having to manage this role alongside those of student and employee. Specifically, work by Bainbridge (2005) investigating the gender discourse for mature women on a Foundation Degree programme has identified that: 'For mature women entrants into higher education, the notion of detracting from the role of mother/care-giver may not be immediately part of their familial habits' (Bainbridge, 2005: 4). Such studies highlight the role tensions as a particular gender issue, although case studies collected by West (1996) present examples of mature males suffering from feelings of guilt when torn between study and family time.

For example, the contrast that Mel describes between her enjoyment of the course and her recognition that she had responsibilities towards her children clearly upset

her. In June at the end of the first year, she describes the difficulties of balancing study and time with her children as *the worst thing, the very worst thing (J-Mel-1/self-guilt)*. Her final diary of the first year explicitly states *relief* that there will be a break in the course over the summer and a return to *the normal things we do (J-Mel-1/self-guilt)*. Yet, at the start of the second year, Mel's guilt returned. She had enjoyed her summer vacation and had acknowledged that time away from the course had provided release from the ongoing guilt of not having had time with family in particular – in Mel's words *it was good to not have that kind of guilt (J-Mel-2/self-guilt)*. As September approached, Mel's daughter recognised that things would change when the University College term started again. She knew from the experience of the first year what the course entailed for her mother and the effect it would have on the family for a second year. Rather dramatically, Mel's daughter announced that *my life is going to end (I-Mel-2/self-guilt)*. Clearly, this was not a literal statement, but implied within it was the expectation that things would change for the worst once Mel was back at College. Therefore, for Mel, a mature student with family roles and responsibilities, she had added pressure from her family members to continue to act in the familial role, as well as demonstrate success as a student. Sam's account, too, clearly exemplifies the difficult decisions that she had to make as a mature woman entering higher education, regarding her role as mother and home-organiser. For example, over Christmas during year one, she had admitted that she had *felt the strain* and that she did *struggle (I-Sam-3/self-time)* due to having to balance the demands of family life and academic study.

The strain felt by all three students in trying to find time for their studies was summed up by Heather in March 2005 when she described her time management as *based on the time that shopping, cleaning, kids delivered and collected to whatever/whenever, dinner and lunches organised, uniform sorted, work, leaves me to study (J-Hea-1/self-time)*. However, despite the additional commitments and responsibilities, all three were successful in achieving the Foundation Degree award and two students (Mel and Sam) progressed to an honours year, perhaps further underlining that the maturity of these students was a key factor in cultivating higher levels of intrinsic motivation and commitment to study (Knowles, 1978; Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002).

For Mel, Sam and Heather, learning through a Foundation Degree was difficult – it involved coping with self-doubt, uncertainty, conflict and pressure and went far beyond Barnett’s assertion that ‘being a student is to be in a state of anxiety’ (Barnett, 2007: 32). For all students the state of anxious uncertainty is an unavoidable part of higher education and it is the ‘will to learn’ (Barnett, 2007) which motivates students to carry on despite anxiety. However, Mel, Sam and Heather encountered a state of double anxiety: the anxiety of being a student and also of coping with additional roles which conflicted with their developing student identity. Such a state of double anxiety had the potential to undermine the solid motivational factors, outlined above, which had drawn the students to study in higher education, but all three students completed their studies successfully, confirming Barnett’s thesis of the existence of a strong ‘will to learn’.

This section has explored the motivating factors that enabled Mel, Sam and Heather to engage successfully with higher education – the desire to improve their performance in the workplace and move towards a teaching career; the desire to engage in the personal challenge of learning at a higher level, and the desire to do something for themselves. Their accounts showed how these factors were related to tangible outcomes (such as becoming a teacher and attracting a higher income) as well as intrinsic factors explored in the context of self-esteem and self-actualisation (Maslow, 1970) and Barnett's 'will to learn' (2007). I have also considered how motivation to succeed might have been undermined by conflict in relation to the multiple roles that Mel, Sam and Heather held as parent, student and employee. In this respect, I introduced the notion of 'double anxiety' as a way of describing the case study students' experiences. This idea could potentially negate the positive view of anxiety promoted by Barnett (2007) as a necessary factor for engendering within a student the 'will to learn' and undermine any motivating factors, but I have shown that for Mel, Sam and Heather their 'will to learn' within a context of 'becoming' was powerful enough to foster success in their studies. Therefore, the existence of 'a will to learn' seems unequivocal for Mel, Sam and Heather. However, despite displaying a 'will to learn', the students constantly suffered self doubt in relation to their ability and crises of conflict in respect of their roles as student, parent and employee, and these are considered next.

8.3 Self-theories and identity

Self-theories and identity were identified as a thread of inquiry in Chapter Three, where it was suggested that studying within higher education presents to the non-traditional student a number of unforeseen challenges to their sense of identity, belonging and self-esteem (Bowl, 2003; Burn and Finnigan, 2003; Reay, 2003; Bhatti, 2003; Hockings et al., 2007). In addition, specific self-theories related to ability were explored (Dweck, 2000; Yorke and Knight, 2004). This section explores the threads of self-theories and identity further, given that the three case study students' views of themselves, particularly in relation to academic identity, featured heavily in their accounts. Mel, Sam and Heather all described feelings of academic inadequacy at various points during the course and in so doing aligned themselves to a skewed perception of higher education as the domain of an elite few – a notion explored more fully in a later section of this chapter 'Making sense of the academy'. However, of all three students, it was Sam who persistently self-labelled her academic identity. For example, under the thematic cluster of 'self' (appendix 4.7) and the codes related to student identity (self-iden/st), the student's self-perception of ability (self-con/abil) and the student's self concept (self-conc) there were a total of eighteen relevant references within the interviews conducted with Sam, whilst Mel's interviews contain seven references and Heather's just three. Therefore, in order to understand the relatively high number of references within the thematic cluster of 'self' for Sam, this section explores the self-theories within which Sam frames herself and the perceived identity that results. It is

followed by discussion relating to Mel's feelings of academic inadequacy and poor self-concept due to her dyslexia.

Sam's reflections on starting the course, recorded in her first journal entry, described her nervousness and worry about beginning in higher education (*J-Sam-I/self-iden/st*). In addition, she questioned whether she was clever enough to complete a degree, revealing her self-perception as non-academic and immediately challenging her identity and self-esteem (issues also identified by Bowl, 2003 and Hockings et al., 2007 as pertinent for students from non-traditional backgrounds). Indeed, Burn and Finnigan (2003) explore whether university students construct themselves as academic or non-academic even before their course has started, and Sam seemed to be doing just that – defining herself as 'non-academic'. She expressed doubts about whether she could manage the course intellectually, and in so doing suggests an alignment with those of the 'fixed trait' school of intelligence (Dweck, 2000), whereby intelligence is portrayed as an unchangeable entity that dwells within an individual, as discussed in Chapter Three. The implication for a student who holds this view of intelligence is that they may perceive that they do not have enough intellectual ability to achieve success within their chosen field of study.

Dweck also suggests that for these students 'effort, difficulty, setbacks, or higher-performing peers call their intelligence into question' (2000: 3) and in this respect, Sam's questioning self-assessment of whether she was 'clever enough' to

study at higher education level was compounded by the assessment and grading system which, in Sam's eyes, reinforced her impression of her low levels of ability. During interviews in parts one and two of the data collection period (appendix 4.4), under the thematic cluster of 'academy' and the code related to the student's perception of their ability (*acad-abil*) Sam focussed specifically on assessment grades on four occasions. Twice she described herself as a 'C' person (*I-Sam-1/acad-abil*, *I-Sam-2/acad-abil*) and twice she discussed the grades she achieved for assessed work (*I-Sam-1/acad-abil*). Therefore, in the light of Dweck's (ibid.) suggestion, above, that effort on the part of the student or knowing that members of the peer group were gaining higher grades was likely to undermine a students' view of his/her own intelligence, Sam's perception that she was not clever enough to study at university would theoretically have been further reinforced.

Sam expressed fear about whether she was capable of completing the course and her words suggested a level of anxiety related to her grades, which could not have helped her fragile self-perception as 'non-academic'. Ironically, Barnett (2007) refers to the fragility of the student's pedagogical being as forming a necessary part of engaging with higher education. He perceives such fragility, together with a permanent state of anxiety in relation to assessments as having a formative effect upon the student's life in terms of developing the 'will to learn' (Barnett, 2007). As outlined earlier, the notion of a 'double anxiety' faced by Mel, Sam and Heather due to the conflicting roles and responsibilities they faced goes

beyond Barnett's intentions in championing fragility and anxiety as necessary factors in 'becoming' learners. This is because, for Mel, Sam and Heather, being a student was a struggle not only for themselves, but also for those around them (their family in particular) who were affected by the shift in roles and responsibilities due to the demands of the course. The difficulties faced by their families then caused further anxiety and feelings of guilt on the part of the three students as well as practical problems to overcome – hence the notion of 'double anxiety'.

However, at the end of the first year, Sam insisted that she was not so *hung up* with grades, saying instead that she was more interested in *feedback* from her tutors (*I-Sam-1/acad-stu*). This comment relating to her interest in assessment feedback did perhaps suggest that her view of ability had changed. An interest in feedback implied that she could use that feedback to improve her performance, and this view is more akin to the 'incremental theory' of intelligence (Dweck, 2000), the view that 'intelligence is portrayed as something that can be increased through one's efforts' (Dweck, 2000: 3). Such a view is far more positive than the fixed view of intelligence, and gives the student license to seek improvement in their achievement. Overall, Sam's views did not appear to hold her back as a learner, contrary to Dweck's (2000) assertion that those holding a fixed entity view of intelligence may be self-limiting their learning. As suggested above, Sam seemed to change her view of intelligence over the year, moving more towards the incremental model. She had faced up to the challenges to her sense of

identity, belonging and self-esteem, in the same way as students in studies by Hockings et al., (2007) and by the end of the first year perhaps was no longer feeling an ‘outsider’ in the academy (Burn and Finnigan, 2003), a notion explored for all three students later in this chapter.

Mel had a different source of self-doubt. Her history of having dyslexia was a key factor that influenced her feelings of anxiety and academic inadequacy. She revealed in her accounts that dyslexia was a significant factor in causing her to withdraw from higher education some 25 years previously. Mel linked dyslexia to failure and, similarly, commentators have documented the damage done to both dyslexic and non-dyslexic learners placed in positions of perceived failure (Morgan and Klein, 2000; Hart, Dixon, Drummond and McIntyre, 2004; Burden, 2005). Mel saw her dyslexia as a ‘deficit’¹³, a view possibly constructed from the perceptions of others (Burden, 2005), and this had coloured her self-concept, in a similar way to the ‘learned helplessness’ described by Dweck (2000) of those who limit belief in their ability. Indeed Burden (2005) argues that:

an important set of presage factors for dyslexics turning the corner are (a) the intention and determination to overcome their difficulties, (b) the belief that their future success lies in their own hands, and (c) the kind of learning environment in which others with a similar set of goals work together to help each other to achieve success (Burden, 2005: 81).

Looking at Mel’s accounts, there is evidence to suggest that her success on the course does illustrate the three factors. For example, Mel’s intention and

¹³ Although Mel saw her dyslexia as a deficit, the practice at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln is to view dyslexia as a ‘learning difference’. Students such as Mel are entitled to specialist dyslexia support in order that their dyslexia does not become an obstacle to making academic progress.

determination to overcome difficulties was evident in her first diary entries, written at the very start of the course during part one of the data collection period, where she described her excitement at starting something that she had planned for and had wanted to do for such a long time (*J-Mel-1/acad-uni*). Mel certainly gave the impression that success was partly down to her (the second of Burden's factors), at least from a practical point of view. For example, she had put plans in place in order to enable enrolment on the course. In addition, she was motivated by a desire to do something for herself and recognised the practical effort that had to be put into the course: *you can't succeed in terms of this course unless you are really, really motivated to do it [...] you have to really drive yourself to find the time to do it (I-Mel-1/self-mot)*, an attitude aligned to Burden's first factor in terms of determination. In addition, Mel was studying within an environment where mutual support was evident (Burden's third factor), as shown in the context of Mel's return to year two of the course, when she was clear that the support of her peer group was vital to her for continuing success on the course: *social interaction is absolutely key to me [...] it is quite reassuring to know that everybody else has very similar concerns (I-Mel-2/acad-peers)*.

Significantly, though, dyslexia became less a part of Mel's self-definition as the course progressed. Mel did face challenges to her self-concept and battles with an identity that was bound up with previous experiences of learned helplessness as a dyslexic learner, but in her account she referred less frequently to her dyslexia as she moved through the course. During the first part of data collection, there are

two references during interview and three in the journal entries. In part two of the data collection there are three references during interview, with no references in the journal. Part three of the data collection contains no direct references to dyslexia, suggesting that Mel had come to terms with her learning difficulty and no longer viewed it as a negative aspect of her learner identity. Instead, she reveals that she has enjoyed the 'me time' that she has managed to carve out for herself when studying: *I enjoyed just having that time [...] I know that I can have that little box that's for me and for the most part that is filled with the course and the course requirements (Mel-2/self-iden/st)*, perhaps suggesting that she felt comfortable with a student identity, when the time was set aside for study and showing that she was no longer labelling herself according to her dyslexia.

This section has explored the self-theories within which Sam frames herself and also investigated Mel's feelings of academic inadequacy and poor self-concept due to her dyslexia. Heather's voice has largely been absent from this section, but I am not suggesting that she did not experience 'learned helplessness' as Sam did, or that she did not hold a poor self-concept in relation to academic ability as Mel did. Heather did express feelings of inadequacy in relation to academic study, but rather than focussing upon perceived internal deficits regarding ability (as Sam and Mel tended to do), Heather's account focuses more upon external structures, conventions and expectations in relation to higher education study – these are explored later in 'Making sense of the academy'. Now I consider the students' individual learning.

8.4 Understanding personal learning

This section focuses explicitly upon the students' personal learning, rather than situated learning. The motivating factors that prompted Mel, Sam and Heather to engage in, and continue with, higher education study have been outlined above and links with similar studies have been made. I have also drawn out the tensions that ensued for the students as they struggled with conflicting responsibilities within the home and in their studies. I now turn to the question of how learners such as Mel, Sam and Heather, who are suffering what I have called 'double anxiety' (because they have families to be responsible for) learn. I use the case study accounts to tease out some evidence in order to understand more fully how they learn and how this relates to the learning theories and models discussed in Chapter Three. In this way, this section explores how the accounts illuminate ways in which students use different forms of knowledge, such the mode one and two forms outlined by Gibbons et al. (1994) and the propositional, personal and process knowledge explored by Eraut (1994) and Bierema and Eraut (2004). In addition, I consider how the accounts relate to experiential learning (Dewey, 1938, 1966; Kolb, 1984) and discuss the part of reflection in learning and transformational learning models (Schön, 1983; Mezirow, 1991, 1997; Moon, 1999).

From the case study accounts presented, Mel and Heather specifically alluded to the process of personal learning and the fact that, for them, central to the process was the notion of making theory-practice links in order to enhance their

understanding. For example, during the interviews conducted during part one of the data collection, in February 2005, both Mel and Heather talked about ‘making connections’ within their learning – of connecting their practice in the workplace with the more theoretical and abstract learning undertaken during taught sessions at the University College. Mel compared the moment when a connection is made to switching on a light as she moved from University College to classroom setting: *when you go back into your classroom the next day you think ‘oh I know why that’s happening’ or you know suddenly you can see the relevance of things (I-Mel-1/acad-con)*. Heather, too, was excited about the links being made between her practical knowledge and work covered during the course, especially in relation to educational theory and policy, saying that making those connections enabled her to *see the jigsaw pieces joining together (J-Hea-2/acad-con)*.

In this way, they were demonstrating how theoretical knowledge generated within an academic setting – the type of knowledge labelled as propositional knowledge by Eraut (1994) and as mode one knowledge by Gibbons et al. (1994) – is made meaningful when reflected upon within their own workplace contexts. It is also illustrative of the practical-academic nexus of knowledge within a work-based course, described clearly by Costley: ‘Work based knowledge then, flows back and forth between practical work and theoretical practice’ (Costley, 2000: 31). For Heather and Mel, the knowledge they used seemed to be ‘flowing’ in just the way Costley describes. They had brought knowledge about learning theory to the workplace and had understood the theory as it was applied to practice. They had

also brought their own practical knowledge and experience to the academy and learnt to underpin that knowledge and experience with a deeper theoretical understanding, thus creating 'flow' between the worlds of practice and theory.

Therefore, for these students, learning was not about reproducing knowledge but was a transformative process (Mezirow, 1991; 1997) which involved learning to connect work-based and academic knowledge and to redefine problems from different perspectives (Mezirow, 1997). This has already been described by Heather as akin to seeing jigsaw pieces coming together and this image is a powerful one. The implication from the journal entry was that the jigsaw pieces related not only to Heather's practice, but to how the practice was justified through the knowledge and understanding gained through the course. A similar metaphor is used by Costley (2000) who compares work-based learning to a mosaic and suggests that the mosaic involves drawing upon professional, academic and experiential learning.

Experiential learning was identified as a thread of inquiry in Chapter Three in the context of learning in the workplace. In the discussion, Dewey's (1938, 1966) belief that interaction between the learner and the environment was essential for effective learning was presented as an endorsement of work-based learning. Beaney's (2005) description of work-based learning as a subset of experiential learning underlined the key role that learning through experience can have, and the thread of inquiry also identified that adults use experience as a key resource

for learning (Lindeman, 1926; Knowles, 1978; Mezirow, 1985; and Fenwick, 2000). However, here I bring a broader consideration of what Mel, Sam and Heather brought to their learning journey in terms of a range of experiences.

The experiences which Mel, Sam and Heather brought to the course related to their unfolding personal biographies, including their previous working lives (recounted at the start of Chapters Five, Six and Seven) as well as experiences developed through roles as parent, teaching assistant and student and the conflicts inherent in managing these multiple roles. In addition, they each brought the influences of prior learning experiences at school; at college for vocational training, such as hairdressing for Sam and secretarial training for Heather, and within previous higher education study some 25 years previously for Mel. Indeed, generally, adult learners bring more complex, extended and varied life stories, prior knowledge and skills (Kasworm, 2003; Belzer, 2004) to higher education study and Knowles' (1978) andragogical model of learning suggests that it is beneficial to recognise and use the experience of the adult learner in the learning process. In order to understand more about how the case study students used their experience, I turn to Kolb's (1984) cyclical model of experiential learning.

Kolb's (1984) model, previously discussed in Chapter Three, envisaged that all learning starts with a concrete (real world) experience and that through reflection, the learner begins to make abstract generalisations about the experience and plan

a new course of action as a result, thus creating an interrelated learning cycle. Initially this seems like a relevant model for the Foundation Degree, with the workplace providing concrete experience for students. However, evidence from Mel and Heather suggest that it is not always the concrete experience that is the starting point, rather it may be a theoretical idea. For example, Mel enthusiastically recounted instances early on in the course when she knew she had grasped an idea that she would then relate to practice subsequently: *when you go back into your classroom the next day you think oh I know why that's happening (I-Mel-1/acad-con)*. In addition, early journal entries made by Heather conveyed her enthusiasm for learning new things pertinent to her role in the workplace, particularly the relevance of educational theory for aspects of practice, citing the relevance of Vygotsky's work to her role working with small groups (*J-Hea-1/work-c/imp*). In both of these cases I would suggest that the starting point within Kolb's cyclical model was a conceptual one, which was then tested in real situations in order to make more sense of the concrete experience.

Kolb's model includes within it 'reflection' and in the context of workplace learning, reflection plays a part in turning a workplace experience into a pedagogical tool – a point echoed more generally by many who have suggested that reflection upon experience plays a key part in the learning process (Schön, 1983; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991, 1997; Boud et al., 1993; Moon 1999; Brockbank et al., 2002; Fenwick 2002). Moon (1999) suggests that defining the term reflection is fraught with difficulty because of the multiplicity of usages it

attracts, but does suggest that there are three central ideas that underpin the way in which the word reflection is commonly used:

First, that reflection seems to lie somewhere around the process of learning [...]. Second [...] we reflect for a purpose [...]. The third understanding of the word is that it involves complicated mental processing of issues for which there is no obvious solution (Moon, 1999: 4).

These ideas certainly underpin the expectations for learning at higher education level (where reflection is central to learning, purposeful and demands higher order cognitive processing skills) and therefore within the Foundation Degree. Mel acknowledges that the course has meant she has made time for reflection – an aspect of professional practice that she sees as important: *in a work place setting there's very little time for reflection [...] this course makes you find time and I think that's a good thing (I-Mel-3/acad-refl)*. Again, the suggestion is that there are links to be made between prior and current experience and with theory, and space for reflection enables Kolb's experiential learning cycle to be complete, thus transforming experience in the workplace into a powerful learning tool.

This section has explored how Mel, Sam and Heather use experience and reflection to learn. The case study accounts have provided evidence related to the ways in which the students used different forms of knowledge, how experience was important to them as work-based learners, and the role of reflection in ensuring the articulation of a link between experience and theory. However, the students faced huge barriers to their learning in the form of higher education

conventions, particularly in relation to academic literacy and therefore it is to 'Making sense of the academy' that I now turn.

8.5 Making sense of the academy

Issues related to the accessibility of the academy were identified in Chapter Three within the thread of inquiry that covered self-theories and identity, and this theme is taken up again here with a slightly different emphasis. This section discusses how the case study students' accounts revealed how Mel, Sam and Heather made sense of the academy, considering in particular the central place of academic writing to success at University. I have already outlined that Mel, Sam and Heather expressed some concern and worry about how they would cope with study at higher education level. Mel harboured deep-seated worries about how she would cope with her learning disability, whilst Sam doubted whether she was clever enough to succeed. Heather mentioned in her early journal entries that she thought the course would be a challenge. However, none of them specifically anticipated problems with coping with academic conventions for writing (such as structuring, referencing and presentation). The students had to cope with the unfamiliarity of academic literacy (Street, 1984; Lea and Street, 2000; Hoadley-Maidment, 2000) and the focus upon writing conventions became a key feature of their journal and interview data through the first year of data collection, as illustrated by the following extracts:

Heather's journal – undated (probably January 2005)

Essays are becoming easier to write/plan. They have been a huge learning curve for me, I find them hard to write in the third person, I

always give a personal view (not deliberately). I think I'm getting better at analysing, it's still hard to find a quote that suits the theme of the essay. Finding quotes involves reading a lot and this can be distracting as I start reading books, find them interesting and then realise that I haven't actually achieved anything for the essay. Extremely time consuming!! (J-Hea-1/acad-uni).

Mel's audio journal – February 2005

Yes this is the coal face of learning, this is as tough as it gets. I think, not having had to do that for a long time I thought there's this kind of aura of mystery about essay writing and you know the formula [...] I know now what I need to do, that's not to say that I'm always able to do it but I do know kind of, I do know now how to construct it, I understand what the elements have got to be (I-Mel-1/acad-uni).

Sam – interview February 2005

A lot of the feedback I'm getting on my essays are it says too chatty [...] I know I'm too chatty in person, you know where am I going wrong, I think the literacy I got too chatty again but also not enough academic language. Straight away I thought there I go again you know because I'm too chatty this academic language isn't coming out (I-Sam-1/acad-uni).

So we can see that half way through the first year of the course, Heather, Mel and Sam recognised that certain conventions were expected within an academic essay. Indeed Mel even referred to the notion of a *formula* for essay writing (although she does not expand on this). Heather identified the need to write in the third person, to analyse and to include quotes, but even this was a misperception because, for the work-based student who is bringing valid examples from the workplace to their written work, it is not always necessary to write in the third person. Despite this, Heather still perceived this as an academic convention that was expected of her. The notion of 'finding quotes' seems to indicate an approach to writing governed by rules, rather than an holistic view of discursive argument. For Heather, successful analysis involved finding a relevant quote, rather than developing ideas and synthesising evidence and this revealed a very

under-developed view of what academic learning involved. Mel referred to the *mystery* of essay writing – almost as if the art of essay writing represented some sort of enigmatic rite of passage into the academy. Sam said that the feedback she got from tutors was that her written style was *too chatty* and that academic language was missing. Sam did not clarify what she meant by this, but the implication was that she perceived a definite difference between her own language and that of the academy and she recognised that this would need to be rectified.

The danger is that, in over simplifying what was perceived as the problem, the students implemented reductionist solutions to overcome the issue of academic access. Hence Mel's referral to a formula for essay writing, Sam's assertion that she must lose her chattiness, and Heather's mantra that quotes must be used to support evidence. The students were acquiescing to the demands of the academy, although there was no real evidence to suggest that they fully comprehended what the demands actually were. As their tutor, I was surprised at the students' comments. I had assumed that the support offered to each of them upon starting the course would have gone some way to easing them into understanding the academy, its conventions and expectations, but rather the impression is that, for them, they really did feel as if they were entering an 'unknown world' (Bowl, 2003: 67). Clearly, the tutor's role had not been effective enough in supporting student access to the academy and therefore improvements in this area are considered in Chapter Nine.

Satterthwaite, Atkinson and Gale (2003) present a range of papers concerned with the assumptive practices of higher education, including conventions in academic writing. Satterthwaite (2003) explores the type of academic discourse with which students are expected to engage, and in conversations with students uncovered attitudes which Sam would identify with. Discussing the responses of a student who was reflecting upon the need for specialised academic language, Satterthwaite writes:

This comment includes some recognition for the need of specialised language, and a guarded acknowledgement that it may serve a purpose. More significantly, this student is aware of a ‘club’ which s/he is being invited to join, through the initiating ritual of acquiring the members’ specialised discourse (2003: 108).

West (1996) also recounts stories of students who struggle to understand academic requirements and who find it ‘difficult to enter academic conversations if lecturers fail to explain the rules’ (West, 1996: 197). The dangers of potential exclusion from the academic ‘club’ for the student (and, for this study, for Sam) are clear. According to Satterthwaite, the students ‘saw themselves as subordinates, disciples, recognising the remoteness of the discourse of education from the world of their own experience’ (2003: 111).

Burn and Finnigan (2003) recount stories from students who believe they have cracked the code in terms of ‘unspoken academic writing rules’ (2003: 125), captured by the chapter title ‘I’ve made it more academic, by adding some snob words from the thesaurus’. The stories resonate closely with those presented by Heather, Mel and Sam, above – students who have struggled, at least initially

during their higher education studies, to unravel the mysteries of the academy and to make sense of what is expected of them within what could be perceived as an elite system which 'reinforces their identities as non-academic, whatever their achievements' (Burn and Finnigan, 2003: 129). There are, therefore, implications for teaching practices which I will consider in the following chapter, but a fundamental given must be that the process of academic writing must not be viewed as a skill inherent to all students studying within higher education. Rather, there must be opportunities to talk about writing:

When students (and tutors) discuss their own writing journeys it validates the production of an academic document as more than a trawl through a thesaurus in order to pass as academic, and avoids the danger of mistaking dense words for thought. It also serves to legitimise students' own language and invites critical reflection from a variety of perspectives (Burn and Finnegan, 2003: 131).

As well as legitimising students' own language, the shared process of discussing writing journeys for the Foundation Degree student would also serve to legitimise the different forms of knowledge that a work-based, adult learner may bring to their studies. This would include professional knowledge (Eraut, 1994) as well as the personal knowledge developed and shaped through experience, explored earlier in this chapter. In this way, students such as Mel, Sam and Heather would have the potential to develop an academic language that was both authentic to them and which was comfortably situated within the academy.

Mel, Sam and Heather were soon made aware that there were certain expectations regarding academic writing in particular. They had not been well prepared for

this by course tutors, who had perhaps been guilty of making assumptions regarding student familiarity with higher education practices, thus perpetuating the notion of an academic 'club' bounded by specialised discourse. However, what the students did bring to the course was their professional workplace experience and a wealth of knowledge and understanding related to their role. The Foundation Degree makes explicit use of such experience in order to contextualise learning, and so work-based learning is considered next.

8.6 Understanding work-based learning

The discussion in Chapter Two revealed a variety of different interpretations of the term 'work-based learning' when applied within the higher education sector. Boud et al. (2001) view work-based learning as a collaborative venture between the higher education institution and workplace, with the emphasis upon creating opportunities for learning within the workplace. Therefore, this implies learning that is planned and structured, as opposed to informal workplace learning (Lohman, 2000; Guile and Young, 2001; and Billett, 2002a, 2002b). The idea of a planned and structured work-based learning experience is consonant with the key principles of Foundation Degree delivery, where collaboration and partnership between employer and higher education institution are an intrinsic part of curriculum design (QAA, 2004). Therefore, it is the notion of learning through work (Gray, 2001; Dirkx et al., 2002) that seems to be the most appropriate model for work-based learning within a Foundation Degree.

This section uses the stories of Mel, Sam and Heather to further elucidate the practical operation of theoretical ideas, models and frameworks in relation to work-based learning. Rather than repeating the discussion in Chapters Two and Three, which surveyed the field in terms of work-based learning theory and pedagogical methodologies, the aim for this section is to look more closely at particular aspects of work-based learning, as revealed through the case study stories. The ideas of situated learning and communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) are used as a starting point, as these were ideas that Mel, Sam and Heather seemed to have an affinity with when they discussed learning experiences within the workplace.

As outlined in Chapter Three within the context of learning as social practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the idea of situated learning specifically within the theory of participation in communities of practice – an anthropological view of workplace learning as part of social activity. Central to their work was the notion of situated learning as a gradual and growing engagement, beginning with peripheral engagement and developing along a continuum to becoming a full participant in a community of practice – the focus being on the community rather than on the individual. Mel described her place within what can be called a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) in an interview during part one of the data collection where she outlined her work roles:

I'm in key stage one and there are five classes of mixed Year 1s and Year 2s so I get an opportunity to work with each of them one afternoon, each class and that's really nice. And then in a morning I'm working more with one literacy group and one numeracy group and then doing things like

ELS¹⁴ or small group reading, more sort of intervention and support programmes so that's a bit more you know kind of working in more detail with smaller targets and a bit more clearly defined I suppose. So I do get a breadth of experience in that way. Yes it, I mean it's always fascinating and working during the week with five different teachers – their styles of teaching are quite different (I-Mel-1/work-role).

In outlining her work roles, she discloses that during an average week she works with five different teachers across different classes within key stage one and with a mixture of groups and whole-class activities. Mel recognises that, because of this, she is exposed to different teaching styles and enjoys a wide range of experience. This highlights the breadth of opportunities that have been afforded her both in terms of access to a range of curriculum content and regarding working relationships. Lave and Wenger see learning not as something undertaken individually and in isolation, nor simply as following directed practices in the workplace, but as participation in the social world. It seems that Mel is being given the opportunity by her employers to engage in different social learning activities through her differing roles within the workplace and this could be significant for her learning in terms of the contextual opportunities available to her.

However, the notion that Mel was fully engaged in the pure model of situated learning as first espoused by Lave and Wenger (1991) – in other words, a gradual and growing engagement, beginning with peripheral engagement and developing along a continuum to becoming a full participant in a community of practice – demands closer scrutiny. For example, it should be remembered that Mel already

¹⁴ Extra Literacy Support

enjoyed legitimate participation as a Teaching Assistant, employed within the community of practice, and was seeking to legitimise this participation through reflection upon practice and engagement with higher-level academic study alongside further interactions with pupils and colleagues within the workplace. Therefore, perhaps for Foundation Degree study, Lave and Wenger's model of smooth progression needs further adaption, in order to take account of the fact that many Foundation Degree students may not be in the role of 'novice', but may bring considerable experience, specific to their role, to the workplace. Indeed, Dirkx et al. (2002) challenge the notion of workplace learning as a linear progression, or 'a one-way path from ignorance to knowledge' (2002: 7), and instead focus on the learning potential of interactions between people, with the implication that these may be untidy and haphazard, rather than progressive and linear. This notion is mirrored in Mel's description of the need to be flexible in her working relationships. She works with five different teachers whose teaching styles are each different and therefore she needs to accommodate these differences in her daily work in classes: *there are subtle differences in how I work in different classrooms depending on what they want and how they like things done (I-Mel-1/work-role)*. Mel does not seem to be working along a steady continuum from peripheral to full participation, rather she recognises the different approaches she takes to her practice depending on with whom she is working.

Sam does not work with as many different teachers as Mel, but her accounts describe very positive attitudes from teaching colleagues at school towards her

studies, including towards the work-based elements. She describes a willingness from the majority of staff to take an interest in what she was doing, often providing specific practical help in relation to work-based tasks in particular (*I-Sam-1/work-sup*). Sam seems firmly situated within Lave and Wenger's 'community of practice' (1991) and benefits from a planned partnership with her mentor, whom she describes as *accommodating* (*I-Sam-3/work-ment*) and who provides opportunities for Sam to steadily progress from peripheral to full participation in terms of the range of classroom activities she is involved in. Sam is clearly very positive about working with her mentor and sees the flexibility of the relationship as important. She feels included, a notion emphasised as crucial to the development of full participation in the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) and says that she can *fit everything in* (*I-Sam-3/work-ment*) in relation to the specific activities she would have been directed to complete within the workplace by the University College. Engagement with such activities would give the opportunity for an enriched working and learning experience, as some activities would have taken Sam beyond her usual work remit. In this respect, Sam's involvement in legitimate peripheral participation appears to be an empowering experience, in contrast to a disempowering position that may arise from restricted participation:

As a place in which one moves towards more-intensive participation, peripherality is an empowering position. As a place in which one is kept from participating more fully – often legitimately, from a broader perspective of society at large – it is a disempowering position (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 36).

Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) acknowledge that role models and teachers can be important in supporting the legitimate peripheral participation of newcomers to the community of practice, but they are clear that it is the role model's membership of the community that enables them to fulfil such a role. Eraut (1994) also identifies, within the context of professional learning, the importance of people as 'sources or interpreters of public knowledge, purveyors of vicarious experience, or supporters of learning from any available and appropriate source' (Eraut, 1994: 13). This seems to parallel the mentoring role within the Foundation Degree, where it is common practice for a colleague within the workplace to 'mentor' a student and provide a link between the employer and the institution. This aspect has been positively reported by Brennan (2004), and is accepted as not only an important principle of Foundation Degree delivery (Herde and Rohr, 2005), but also as one way in which the employer can demonstrate active engagement with the Foundation Degree (Connor, 2005; Duckworth, 2006; Green, 2006).

Mel saw that the role of mentor was important, in order to facilitate access within the workplace to experiences that may enhance learning, but also to show interest in the course. This level of employer engagement was important to Mel, and her comments regarding her mentor underlined this. At the start of the course, Mel described *a really excellent working relationship (I-Mel-1/work-ment)* with her mentor. Crucially, the mentor understood that Mel had specific work-based tasks to undertake in the school setting and the mentor ensured that Mel had the time to

carry these out. In making this possible for Mel, the mentor was enabling fuller access to the full range of learning opportunities for Mel, which in turn enabled further participation in the community of practice. Mel was clear that if a student was not well supported in school, then the completion of work-based tasks would prove to be very difficult. If this were the case, then participation would become a restricted and disempowering experience.

Towards the end of the course, Mel was able to reflect further on the mentor's role and how important it was to have practical support within the workplace for completing tasks:

I think you do need to have a very good relationship with either your mentor or if your mentor isn't the teacher that you work with for the best part of the time then whoever it is you're working with. If you don't have those good relationships then I can imagine that it would be sometimes impossible and you know at best really difficult to negotiate the time etc [...] my mentor is always very interested, mostly because it's her children that I take. But she's also interested in the course in general and we talk quite a lot about what I'm doing and she's very expert at linking it to what's going on in school (I-Mel-3/work-ment).

For Mel the mentoring role seemed to be a dual one. Not only was Mel being given access to the community of practice and supported in her participation, but she was also being given practical support for the completion of work-based tasks, set by the University College. In addition, although Lave and Wenger recognise the threats that newcomers may pose to established workers: 'Each threatens the fulfilment of the other's destiny, just as it is essential to it' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 116), there is no sense that the mentor feels threatened by the fact that Mel is engaged with the course. Rather Mel's mentor is 'interested' in the

course and this interest enables her to facilitate the completion of workplace tasks, as enshrined in the Foundation Degree benchmark (QAA, 2004) and espoused by commentators such as Smith and Betts (2000), Challis (2005b) and Connor (2005).

Furthermore, the opportunities presented by the Foundation Degree to reflect upon and think about practice led Mel to question aspects of practice observed within her own workplace setting. For example: *some of the marking I'd seen [...] I couldn't work out who it was for, it certainly wasn't for the children because [...] they couldn't understand necessarily what was being said. So we talked quite a bit about that [...] how to make it effective (I-Mel-3/work-c/imp).*

Here, Mel was able to contribute to constructive discussion with the teacher and this could be construed as evidence of membership in a community of practice as 'a matter of mutual engagement' (Wenger, 1998: 73). In this respect, the community of practice facilitated joint enterprise and a shared repertoire both for novice and for more experienced worker. In addition, Mel exercised agency in recognising an opportunity for further discussion and learning. Fuller discusses the notion of individual agency as an important factor for successful workplace learning:

[the individual is seen] as an active agent who can elect to engage in learning opportunities, who can construct meaning from them and whose development will be shaped and will help shape the environment in which he or she is participating (Fuller, 2003: 11).

This is a more active and proactive model of participation than that originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and seems more appropriate to the Foundation Degree model, where the student is bringing knowledge into the workplace. The workplace then serves to enable the student to make sense of the knowledge by providing context and ‘real life’ scenarios within which to apply it.

In contrast to Mel and Sam, Heather seemed to find herself in a disempowering position in relation to legitimate peripheral participation – particularly in terms of how the work-based tasks may have afforded structured opportunities to extend her workplace experience. In her first interview, Heather described her work-based colleagues as not actually realising what she was doing (*I-Hea-1/work-rel*), in terms of the course. In addition the situation was exacerbated by the lower levels of effectiveness in mentoring practice perceived by Heather in relation to her own workplace. Indeed, she was quite aware, in conversation with fellow students on the course, that the levels of mentoring support she received were poor (*I-Hea-1/work-ment*). Therefore, for Heather, Lave and Wenger’s model of experienced worker supporting novice did not seem to be a reality. However, their model does not take account of the capacity of an individual to construct new knowledge, ‘by making connections between the forms of participation in which they are engaged’ (Fuller, 2003: 2). Fuller argues that a third party (or in Heather’s case, a mentor) is not necessarily a crucial factor in enabling the individual to construct new knowledge from their engagement in contrasting settings such as the workplace and the higher education institution. Rather such

constructions and connections can be made by the individual and Heather does progress successfully through the course by engaging in making these connections, as discussed earlier.

The lack of understanding within the workplace that Heather described was not unique within the field of Foundation Degree development and delivery. For example, Green (2006), Hulbert (2007), and Powell and Strickland (2007) all report not only a lack of awareness of Foundation Degrees amongst employers, but also general misunderstanding from employers engaged with Foundation Degrees as to exactly what their role should entail and the levels of engagement expected of them. Therefore, Heather's experiences of the lack of employer engagement underline the important role of the employer in not only recognising and supporting the work-based studies undertaken by Foundation Degree students, but also in affording unrestricted participation within the community of practice as befits the job role. In addition, this emphasises the crucial importance of strong partnership between higher education institution and workplace, where roles and responsibilities are understood clearly, and in addition the importance of good quality relationships, as opposed to the less effective (but seemingly common) arrangements described by Brennan and Gosling (2004), Duckworth (2006), Green (2006) and Hulbert (2007).

Other sources of support were important to the case study students too. For example, in the context of Mel's return to year two of the course, she is clear that

the support of her peer group is vital. She needs the reassurance of knowing that others have similar issues to deal with, and actively engages with the group in order to seek support. The implication is that the engagement is mutual – she has found out that others have similar concerns so there must have been discursive interaction within and across the group. For Heather, the peer group became a central part of her support system, saying that *we've fed off each other (I-Hea-llacad-peers)*. It could be construed that a parallel community of practice amongst this student cohort exists alongside each of the student's workplaces. This is consonant with Lave and Wenger who describe a community of practice as 'a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 98). Thus, the student cohort to which Mel, Sam and Heather belong form a relational community of practice, sharing core activities related to their course of study but also each overlapping with an individual community of practice bespoke to each student within their own workplace.

Wenger (1998) updated the original work started with colleague Lave, and articulates three characteristics of practice 'as the source of coherence of a community' (Wenger, 1998: 73), namely mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. Wenger is clear about what a community of practice is not. It is not merely a group or organisational membership, nor is it a 'network of interpersonal relations through which information flows' (Wenger, 1998: 74). Perhaps the student body does just constitute a network, but there does seem to be

evidence from Heather and Mel in particular that it is more than this, and that such a community does play an important part within the Foundation Degree model. In particular, as well as being clear that the support of the peer group was important, Heather also recognised that the conventional practices of the academy had to be taken on board in order to be successful. This mirrors Wenger's description of 'the repertoire of a community of practice' that includes:

routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice (Wenger, 1998: 83).

This has implications for course delivery and tutor support of the community of practice, which will be explored further in the next chapter.

8.7 Chapter summary

The case study accounts have been used to explore the usefulness and relevance of particular theories and conceptual models related to aspects of learning through a Foundation Degree. Some of the evidence cited has illustrated ways in which particular theories and models are helpful and resonate with the students' learning experience, whilst in some cases I have begun to show that such theories and models fall short in terms of being adequately representative of the student experience.

I started by considering the factors that motivated the students' engagement with Foundation Degree study, using the lenses of Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs'

motivational framework (1970) and Barnett's notion of 'a will to learn' (2007) through which to view the case study students' experiences. Maslow's framework and Barnett's philosophical approach go some way to illuminating why the students persisted in their studies, but I also drew out the tensions that ensued for the students as they struggled with conflicting responsibilities within the home and in their studies. These tensions potentially undermined their motivation to succeed, even creating a state of 'double anxiety' for the student.

This state of double anxiety seems to go beyond the anxiety that Barnett accepts as quite usual for students engaged in higher education study and is exacerbated further by constant self-doubt in relation to ability on the part of the students and by conflict in respect of their roles as student, parent and employee. Thus, these additional factors (self-theories, identity and role conflict) have the potential to impact upon student motivation, meaning that Maslow's and Barnett's work does not explain enough for me in terms of providing a comprehensive theoretical framework and conceptual model for understanding motivational factors for engaging with the Foundation Degree.

I then used the accounts to tease out some evidence in order to understand more fully how Mel, Sam and Heather learn, relating this to the learning theories and models discussed in Chapter Three. The accounts provided evidence about how the students used different forms of knowledge, how experience was important to them as work-based learners, and the role of reflection in ensuring the articulation

of a link between experience and theory. However, despite the evidence that did point to effective learning taking place, the students faced huge barriers as they tried to make sense of the academy, considering in particular the central place of academic writing to success at University. In this context, the experiences of Mel, Sam and Heather did seem to equate with the writings of Street (1984), Lea and Street (2000) and Hoadley-Maidment (2000) and with the experiences of students recorded by West (1996) and Bowl (2003).

However, despite bringing little awareness of the academic conventions related to higher education, what the students did bring to the course was their professional workplace experience and a wealth of knowledge and understanding related to their role. That led me to consider how the students' accounts contributed to our understanding of work-based learning and their differing experiences of workplace support were key here. For example, Mel's and Sam's participation within their community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) seemed to be an empowering experience because of the support they received, whilst the lack of support that Heather experienced led to her being placed in a disempowering position. Such contrasting experiences underline the limited nature of Lave and Wenger's theoretical frameworks related to communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation.

Therefore, this chapter has tried to extract elements of established theories and models that have appeared to be useful in understanding what it is like to learn

through a Foundation Degree. In the next chapter, I build upon these findings and present a new conceptual model for learning and teaching on Foundation Degrees that has practical application in relation to Foundation Degree design and delivery.

Chapter Nine

A new conceptual model

9.1 Introduction

This research has attempted to use the accounts of three mature students to understand the realities of what it is to learn through a Foundation Degree. A case study approach has been used in order to develop accounts of learning that have identified specific themes pertinent to the students' learning experience for the duration of their studies. The potential threads of inquiry were outlined in Chapter Three, but it was not until the accounts were presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven that the research started to reveal the essential issues that were part of the learning journey for Mel, Sam and Heather. Chapter Eight used the students' accounts to 'test' the relevance of key theoretical ideas and concepts in relation to the identified issues.

This chapter suggests a new conceptual model specific to learning through a Foundation Degree. It has been developed in response to the research findings which have given some insight into what it has been like for Mel, Sam and Heather to learn through a Foundation Degree and, although the findings are specific to their experiences, the model seeks to show generic factors that could be applied to learning through any Foundation Degree. The chapter then continues to analyse practice in the light of the accounts in order to make

suggestions regarding learning and teaching within the Foundation Degree format, in keeping with the model proposed.

The chapter starts by presenting the new conceptual model and then continues by investigating potential improvements to practice, using the six factors identified in the model to structure the discussion. Within each factor, relevant aspects of the student life cycle (HEFCE, 2001) are referred to in order to capture the full range of activity relating to preparation for, and engagement with, higher education: aspiration raising; pre-entry activities; admission; the first semester; moving through the course and employment. Throughout, the students' accounts provide an evidence base upon which to evaluate current practice and then make suggestions for new practices in relation to Foundation Degree delivery.

9.2 A new conceptual model

The model is made up of six factors:

1. The learner's self-theories and motivation
2. Tutor beliefs regarding ability
3. The nature and level of employer engagement
4. The learner's experience in the workplace
5. The accessibility of 'the academy'
6. The tutor's role

The six factors are derived from the threads of inquiry that were first identified in Chapter Three and developed further in Chapter Eight in the light of the student accounts. Figure 9.1, ‘Tracking the threads of inquiry (part b)’, shows how the factors have developed through the thesis:

| Chapter Three | Chapter Eight | Chapter Nine: conceptual model factors |
|--|---|--|
| 3.2 Forms of knowledge | 8.4 Understanding personal learning | 9.3.6 The tutor’s role |
| 3.3.1 Being a student: adult learners | | |
| 3.3.2 Being a student: self-theories and identity | 8.3 Self-theories and identity; 8.5 Making sense of the academy | 9.3.1 The learner’s self-theories and motivation 9.3.2 Tutor beliefs regarding ability 9.3.5 The accessibility of the academy |
| 3.3.3 Being a student: will and motivation | 8.2 Motivating factors and conflicting responsibilities | |
| 3.4.1 Learning in the workplace: learning as social practice | 8.6 Understanding work-based learning; 8.4 Understanding personal learning | 9.3.3 The nature and level of employer engagement 9.3.4 The learner’s experience in the workplace |
| 3.4.2 Learning in the workplace: experiential learning | | |

Figure 9.1: Tracking the threads of inquiry (part b)

Figure 9.1 shows how the threads initially identified in Chapter Three align to areas of inquiry pursued in Chapter Eight and then to the model I am proposing here. Of note is the explicit appearance for the first time of the tutor’s role, the sixth factor identified in the model. This factor does not represent the identification of a single influential tutor, rather it is used to consider the role of Foundation Degree tutors generally. Earlier in the thesis, I chose not to explore

the role of the tutor in order to retain a clear focus upon student learning, rather than exploring the impact that tutors may have upon the student learning experience. In fact, nowhere in the accounts of Chapters Five, Six and Seven do the case-study students refer explicitly to the role of the tutor, such was the focus upon their own particular learning experiences (plus the added factor of me being their tutor, so the students would have been careful to avoid discussion in this area). In this chapter, the tutor's role is scrutinised in terms of how she/he may facilitate learning for the Foundation Degree student and, to some extent, I use my own experience as a Foundation Degree tutor to contextualise this scrutiny. However, consideration of the tutor's role in terms of student learning has been implicit throughout, and therefore figure 9.1 shows how the tutor's role links to previous investigations within the thesis around understanding student learning and forms of knowledge.

Similarly, factor three, 'The nature and level of employer engagement' does not match exactly to previous threads of inquiry, although 'Employer involvement' was discussed in Chapter Two. Here, employer involvement was identified as a key feature of the Foundation Degree (QAA, 2004) and the engagement of employers in the design and delivery of Foundation Degrees was highlighted as problematic across the higher education sector. The student accounts identified the level of employer engagement with the Foundation Degree as an influential factor on the quality of learning they experienced, given that the Foundation Degree is a work-based course. Therefore, the nature and level of employer

engagement is included as one of the six factors, with a thread of inquiry traceable from the concerns highlighted in Chapter Two regarding poor levels of employer engagement across the higher education sector with Foundation Degrees, and through Chapters Three and Eight in relation to work-based learning theory.

With the learner set firmly at the centre of the learning process, my suggestion is that each of the six factors, identified above, are crucial for successful learning through a Foundation Degree, as all impact upon the learner experience. Some of the factors could be applied to any higher education course of study, but some are specific to the Foundation Degree. For example, the Foundation Degree benchmark statement (QAA, 2004) identifies explicitly the central role that work-based experience and employer engagement have within Foundation Degree programmes, making those two elements specifically relevant for Foundation Degree learners. However, I also suggest that each of the factors could be set upon a continuum that polarises learning inhibitors and learning enablers, thus:



Figure 9.2: The learning inhibitors/enablers continuum

What the learner experiences depends upon where each factor is situated upon its own particular continuum, but also upon the influence of dispositions within the learner and objective features that may go beyond the immediate learning

environment. Each of the six factors impacts their learning, but the learner can also potentially influence each of the factors too – ideally the relationship should be two-way between learner and factor. Therefore, figure 9.3 represents the complete model, with the learner at the centre and a reciprocal relationship between the learner and each of the identified factors. In addition, I have suggested for each factor a continuum descriptor related to learning inhibitors and learning enablers. It is to a fuller consideration of each factor that I now turn, using examples from the students' accounts to illustrate key points, and referring to aspects of the student life cycle in order to contextualise the application of the conceptual model to practice.

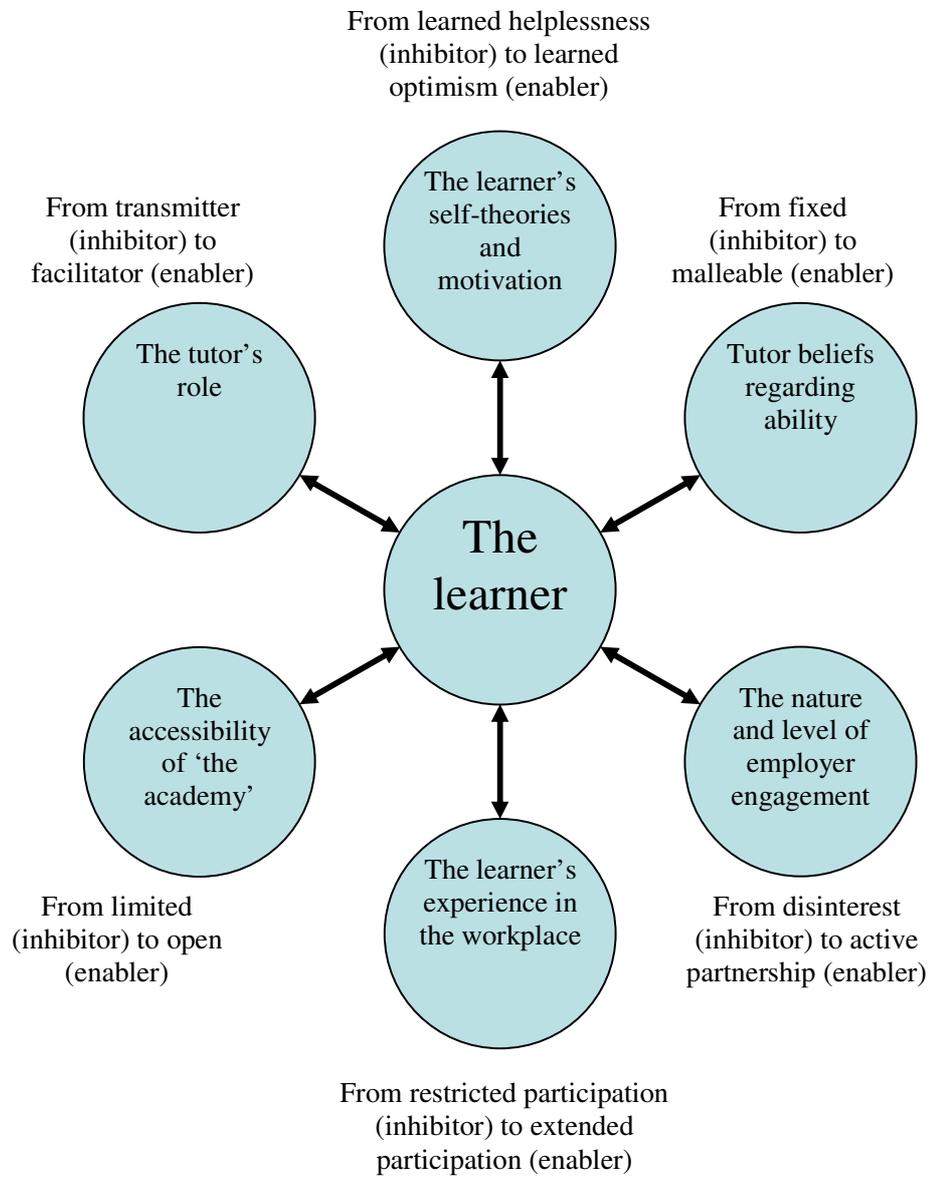


Figure 9.3: Learning through a Foundation Degree

9.3 Learning enablers and learning inhibitors

9.3.1 The learner's self-theories and motivation

A significant theme throughout this research has been the case study students' self-concepts and how they view themselves as higher education students. Identified as a thread of inquiry in Chapter Three, the discussion highlighted how non-traditional students have expectations of higher education study shaped not only by their views of self (Dweck, 2000; Reay, 2003) but also by a range of social, cultural and economic backgrounds (Bowl, 2003; Hockings et al., 2007). Dweck's (2000) work around self-theories underlines the advantage that a student has if their self-belief is founded upon a malleable form of ability – a 'can do' attitude that perseveres in terms of seeking self-improvement; whilst Bowl (2003) describes the alienation felt by many mature students from non-traditional backgrounds when they enter the 'unknown world' (Bowl, 2003: 67) of higher education. It is these challenges of feeling intellectually and socially marginalised, exacerbated by the suggestion that students operate in 'an age of uncertainty' (Barnett, 2007) that underlines the need for high levels of student motivation, resilience and self-belief in order to complete a course of higher education. Therefore, the learner's self-theories and motivation have emerged as a factor within the conceptual model, operating along a continuum of 'learned helplessness' (inhibitor) to 'learned optimism' (enabler).

The case study accounts gave an insight into the struggles that Mel, Sam and Heather faced in relation to their own self-theories and motivational factors, and

how learning was both enabled and inhibited at different points of the student life cycle. Even at the point of considering applying to the University College, at the very start of the student life cycle, all three students experienced potential inhibitors to their learning journey in relation to self-theories and motivation. For example, Mel had experienced an aborted attempt to engage in higher education as a school leaver, when she had struggled to access support in order to manage her dyslexia. When she applied to do the Foundation Degree some 25 years later, she expressed concern about whether she would cope. This was because Mel's early experiences of having to cope with dyslexia had coloured her self-concept, placing her towards the point of 'learned helplessness' on the continuum.

However, Mel was motivated by a desire to do something for herself, and this is related to the top level of Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs (self-actualisation) in Chapter Eight. It could be construed that such a high level of motivation to succeed would neutralise the tendency towards learned helplessness developed through a poor concept of self. This would move Mel along the continuum towards learned optimism and there is some evidence of this in her account when she discusses her enthusiasm for and enjoyment of learning (*I-Mel-1/self-iden/st*) – an enthusiasm that seems to transcend the difficulties that Mel has in relation to learned helplessness.

Sam had not aspired to enter higher education, until a series of incidents (including illness and marriage breakdown) led her to reflect upon the direction

her life was taking. Even then, her journey towards enrolling on a degree course had taken a very cautious step-by-step approach. For Sam, even applying to university was a huge step to take (*J-Sam-1/acad-uni*) and the research revealed that Sam in particular struggled with the development of an academic identity and continually doubted her ability to succeed throughout the course. Sam's social and cultural background had engendered a particular view of the type of person who may succeed at university. She really believed that *only clever people get degrees [...] people who are in high powered jobs* (*I-Sam-1/self-iden/st*). Sam doubted her ability to succeed, and suggested that there was a limit to what she could achieve as, by implication, she did not view herself as 'clever'. On the continuum from learned helplessness to learned optimism, Sam was more aligned to the point where she was exhibiting learned helplessness (Dweck, 2000), and such a perception of herself was in danger of acting as a learning inhibitor. Sam had a poor view of her ability to succeed and therefore low aspirations in terms of studying within higher education.

Therefore, for the potential Foundation Degree student, involvement with an aspiration-raising activity pre-application could be critical in establishing a positive decision to apply. For example, contact with student 'ambassadors' – those who have completed or are currently involved in the Foundation Degree – can be a very powerful factor in raising the aspirations of prospective students who may not have considered applying. This was the case for Sam who had direct contact through her workplace with an ex-Foundation Degree in

Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants student, who had succeeded not only on the Foundation Degree at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, but had attained an Honours Degree and Qualified Teacher Status. In addition a 'taste' of higher education study, in the form of 'taster days' or residential summer schools could serve to allay fears, such as those expressed by Sam and could serve as a stepping stone towards applying for higher level study. Unfortunately, Sam did not have the opportunity to attend such an event, but such aspiration-raising activities are becoming more usual. For example, following a 'Taste of Teaching' event held at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln in May 2008 (which targeted teaching assistants), applications to the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln doubled from thirty-one in April 2008 to sixty-two applications by September 2008. Over forty teaching assistants attended the taster event and subsequently, during interview for the Foundation Degree, most said that they had applied because of the event they had attended, which included course-specific presentations by academic tutors and opportunities to meet with current and graduating Foundation Degree students. Activities such as these have the potential to raise aspirations amongst prospective Foundation Degree course applicants, enabling them to begin the student life cycle with an optimistic self-view in relation to academic capability and a more intrinsically embedded motivational framework, thus moving them along the continuum from learned helplessness to learned optimism.

In addition, the selection process for Foundation Degree students should be viewed as an aspiration-raising activity. For Sam, being accepted onto the course was a significant point for her in her journey through higher education. Until Sam actually received her letter informing her that she was successful in getting a place on the course, she was doubtful about whether she would be accepted. She had taken a personal risk in applying for the course, with no certainty in her own mind of success. In this way, Sam had demonstrated strength of character and had exercised personal will in order to translate her aspirations into action and thereby avoid the onset of 'learned helplessness' (Dweck, 2000) prevalent in those students who perceived a limited ability within themselves.

Heather did not appear to exhibit learned helplessness to the same extent as Mel and Sam in relation to self-theories and motivation at the time of application to the Foundation Degree. Social and economic circumstances as a school leaver had meant that a university education was not an option at that time, yet as a mature applicant she appeared comfortable in considering the Foundation Degree as a route through higher education. Indeed, Heather began the course with a high level of intrinsic motivation – she was looking for *a personal challenge (J-Hea-1/self-mot)*. She did not exhibit the same levels of apprehension that Mel and Sam felt towards academic study, although she admitted during her first year of study that understanding academic conventions for written work had been a particular challenge for her. In addition, other factors within the model did become learning inhibitors for Heather during her studies (such as her workplace

experience and the level of engagement in the course from her employer that are discussed later in this chapter), thus tipping the balance away from a positive start on the course.

Overall, for all three students it was remarkable that they even got to the stage of applying for and enrolling upon the Foundation Degree, because of the practical and psychological barriers that they faced. They possessed a certain amount of motivation and they were attracted by the accessibility of part-time attendance and the work-based elements of the course, but each of their accounts expressed deep feelings of anxiety, particularly prior to and within the early stages of the course, because they did not know what to expect. However, the fact that the course was accessible was an important factor in encouraging Mel, Sam and Heather to apply, thus turning aspiration to action. Indeed, commentators have identified the translation of aspiration into action, rather than motivation *per se*, as a key to higher education entry for mature students (Davies et al., 2002; Bowl, 2003). Once on the course, though, Mel, Sam and Heather needed support in retaining a level of self-belief that would see them through their studies, and therefore the tutor has a potentially crucial role in sustaining academic engagement from Foundation Degree learners. In this respect, I consider the inhibiting and enabling influences of the tutor's beliefs regarding ability.

9.3.2 Tutor beliefs regarding ability

In exploring the students' self-theories and the influence such theories may have on achievement, there is, by implication, a further thread of inquiry related to tutor beliefs regarding ability. Tutor beliefs have not been explored within the thesis so far, in order to retain a clear focus upon the student learning experience, but now appear within the new conceptual model for Foundation Degree delivery as a factor that could act as an inhibitor or enabler of student learning. Regarding self-theories in particular, Yorke and Knight (2004) identify key implications for the tutor role in relation to the beliefs they hold. Using Dweck's (2000) work and their own empirical data surveying staff and students in five English universities, Yorke and Knight suggest that in order to support student learning effectively, tutors should appreciate the significance of self-theories for student learning and should be able to infer whether students are inclined towards fixedness or malleability.

Where a tutor is situated along the 'fixed to malleable' continuum may dictate the nature and level of support they may offer to a student and therefore tutors' self-theories could have a significant effect upon the cultivation of positive student self-theories and upon student attainment. For example, a tutor situated towards the fixed end of the fixed-malleable continuum would be in danger of imposing a severe inhibitor upon student achievement – particularly if they reinforced a student's self-theory that tended towards a fixed view, as in Sam's case. Ideally, a tutor would hold a malleable view of ability and would seek to support the

student to move along the continuum if they themselves tended towards a fixed view, in order to avoid a tendency towards learned helplessness. However, regardless of where a tutor may position him or herself upon a continuum of self-theories from fixed to malleable, it is clear that ‘the interplay between the self-theories held by a teacher and a student may be particularly significant’ (Yorke and Knight, 2004: 29).

Of course, students do not just have contact with one tutor throughout their course and will have contact with different tutors at different times of the student life cycle. For example, the admissions tutor’s attitude towards potential Foundation Degree students is crucial. A tutor who holds a fixed view of ability may struggle to see the potential of a student such as Mel, Sam or Heather, as none of them could demonstrate much in the way of traditional qualifications or a track record in recent, sustained study. Such a tutor could even hold a negatively biased view towards such students even within the parameters of policies that clearly set out admissions criteria that outline the range of qualifications and experience required for course entry. Furthermore, Mel and Sam in particular expressed doubts about their ability to succeed prior to and at the start of the course, so for prospective Foundation Degree students with similar fears, contact with a tutor at interview who held a malleable view of ability could serve to translate aspiration into action by promoting a positive view of potential achievement.

Carney-Crompton and Tan have gone so far as to recommend the reconsideration of admissions criteria ‘in order to devise more appropriate indicators of academic success among non-traditional students, particularly women’ (Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002: 150). They argue that the non-traditional learner is often disadvantaged when measured using conventional entry qualifications which may have grades or marks attached to them. Instead, they suggest that consideration is given to ‘the role that age, intrinsic motivators, and child-rearing responsibilities play in the decision of non-traditional female students to return to school and in their strategies to survive and thrive’ (Carney-Crompton and Tan, 2002: 150-151). The admissions criteria for the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln goes some way to considering such factors. For example, the life and work experiences of a mature applicant would be considered alongside their academic profile when determining potential for success on the course. Indeed, the accounts related to the experiences of Mel, Heather and Sam provide some evidence that their maturity and motivational factors to engage with the course are factors in their overall success.

Once students have been admitted to a Foundation Degree, then tutor beliefs regarding ability continue to be a potential issue. Chapter Eight brought together evidence from each of the three case study students that showed insecurity and lack of confidence as learners on their part. I suggested that self-theories (Dweck, 2000) were instrumental in influencing how highly the students may achieve, and

also discussed the evidence that pointed to Mel, Sam and Heather constructing themselves as non-academic even before the course has started (Burn and Finnigan, 2003). Therefore, the attitudes of tutors and their core beliefs regarding ability in particular have the potential to either provide additional support for those students who may doubt their place within the academy, or could be psychologically damaging for their students (Hart et al., 2004; Yorke and Knight, 2004).

Yorke and Knight identify three implications of Dweck's work (and of their own empirical data surveying staff and students in five English universities), namely that teachers should:

1. appreciate the significance of self-theories for student learning;
2. be able to infer whether students are inclined towards fixedness or malleability;
3. possess strategies for encouraging 'fixed' students to move towards malleability.

(Yorke and Knight, 2004: 29-30)

Their study led to them matching teachers' and students' theories about intelligence in a fourfold typology, which is summarised in figure 9.4, overleaf.

| Teacher/student self-theories | Discussion |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Teacher malleable, student malleable | The teacher believes that feedback given to the student will serve to enhance the students' skills and will reinforce their self-theory. Feedback will support development, and will be received by the student as a valuable contribution to their learning. There is a danger that the student may become over-reliant on the teacher's formative feedback, and it would be important to reduce levels of formative support as a student progressed through a course. |
| Teacher malleable, student fixed | The teacher has to support the student in moving along the fixed-malleable continuum, by showing them that they may achieve more if they attended to the development of their own attributes. |
| Teacher fixed, student malleable | The teacher may erode a student's self-belief by giving feedback that suggests that the student is working at the 'right' level – particularly if the student lacks a strong academic background. |
| Teacher fixed, student fixed | No allowance is made by either party for the development of intelligence – leading to a state of paralysis in terms of the student's capacity to learn. |

Figure 9.4: Teacher/student self-theories

(adapted from Yorke and Knight, 2004: 30 – 33)

Ideally, therefore, teacher's beliefs about students should tend towards the malleable end of the spectrum, because only a malleable view would have the potential to encourage higher levels of achievement from the student. For example, if we consider the accounts presented by Sam in the context of figure 9.4, we see that she seems to project herself as a 'fixed' self-theorist, particularly in the light of her comments which are very grades-focussed: *I just seem to be a C sort of person. When I did the OU I tended to get that (I-Sam-1/acad-abil)*. For a tutor aware of self-theories, then, the challenge would have been to support Sam in moving towards a more malleable view of ability and this was the challenge

that I, (as a tutor who held a malleable view), faced. I did this by valuing the knowledge and experience that Sam brought to her studies and by supporting her in making links between sessions delivered at the University College and her workplace experience. In addition, I consistently and explicitly articulated my own belief of a malleable view of ability with all students on the course. These strategies and her own successes seemed to enable Sam to rebalance her views more towards a malleable perspective of her own ability. If this had not happened, the danger would be that Sam would continue to label herself at a particular graded level and struggle to progress beyond that.

What would not have been helpful to a student such as Sam would have been contact with a teacher who held fixed views of ability. For 'non-traditional' Foundation Degree students, being labelled as working 'at the right level for their ability' (with the implication that potential achievement was capped at a certain level) could potentially act as a learning inhibitor. For example, Sam constantly questioned whether she was 'clever enough' to study at higher education level and perhaps this was a perception wrongly reinforced by some of the tutors she encountered at the University College who held fixed views of ability, suggesting an important area for staff development.

Having considered two of the six factors identified within the conceptual model that focus very specifically upon the learner (his/her self-theories and motivation)

and upon tutor beliefs regarding ability, I now turn to inhibitors and enablers related to employer engagement and to the learner's workplace experience.

9.3.3 The nature and level of employer engagement

The area of employer engagement with Foundation Degrees has recurred as a problematic aspect of practice at various points during this thesis and therefore 'The nature and level of employer engagement' has been identified as a potential inhibitor or enabler to learners. However, I have also identified 'The learner's experience in the workplace' as a separate factor for consideration, so it is important to establish how the two differ. The key difference lies within the nature of the continuum from inhibitor to enabler. For 'The nature and level of employer engagement' I have identified the continuum descriptor as moving from disinterest to active partnership and here the focus is upon the employer's involvement with the course. For 'The learner's experience in the workplace' the descriptor moves from restricted participation to extended participation and the focus is upon the learner. Therefore, although there is some overlap in terms of the implications for Foundation Degree practice (for example, mentoring in particular), the foci for each factor are deliberately different – focussing upon the employer on the one hand and the learner on the other. Firstly, then, I consider 'The nature and level of employer engagement'.

In Chapter Two (Research Context), I presented evidence to suggest that, generally, engaging employers in the design and delivery of Foundation Degrees

had been less than successful (Foskett, 2003; Brennan and Gosling, 2004; Green, 2006; and Duckworth, 2006). This is despite the fact that Foundation Degree courses should be designed in accordance with the QAA (2004) benchmark that states explicitly that employers will be involved in the design and review of courses and, ideally, in course delivery, assessment and the monitoring of students. In addition, regardless of the requirements of the Quality Assurance Agency it makes good sense to involve employers in the Foundation Degree in order to ensure relevance in relation to the work-based elements.

It seems essential, then, that employers are engaged more fully before a student even applies for a Foundation Degree, at the very beginning of the student life cycle. Indeed Hulbert (2007) argues that employer engagement 'does need to be better understood and articulated as a longitudinal continuum of partnership' (Hulbert, 2007: 13), and perhaps the continuum needs to span from before a student makes an application for a Foundation Degree course, in the hope that engagement would then continue throughout the course. This would demand more effort on the part of the higher education institution, at least initially, to market the Foundation Degree to potential work-based partners. Leitch (b) (2006) advocates that higher education providers should be more responsive to what learners and employers want, and is also clear that the Foundation Degree provides one resource that should be promoted in order to fill the gap in adult skills. Yet there still appears to be misunderstanding from some employers as to what the Foundation Degree actually is and even suspicion in some sectors as to

whether the qualification will actually meet the needs of the learner and the employer (Brennan, 2004; Green, 2006). Within the school-sector, where the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln is situated, head teachers still perceive the qualification as being comparable to a National Vocational Qualification, and some misconstrue the title to imply that the course focuses exclusively upon the Foundation Stage of Early Years education. Perhaps one way forward would be for employers to be more actively involved in partnership with the student from earlier on in the process – for example by attending course open days together, and even having a joint input at interview stage. This may go some way to moving the nature and level of employer engagement from disinterest to active partnership and would provide a platform for the employer’s ongoing involvement in supporting the learner’s experience in the workplace, discussed further later in this chapter.

The Foundation Degree Forward website¹⁵ contains specific information for employers and also includes some case study material relating to how employers have been involved in design and delivery. However, because the very nature of a Foundation Degree programme means that it is tailored to a specific sector, it is difficult to apply some of the website material across sectors (for example, currently, there is no case study material related to Foundation Degrees for Teaching Assistants). Therefore, I would suggest that the higher education

¹⁵ <http://www.fdf.ac.uk>

institution should take the lead in engaging more proactively with employers, in order to foster an active partnership with employers and the best possible work-based learning experience for students. This may include the development of a general programme of support for employers, with roles and responsibilities clearly outlined; the use of specific staff to liaise with the workplace, and specific training related to the mentoring role in particular (mentoring is discussed further, below). Such initiatives may be able to pre-empt the difficulties of engaging with employers once the course has started – as shown through Heather’s accounts in particular. In addition, the use of contracts, drawn up between higher education institution, employer and student may serve to formalise the partnership arrangement more clearly in terms of setting out roles and responsibilities for all parties. This happens to some extent currently at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln, but the agreements are limited to the head teacher acknowledging that work-based learning is involved and agreeing to very general support of the student (appendix 9.1). Rather, such an agreement could set out more specifically the key roles and responsibilities of student, workplace and higher education institution.

9.3.4 The learner’s experience in the workplace

As well as a continuum related to levels of employer engagement, discussed above, I have also uncovered differences between the case study students in terms of their workplace experience, and the opportunities given to them to extend their experience.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) work around situated learning and communities of practice was explored in Chapters Three and Eight, and in particular the notion of legitimate peripheral participation was considered. I discussed the appropriateness of Lave and Wenger's model which saw the novice in the workplace developing to becoming a 'fully-fledged' worker and suggested that for some work-based Foundation Degree students the model was not wholly appropriate, as they already had considerable workplace experience. However, what did seem to be important to the students' learning was the extent to which they were allowed to extend their workplace experience. Therefore, in the new conceptual model the learner's experience in the workplace is considered along a continuum from restricted participation to extended participation, with participation referring not only to the range of experiences available in the workplace, but also to the quality of relationships between workplace colleagues.

For example, Mel outlined that during an average week she worked with five different teachers across different classes within key stage one and with a mixture of groups and whole-class activities. In so doing, she was exposed to the routines and teaching practices of a range of colleagues within the school (*I-Mel-1/work-role*). Mel was being given the opportunity by her employers to engage in different social learning activities through her differing roles within the workplace, thus placing her experience along the continuum towards 'extended participation' and giving a variety of rich work-based contexts within which to situate her learning. Sam also enjoyed flexibility in the workplace in terms of the

activities she could be engaged in, due to the flexible attitude of her mentor who was happy to accommodate Sam when completing work-based activities set by the University College (*I-Sam-3/work-ment*). Such activities took her beyond her usual work remit and gave the potential for an enriched working and learning experience – again taking Sam’s experience towards the ‘extended’ end of the workplace experience continuum.

However, in contrast to Mel and Sam, Heather seemed to experience restricted participation within the workplace. This was due to lack of interest from colleagues (*I-Hea-1/work-rel*), poor mentoring provision (*I-Hea-1/work-ment*) and ‘political manoeuvring’ between some staff members upon the arrival of a new head teacher (*I-Hea-2/work-rel*) which led to workplace conflict and the marginalisation of the practical support available to Heather as a work-based learner. For Heather, the relationships between colleagues (teachers, teaching assistants, head teacher) became a sociocultural factor that restricted Heather’s participation in workplace practices and impacted upon the learning potential of the workplace.

Mentoring is briefly suggested by the Foundation Degree benchmark (QAA, 2004) as one vehicle for supporting students in the workplace, but is not promoted within government rhetoric as an essential manifestation of either employer involvement or a commitment to ensuring a quality experience for the learner in the workplace. However, the guidelines for the validation and quality assurance

of Foundation Degrees, available from Foundation Degree Forward (undated) do state that there should be systematic and clear arrangements in place for the management and supervision of workplace learning. In addition, Herde and Rohr paint an ideal picture of how mentoring within the workplace could be beneficial to all parties involved in Foundation Degree delivery:

Mentoring not only benefits the mentee (the student) but also the mentor and the company as a whole. The benefits are higher levels of competence, closer working relationships with the teaching institution, across section and departments and between different levels of the organisation, increased motivation and overall improved outcomes. In this way effective mentoring can raise achievement, self-confidence, personal and social skills for all involved (Herde and Rohr, 2005: 15).

This picture of mentoring practice goes beyond merely being a structure to demonstrate employer engagement. Instead, it aspires to transform workplace experience and performance as well as foster more effective relationships with the higher education institution, leading to extended participation for the work-based learner. Yet, the key area identified as an aspect where there seemed to be extremes in terms of successful practice for the three case study students was the practice of mentoring in the workplace. For example, Sam and Mel seemed to experience reasonable support in terms of workplace mentoring, but Heather's accounts revealed poor mentoring. She knew that other students on the course were getting more support than she was and she perceived this as a disadvantageous position to be in (*I-Hea-1/work-ment*).

More effective mentoring practice could have improved the work-based learning experience for Heather in particular, moving her along the continuum from

restricted participation to extended participation. Therefore, it could be suggested that higher education institutions have an obligation to ensure that clear policies are in place for ensuring that effective workplace learning takes place. In terms of workplace mentoring, Darwin (2000) outlines different views on what constitutes high quality mentoring, including the functionalist perspective (where knowledge is transferred from mentor to mentee), and the perspective which has at its core the notion of a more interdependent mentor-mentee relationship, which encourages co-learning and dialogue. Evidence from Mel, Sam and Heather demonstrate that the functionalist role is a vital one – particularly in enabling them to undertake work-based tasks set by the University College within specific curriculum areas. Such a role is also important in terms of ensuring that information is passed on swiftly between higher education institution, student and workplace – particularly as Green found that the exchange of information seemed to be a cause for concern with some partnerships, suggesting that course staff ‘need to be sure to target the right person’ (Green, 2006: 30). At the same time, Chapter Five did see Mel’s relationship with her mentor develop along a co-learning continuum when Mel found herself fully engaged in practice-changing dialogue with her mentor around a specific aspect of workplace practice.

I have shown through Mel’s and Sam’s accounts that a good quality workplace experience that affords the learner extended participation in workplace practices enriches the work-based learning context for the Foundation Degree student. The effects of the omission of such an experience for Heather were also outlined. A

positive experience is also dependent upon developing an active partnership between higher education institution and employer in order to move the factor of employer engagement to the enabling end of the continuum. Having considered the role of the employer and the workplace in supporting learning through a Foundation Degree, I turn now to the higher education institution and its accessibility for Foundation Degree students.

9.3.5 The accessibility of 'the academy'

In their accounts, Mel, Sam and Heather all revealed an uncertainty about what to expect of higher education and whether they were capable of succeeding within the unfamiliar environment of 'the academy'. Although partly linked to their self-theories regarding ability, already discussed above, these uncertainties were also connected to a lack of understanding of higher education systems and expectations. In Chapter Three I outlined key issues facing non-traditional students seeking to access higher education, identifying the unfamiliarity of academic practice (Street, 1984; Lea and Street, 2000; and Hoadley-Maidment, 2000) as a particular barrier. Furthermore, in Chapter Eight I explored the attempts of Mel, Sam and Heather to unravel the mysteries of the academy in order to make sense of what was expected of them as learners within higher education. Therefore, within the conceptual model, accessibility to the academy has been identified as a key factor and the continuum upon which the factor is placed is described as moving from limited to open accessibility.

In their accounts, Mel, Sam and Heather all demonstrate a state of anxious uncertainty, which Reay (2003) identifies as an inevitable disposition for non-traditional students and which Barnett (2007) suggests is a necessary part of being a student in higher education. In particular, the early parts of their accounts show an uncertainty with what to expect of higher education and whether they were capable of succeeding. Discussion in Chapter Eight showed how Heather, Mel and Sam struggled, at least initially during their higher education studies, to unravel the mysteries of the academy and to make sense of what was expected of them within what could be perceived as an elite system which ‘reinforces their identities as non-academic, whatever their achievements’ (Burn and Finnigan, 2003: 129). I have already explored the need for support pre-course in terms of raising aspirations, and in terms of demystifying elements of academic practice in order to improve accessibility to higher education for non-traditional students. Such support needs to continue throughout induction and into semester one and beyond, in order to mitigate the barriers to participation in higher education identified by Gorard et al. (2006) and to dispel the anxieties felt by higher education students from non-traditional backgrounds in particular (Bowl, 2003; Reay, 2003). This would then have the potential of moving the accessibility of the academy along the continuum from limited (a learning inhibitor) towards open (a learning enabler).

Gorard et al. identify the transition period to higher education as a crucial time for non-traditional students, describing it as learning to ‘play the game’ (2006: 41).

West (1996) and Bowl (2003) also cite students who identify feelings of exclusion through failing to understand the rules of academia, including the feeling of under preparation for coping with assessment methods within higher education. Similarly, academic and professional support staff at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln recognised that, for the potential Foundation Degree student, feelings of inadequacy and exclusion needed to be minimised as early as possible in the induction process. They responded to this by providing pre-course sessions for prospective Foundation Degree students (both teaching assistants and early childhood practitioners) which introduced potential students to sources of support for developing academic literacy, organisational and ICT skills (Barber, Richardson and Taylor, 2006).

In this example, academic tutors and learning support staff had found that just informing students of opportunities for support, (through presentations, online information and leaflets) was not effective. What was needed was a practical approach to showing how and where to access support for academic literacy, ICT and organisational skills, in order to give an additional insight into the practices of higher education. The sessions themselves also needed to be accessible and were therefore repeated during evening and Saturday morning sessions, to give work-based learners the opportunity to attend outside working hours. In addition, the sessions were delivered during the July prior to enrolment in September. This allowed time for prospective students to come to terms with what they were being told and shown, in order that they may be encouraged 'to start to develop new and

dynamic identities as learners within higher education' (Barber et al., 2006: 34). Perhaps if Mel, Sam and Heather had been able to attend such a session (they had enrolled before the session was available), they might not have experienced the high levels of anxiety, related to entering higher education, described at the start of their accounts.

For students such as Mel, Sam and Heather, entering higher education had far reaching implications. Their accounts outline the practical and emotional difficulties faced by mature learners who also have familial responsibilities. Such challenges are also identified by Carney-Crompton and Tan, who conclude that: 'these women do face a number of challenges and experience stressors that may differ from those experienced by more traditional-age students' (2002: 150). For example, the students had to balance their role as primary carer within the family, with the new demands put upon them as higher education students. Emotionally, the students had to come to terms with feelings of guilt when they could not fulfil their role within the family. Therefore, it is crucial that higher education practitioners understand the tensions faced by students such as Mel, Sam and Heather, as they can have a profoundly negative effect not only on entry to higher education, but also on continued participation.

Demonstrable understanding on the part of whole institutions and individual academic tutors of the 'juggling' (Davies et al., 2002: 4) that these students have to manage in relation to multiple roles and responsibilities would complement an

induction programme that also sought to make academic conventions and practice accessible. Understanding could be shown through practical support (for example childcare facilities and financial advice) but could also stretch to curriculum content and flexible modes of delivery, which will be discussed more fully later in this chapter. Crucially, higher education policies and practices must take account of the complex financial and caring responsibilities that many adult learners have in order that higher education institutions may ‘affirm their sense of identity as mature learners’ (Davies et al., 2002: 4).

Mel’s account, in particular, shows that the need for support does not stop at the end of induction, or even semester one. For Mel, preparing for entry into year two of the programme was an anxious time, as when she received the course handbook which would have outlined the second year of the course, Mel immediately identified *issues* that she would need to tackle (*I-Mel-2/self-anx*). Yet the handbook would have arrived with Mel during the July, prior to returning to the University College in September, leaving Mel to worry about the issues for a full two months. Perhaps the provision of specific support during the vacation prior to year two may have diffused some of the anxiety that Mel had to cope with. Mel even says that she craved support at the time, although she specifically refers to the support of her student peer group: *I didn’t have at that stage the kind of input of being back here and you know the support of everybody else* (*I-Mel-2/self-anx*). In addition, Mel required specific support for her dyslexia and therefore had a particular access need. At Bishop Grosseteste University College

Lincoln this required close liaison between academic tutors, student support and learning support departments in order to support Mel in overcoming her deficit view of dyslexia and in accessing the practical support to which she was entitled.

For Mel, Sam and Heather, accessibility to the academy was also aided by the support of the student peer group. When Mel started the second year of the Foundation Degree, she sought the reassurance of knowing that others in her group had similar issues to deal with (*I-Mel-2/acad-peers*). Heather was also clear that, for her, the peer group became a central part of her support system, using the analogy of *feeding* off each other in terms of sharing ideas and issues (*I-Hea-1/acad-peers*). Therefore, for the case study students peer support became a 'learning enabler' in helping them understand the conventions of the academy. This suggests a potential role for the higher education institution in supporting the student group beyond contact time with their tutors, in order to facilitate ongoing mutual support and facilitate enhanced accessibility of the academy through the student peer group. For example, the virtual learning environment (VLE) is one resource that could be used in this respect, to extend the higher education experience for students beyond the physical restraints of campus-based attendance at all stages of the student life cycle from induction through to graduation.

Ensuring that 'the academy' was accessible to Mel, Sam and Heather demanded openness from them regarding the difficulties they faced and understanding from the institution regarding what could be put in place to support them. This could

only be done if there were good relationships between academic staff, support staff and students and a clear understanding from tutors regarding their role in teaching non-traditional work-based students. Therefore, the tutor's role is considered as the final potentially inhibiting or enabling factor for learning through a Foundation Degree.

9.3.6 The tutor's role

The role of tutors was not identified as a thread of inquiry in Chapter Three in order that the research retained a strong focus upon students and learning, but has now been identified as a factor within the conceptual model along a continuum that moves from tutor as transmitter to tutor as facilitator. In seeking to understand how Mel, Sam and Heather learn, I have suggested that adult learners possess certain characteristics, in line with Knowles andragogy (1978, 1980, 1984) – namely, that they have a capability to learn independently; they use life experience in their learning; they desire to apply knowledge to solve problems and possess an internal motivation to learn. In addition I have used Mezirow's (1991, 1997) theory of transformative learning to explore further the question of how adults learn – through critical self-analysis and discursive reflection upon experience. I have also outlined the struggles that 'non-traditional' adult learners face in relation to their multiple and shifting identities and the impact that personal belief systems or self-theories can have upon the learner (West, 1996; Dweck, 2000; Bowl, 2003). It is within these contexts that the tutor's role is considered.

To facilitate transformative learning, tutors have a key role within the learning environment as a whole in enabling adult learners to engage in critical self-analysis and to take part effectively in discussion, as outlined by Kiely et al. who state that ‘finding space to engage in reflection and providing opportunities for group dialogue are essential to foster transformational learning’ (Kiely et al., 2004: 23). The emphasis for the tutor moves away from the transmission of knowledge, to supporting the learners in incorporating information into their own frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997) and facilitating the interactive exploration of the ideas and knowledge that students may bring with them (Hockings et al., 2007). In addition, in responding to the non-traditional student, tutors have to take account of the students’ lack of prior engagement with academic practices and unfamiliarity with academic language. In this respect, tutors find traditional, didactic teaching practices ineffective (Street, 1984) and need, instead, to value and draw upon what the students know. Barnett (2007: 8) suggests that ‘of the individual student with his or her own challenges, we gain very little sense’, therefore a real challenge for the tutor is to know the student – including their hopes, fears, prior experiences, motivations, personal challenges, wider commitments (such as multiple roles, highlighted throughout this thesis) and self-theories.

I have already suggested, above, that the role of the tutor in adult learning tends more to a model of facilitation than to the transmission of knowledge. Such a role is emphasised further in the context of learning in the workplace, and in particular

through the role that the tutor has in supporting student reflection upon workplace experience. Such a role demands of the tutor not only knowledge of the workplace in question and the practices that are carried out within the workplace, but also an appreciation of the multi-dimensional quality of workplace learning (Billett, 2002b) and a scholarly knowledge and understanding of theory relevant to the particular area of learning being undertaken. This is so that students can be supported in moving beyond the immediate context and show awareness of their learning in a new situation (Boud, 2001), a skill associated with study at higher education level (QAA, 2008). Fundamentally, though, the tutor must appreciate the nature of work-based learning and embrace the acceptance of different forms of knowledge and the credible contribution that they can make to a student's learning, as discussed earlier through the exploration of work by Gibbons et al. (1994) and Eraut (1994).

Therefore, the tutor as facilitator, rather than a transmitter of knowledge, is the final element within the framework depicted in figure 9.3. Gregory (2002) defines facilitation as a role that seeks to draw out from the learner already existing wisdom. Therefore this role also depends upon the tutor holding a view of knowledge that recognises the worth of different types of knowledge and the importance of helping the learner to move beyond the immediate context to transform and reinvent knowledge in different contexts (Fenwick, 2000; Boud, 2001). In the context of Foundation Degrees, the three types of knowledge identified by Eraut (1994) and discussed in Chapter Three – personal,

propositional and process – have the opportunity to be developed, but this is dependent upon the tutor’s dispositional attitude towards different types of knowledge and their skill in integrating strands of knowledge across subject-based and practical/professionally-based boundaries. In addition, the tutor is charged with recognising the links between experience and abstract ideas within the learning process (Kolb, 1984) and in supporting the student in developing a reflective approach to make sense of such links (Moon, 1999). Therefore, where the tutor’s role is placed along the continuum between acting as knowledge transmitter and learning facilitator could inhibit or enhance the students’ learning.

It should be clear, though, that the tutor’s role is a complex one. For example, in relation to the place of reflection in learning, Moon refers to the process as a ‘messy’ one ‘with stages re-cycling and interweaving as meaning is created and recreated’ (Moon, 1999: 35). The tutor has to help the student make sense of this in the context of what the student brings to their learning – including their identity and the ‘complexities of human experience’ (Fenwick, 2000: 244). Therefore, in order to achieve a tutoring role that acts as a learning enabler, the tutor must be prepared to nurture the student’s ‘will to learn’ (Barnett, 2007).

For Barnett, nurturing the student’s ‘will to learn’ not only necessitates commitment by the tutor over a sustained period of time to supporting the student’s learning journey, it also involves the tutor giving the student ‘space’ to learn in order that ‘students can become authentically themselves’ (Barnett, 2007:

141). However, Barnett also cautions that students may not venture into the space created for learning of his/her own accord, and therefore the tutor has a role in not only freeing up space for the student, but also in encouraging the student to venture into and explore the space. Furthermore, Barnett describes a 'spatial tension' between the 'singularity' of permitting a student 'to become what she wishes' and the 'universality' of knowing that the student will be judged by specific standards within the field. Similarly, Yorke and Knight (2004: 34) highlight the marginalisation of the 'personal dimension of student learning' because of the growing emphasis in higher education upon the attainment of measurable task outcomes and standards. Therefore, the tutor also has a role in managing the tensions inherent in nurturing a student's learning journey through enabling pedagogical spaces, and retaining an awareness of the standards embedded in the course of study.

In this respect the Foundation Degree format is well placed to cope with such a tension. For example, the work-based elements have the potential to be tailored to the interests of the student, and in this way pedagogical space can be created in which the student can engage in their own explorations. This was demonstrated by Mel, who described being able to *make connections* with her learning (*I-Mel-I/acad-con*) and who engaged in 'discovering the world in one's own way' (Barnett 2007: 43). However, the fact that the Foundation Degree is situated within a national higher education framework provides for the safeguarding of standards. However, further work could be done by tutors in relation to curricula

design in order to create the space needed for authentic learning to happen. For example, one way would be to incorporate approaches to learning such as problem-based learning (Savin-Baden, 2000; Baden, 2003; Baden and Major, 2004) and the active encouragement of undergraduate research projects, such as the Action Research module which exists currently within the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln (Bishop Grosseteste College, 2005).

Supporting students in coping with the space they are given for learning is also a key role for tutors. For example, the students' accounts identified experience and reflection as important mechanisms for learning and Chapter Eight suggested that the learner's experience was a key resource to the adult learner (Lindeman, 1926; Knowles, 1978; Mezirow, 1985; Fenwick, 2000). I suggest that a Foundation Degree course that attracts adult learners should aim to recognise and use the complex, extended and varied life stories, prior knowledge and skills that are presented by students. This is clearly a challenge for course design, which must balance the need for flexible recognition of what learners may bring through prior experience, with the requirements of quality assurance. However, there are also implications for the tutor in delivering such a course – in facilitating the correct balance and also drawing out a reflective approach from the student.

Course design for the Foundation Degree must also be based upon a clear notion of what knowledge forms are appropriate to work-based learning (different views

of knowledge were discussed in Chapter Three) and in terms of designing courses to promote effective learning it is worthwhile noting that ‘work-based learning programmes are meeting points of *different* forms of knowledge’ (Harris, 2006: 24). Harris notes that Foundation Degrees are an interesting case in that ‘they have to relate to the practicalities of occupations and to subject-based, formal knowledge’ (2006: 24). For the Foundation Degree, the bringing together of professional and practical knowledge with subject-based, academic knowledge creates a challenging context for effective learning, where the two strands are to be integrated without compromising either type of knowledge brought to the course by student, workplace or institution. Potentially this can involve ‘complex pedagogical strategies to ensure that forms of knowledge are mutually reinforcing’ (Harris, 2006: 24). This demands of the tutor a clear understanding of the wider discussion around forms of knowledge (Gibbons et al., 1994; Eraut, 1994) in order to develop a scholarly understanding of how forms of knowledge relate to work-based learning. For the Foundation Degree, therefore, the bringing together of personal professional and practical knowledge (Eraut, 1994) with subject-based, academic knowledge is a real challenge. Tutors must seek to integrate the strands without compromising either type of knowledge brought to the course by student, workplace or institution. In my view this is a fundamental principle that must be recognised and practiced by all those teaching on Foundation Degree programmes.

I have already suggested that, for the Foundation Degree student, knowledge creation occurs within the socially situated context of the workplace. The knowledge may be new to the student, or may have already been part of the student's ontological being but may not have been recognised by the student as such. For example, Mel referred in her accounts to *making connections (I-Mel-1/acad-con)* in her learning, whilst Heather referred to the *jigsaw pieces coming together (J-Hea-1/acad-con)* as she came to understand the theoretical rationale for much of her work-based practice. Therefore, the role of the Foundation Degree tutor is not to be a gatekeeper of knowledge, rather the role is to facilitate learning (and understanding) for the very work-experienced students, who bring valuable knowledge, experience and skills to the course.

Gregory suggests that 'Facilitation literally means 'easing'. Its art is in drawing out the wisdom already embedded and lying dormant in the psyche of the learner' (Gregory, 2002: 80). This applies well to the work-based learner who may have considerable knowledge related to their work setting, but who may not realise the extent of their learning capacity and the connections that could be made between different forms of knowledge – the practical, theoretical and personal. In addition, therefore, the tutor is charged with ensuring that learners' understanding is not trapped within their own work setting. In this respect, Fenwick (2000) asserts that the knowledge can be transformed and reinvented when applied in different situations. In addition, Boud (2001) is clear that in order to achieve at higher education level it is vital that learners are able to move beyond the

immediate context and use their knowledge in new situations. In order for this to happen, the teacher must facilitate critical reflective learning which is relevant for the student's particular workplace setting, but which also ensures that the student can apply knowledge and understanding in alternative situations, making the connections that Mel refers to in Chapter Five. The tutor must deliver a 'pedagogy for inspiration' (Barnett, 2007: 118), knowing that 'through inspiration, new being is formed, new will is taken on. The student moves herself to a new place. New connections are formed in her mind and her being' (Barnett, 2007: 118). Barnett discusses that the tutor can be directly or indirectly inspiring – directly through his/her personal 'qualities, dispositions or energies' (Barnett, 2007: 119) or indirectly through course design. In addition, Barnett suggests a role for the tutor in nurturing the student's 'will to learn' (especially as Barnett suggests that the will is not necessarily infallibly durable), which necessitates commitment by the tutor over a sustained period of time in supporting the student's journey from being to becoming.

9.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a new conceptual model to facilitate the scrutiny of learning and teaching practice within the Foundation Degree. The model has identified six factors which impact upon the learner experience and which, I argue, are crucial for successful learning through a Foundation Degree. By setting each factor upon a continuum which polarises learning enablers and learning inhibitors, the model can be used to map what the learner experiences

with the aim of understanding more fully the nature of learning through a Foundation Degree. In order to contextualise the factors, the student lifecycle (HEFCE, 2001) has been used as a lens through which to view practice in the light of Mel's, Sam's and Heather's accounts and to investigate potential changes to practice in order to improve the student learning experience.

In summary, I would suggest that the model shows 'Learning through a Foundation Degree' as a developmental process founded upon learning relationships – relationships between the learner and him/herself; the learner and their tutor(s); the learner and their employer; the learner and the working environment, and the learner and the academy. Within the model, the learner is placed at the centre and engages in reciprocal relationships between him/herself and each of the identified factors. Thus, effort is demanded of the learner, as much as from each of the factors that may impact upon their learning and ideally the relationship should be two-way between learner and factor. In addition, what the learner experiences depends upon where each factor is situated upon its own particular continuum. Therefore, with the model there is the facility to analyse the quality of the learner's experience across all six factors, to identify any factors that may be acting more as inhibitors rather than enablers and to suggest ways in which a learning inhibitor may be moved towards being a learning enabler.

Chapter Ten

Last words

10.1 Introduction

I finish this thesis by returning to the beginning, and the very first sentence which states that ‘This thesis seeks to tell a story about learning’. In the opening paragraphs, I explained that the study focuses on three students and their learning experiences within the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln. I stated that I wished to understand ‘how it is for them’ as they engaged with the course and how their experience could be improved. Therefore, throughout the thesis the focus has been upon the students and their particular learning journeys. Their accounts have provided a rich and extensive data pool, which I have used both to illuminate theory and policy, and to suggest ways in which practice may be improved, through a new conceptual model for learning through a Foundation Degree.

However, I also suggested at the start of the thesis that a parallel learning journey was taking place, and that was my own. This journey has followed my development as a PhD student and emerging researcher, and as Foundation Degree programme leader and tutor. Yet, throughout the thesis, I have deliberately kept my own journey in the background in order to retain the focus upon Mel, Sam and Heather – the learners who have been at the centre of this

study. Now, in these last words, I return to my own journey in order to reflect upon what ‘Learning through a Foundation Degree’ has meant for me. I start by recapping my early experiences of learning at university and how I came to develop my own particular approach to learning and teaching. I link this to what motivated me to engage in doctoral study and then consider my development as a researcher, scrutinising my research design along the way. Finally, I return to learning, and link this to Barnett’s (2007) notions of being and becoming, drawing parallels between Mel’s, Sam’s and Heather’s journeys from being to becoming and my own.

10.2 Teaching, learning and reflection

In ‘Introducing myself’, early in Chapter One, I outlined my own learning experiences as a student at Cambridge University. I was of the first generation in my family to attend university and was ill prepared for what I found to be an intimidating environment. Like Mel, Sam and Heather, I did not possess knowledge related to how the academy worked and did not arrive at the university with the tools of academic literacy necessary to succeed easily in such an environment. Unlike Mel, Sam and Heather, I was not supported in developing the tools and skills I needed and was initially studying for a degree that had little practical application to the ‘real’ world.

However, when I changed my course from Music to Education (and associated Teacher Training) I developed a dual understanding of the value of experience as

a powerful tool for learning. Firstly, I was able to see children learning within classroom contexts and I was able to link their learning to the theoretical models that were introduced during my studies. Secondly, I was able to recognise higher levels of effectiveness in my own learning, because the theoretical elements of the course made more sense when applied to my own classroom teaching practice. In this way, I developed a clear belief in the value of the learning *process*, as opposed to wholly summative outcomes. I felt that this was what had been missed in my school studies and during the early part of my time at university. Therefore, as I completed my degree course and started my first teaching post, I felt that I finally understood that the learner could hold the power to influence their own pathway and were not dependent upon the imparting of knowledge from others.

Parallel to this ran a growing realisation in my own mind that a robust understanding of learning processes demanded a reflective, creative and evaluative approach to teaching. I stated in Chapter One that ‘In practice, this has meant that a constant feature of my teaching style is the incorporation of space to take a step back and reflect upon the impact that my intervention as a teacher has had upon the quality of learning’, and this was the rationale for undertaking doctoral research. Doing this PhD has become a natural outworking of my professional teaching practice – practice that is founded upon the following key characteristics, first presented in Chapter One:

1. the subject matter of reflection is likely to be one’s own practice;
2. reflective practice may have a strong critical element;

3. the end point of reflection may not be a resolution of an issue, but an attainment of a better understanding of it;
4. review and reconstruction of the ideas surrounding reflection will be aimed at understanding or resolving the issue in the context of a general aim of improving practice;
5. still within the overall context of improving practice, the immediate aim may be self-development or professional development.

(Adapted from Moon, 1999: 64)

Therefore, these characteristics not only underpin my teaching practice, but have also underpinned my approach to doctoral research. This has taken the form of critical investigation and reflection upon my practice (in the case of my research, 'Learning through a Foundation Degree') in order to attain a deeper understanding of it, which in turn, has enabled me to suggest ways in which to improve practice, and also to further my own self and professional development. Thus, the importance that I attach to the process of learning and to the place of reflection, and the personal route I have taken in developing my approach has influenced the way in which I have approached this thesis.

However, alongside the general approach I have taken to undertaking doctoral study, I have also had to develop specific skills related to research, and so now I consider my development as a researcher. In so doing I return to the image of the 'bricoleur', the place that reflection has had within my researcher role and aspects of the research design that have underpinned this study.

10.3 The actively reflexive bricoleur

At the beginning of Chapter One, I suggested that a key role for me throughout the research process was to act as ‘bricoleur’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 4) or ‘quilt maker’, stitching pieces of the story together. I have, indeed, acted as bricoleur. I have made decisions about how to organise the accounts that Mel, Sam and Heather have so openly shared with me. I have had at my disposal a plethora of lenses through which to view and interpret the stories, conscious of the ‘self’ that I bring to the process. I have had to decide not only what to stitch into the quilt, but how to present it, and this has been a far from straightforward process. I have had to unpick and re-stitch as the accounts have been developed and reinterpreted in order to present the best possible end product, conscious that each time an account is subject to interpretation, I leave my mark upon it. Therefore, acting as bricoleur has necessitated an approach founded upon ‘active reflexivity’ (Mason, 2002: 7), or critical self-scrutiny, which has emerged from the key features that characterise my professional teaching practice (outlined above) and with which I have engaged at all stages of the research process.

For example, I began Chapter Four, ‘Research Design’, by asking ‘difficult questions’ related to the nature of reality and to knowledge. At the very start of that chapter, therefore, I had to engage in challengingly reflexive activity that drew upon the key philosophies and principles I brought to my teaching practice and to my understanding of learning. This resulted in the articulation of a constructivist perspective in relation to the development of meaning through

interactions with the world and a socially constructed view of knowledge. The section on 'Strategy and Methodology' started with a consideration of 'choices and decisions' and a survey of the options available to me in terms of methodological approaches, demonstrating again the reflexive activity in which I was engaged. In addition, when considering the notion of 'validity as authenticity' (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 207) in relation to research design, researcher reflexivity emerged as a key tool in order that validity of method and interpretation could be 'demonstrated through careful retracing and reconstruction of the route by which you think you reached them' (Mason, 2002: 194). In order to achieve this I have been careful to align my research methodology and methods to the key principles related to teaching, learning and reflection, outlined above, and to the ensuing views of reality and knowledge already discussed.

However, it is in the actual gathering of data where my role as 'actively reflexive bricoleur' has been most marked. I needed to choose data collection methods and tools that would capture what I set out to do (generate accounts of the learning experiences of Mel, Sam and Heather) and which had integrity in relation to the philosophical foundations of my research (Mason, 2002). Therefore, interviews were used as the main source for generating the students' accounts, supplemented by student journals and curricula vitae that were used both empirically and as a tool to facilitate discussion within interview. I developed a 'responsive interviewing' style (Rubin and Rubin, 2005: 15) in order to avoid an over-structured approach, but was keen that the students would 'speak in their own

voices and with their own language' (Byrne, 2004: 182) and in this respect, the use of digital video disc (DVD) recordings became an important tool for bringing richness and depth to the accounts.

These recordings were made by the students and showed themselves engaged in practice within their workplace. I was keen to use a tool that generated material from the participant in order to elicit a sense of ownership and a feeling that the interview was being conducted on their terms and with the backdrop of a familiar context. However, the use of DVD recordings brought an added dimension to my role as the 'actively reflexive bricoleur'. In particular I had to accept that I was relinquishing certain aspects of control over the data gathering process. For example, by taking responsibility for the recordings, Mel, Sam and Heather made decisions regarding where they filmed, for how long and which camera angles to use. This placed them in the role of 'director', thus affording them some ownership over the process, but also meaning that I was reliant upon their decisions, based on their own preferences, upon practicalities, and also, upon their interpretation of what I would like to see. Reflecting back upon this process, perhaps in this context, the students were acting more as bricoleur than I was able to. Thus, the DVD recordings brought a further dimension to the case study students' accounts of their particular learning experiences and to my role as 'actively reflexive bricoleur'.

The data collected did form powerful accounts of what it was like to learn through a Foundation Degree. However, on reflection there were instances during the interviewing process where I could have probed further in order to gain an even deeper understanding of the issues raised and this is a methodological issue for my future consideration. For example, I missed gathering further detail related to how the Foundation Degree course had impacted upon Mel's professional practice. In Mel's account (Chapter Five), I made an assumption that the impact was related to improved curriculum delivery, but did not follow this up in order to confirm the detail. At the beginning of Sam's account (Chapter Six), I did not clearly establish why she thought that a career in hairdressing was not for her. On reflection this may have resulted in a missed opportunity in terms of exploring what professional work activity she found satisfying or not satisfying and this in turn may have informed a deeper understanding of what motivated her to consider a teaching career. These are just two examples of where further probing at the interview stage may have generated an even richer data set, although at the time I was keen not to lead the direction in which each interview went.

Overall, though, the accounts give insight into what Mel, Sam and Heather experienced, the challenges that they faced, and the changes that they went through in terms of how they saw themselves, those around them, and the systems within which they operated. For Mel, Sam and Heather, the Foundation Degree did represent a journey through which each engaged in the 'continuous process of becoming' (Barnett, 2007: 62) – a process involving the discovery of one's voice

and ‘a will to learn’ (Barnett, 2007). Therefore, my very last words turn to a consideration of learning, being and becoming – both for Mel, Sam and Heather and for myself.

10.4 Learning, being and becoming

Throughout the research, I have been privileged to be able to move on in my own learning journey by learning alongside and through the experiences that Mel, Sam and Heather describe. I have even been able to empathise with some of their experiences, by reflecting back upon my own university education and recognising that some of the difficulties I faced then (accessing the academy, academic literacy and developing a learner identity) have also been issues for Mel, Sam and Heather some twenty years later. My roles as tutor and course leader have afforded me the opportunity to get alongside the students, to reflect upon the course in practical terms as course leader and to consider the quality of the student experience in the light of the case study students’ experiences. Thus, this account of learning through a Foundation Degree has not only unearthed stories of ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ (Barnett, 2007) for each of the case study students, but also for myself. Within each of my multiple identities as a novice researcher, a student within higher education, and also as a higher education practitioner, my own state of ‘being’ has been propelled through the research process towards one of ‘becoming’. Barnett (2007) specifies the development of one’s own voice, self-confidence and passion as factors which lead to the notion of the higher education student ‘taking off’ with their will to learn.

I can see Barnett's words applying not only to Mel, Sam and Heather, but also to myself as one who, in 'becoming', enters 'a new place, which she discovers for herself, but in so doing, discovers herself' (Barnett, 2007: 55). The new places I have discovered through engaging with this doctoral research have included a fuller understanding and appreciation of the difficulties I faced at university and the parallel issues experienced by Mel, Sam and Heather. I have developed a clear rationale for undergoing doctoral study (the desire to improve teaching and learning practice within a Foundation Degree), and have conducted the research in a way that is based upon the key aspects that characterise both my teaching and my understanding of learning, with reflection being a central tenet of my approach. In addition, I have entered a new place as a novice researcher, both in terms of developing knowledge, understanding and practical application of research design, but also in terms of discovering myself with a new researcher identity.

Finally, I have come to a new place in developing a fuller and more sophisticated understanding of 'Learning through a Foundation Degree' and the ways in which practice may be improved in order to further support students on their journey from being to becoming. This has motivated me to reflect upon how to take this research further. For example, the conceptual model presented in Chapter 9 has the potential to be used as a heuristic tool both for exploring practice and as a basis for future research. The model could be used within staff development workshops as a starting point for exploring different learning and teaching

contexts, whilst each of the six factors identified could be further developed in themselves. In particular 'The tutor's role' demands additional exploration, perhaps warranting a parallel piece of research which develops a case study around Foundation Degree tutoring. In addition, links could be made between individual factors within the model and broader issues within higher education (not necessarily tied to the Foundation Degree context). For example, new ways of engaging employers with higher education courses is the focus of an externally funded project at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln. In this respect, the work done around employer engagement for 'Learning through a Foundation Degree' is proving to be invaluable in terms of providing a theoretical and policy framework within which to situate the project.

Through the ongoing process of 'becoming' the learner 'comes to understand matters, sees anew into topics, comes to be able to perform all manner of operations and engage in hitherto strange activities' (Barnett, 2007: 61). I have been able to view learning and teaching on a Foundation Degree through the vibrant lens of the student experience. I have learned to engage in the process of research and its associated 'strange activities' of data collection and interpretation. I have developed my researcher voice, and a voice that is more comfortable with academic writing, whilst also retaining fidelity to the key principles that drive my approach to teaching and learning. Together, Mel, Sam, Heather and I have shared a learning journey, which has not been without its difficulties and which has brought personal and professional challenges and

rewards for each of us. I suspect the end of this research process does not mark the end of either of our learning journeys; rather it is merely a pause before the next phase begins.

Appendix 1.1

Examples of the typical higher education qualifications at each level of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

| Typical higher education qualifications within each level | FHEQ |
|--|------|
| Doctoral degrees (eg, PhD/DPhil, EdD, DBA, DCLinPsy) | 8 |
| Master's degrees (eg, MPhil, MLitt, MRes, MA, MSc) Integrated master's degrees (eg, MEng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm) Postgraduate certificates and diplomas Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) | 7 |
| Bachelor's degrees with honours (eg, BA/BSc Hons) Bachelor's degrees Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Graduate certificates and diplomas | 6 |
| Foundation Degrees (eg, FdA, FdSc) Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE) Higher National Diplomas (HND) | 5 |
| Higher National Certificates (HNC) Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE) | 4 |

Adapted from QAA (2008: 10)

Appendix 1.2

Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln: Modules 2001 – 2003

| | <i>Semester 1</i> | <i>Semester 2</i> |
|---|--|---|
| Year 1 first cohort, 2001 - 2002 (FHEQ level 4) | FES101 Understanding your own learning and that of others | FES105 Numeracy |
| | FES102 Language and Literacy | FES104 Learning and ICT |
| | FES103 Education in Practice | FES106 Personal, Professional Communication |
| Year 2 first cohort, 2002 - 2003 (FHEQ level 5) | FES201 Science | FES204 Meeting Childrens' Learning Needs |
| | FES202 Developing Action-Based Studies | FES205 Assessment and Evaluation for Learning |
| | FES203 Specialist Subject FES206 Research Project | |

Appendix 2.1

Foundation Degree Subject Areas

(number of related courses in brackets)

Agriculture Environmental and Land-based Studies (147)
Art and Design (301)
Bioscience (38)
Business (421)
Community and Social Studies (204)
Computing (306)
Construction (102)
Education (425)
Engineering (187)
Health (314)
History, Theology, Geography and Languages (28)
Hospitality and Tourism (202)
Law (16)
Media (144)
Performing Arts and Music (178)
Personalised programmes for professional development (16)
Public Services (84)
Retail (40)
Science (18)
Sport (229)
Technology (46)
Transport and Logistics (29)
Veterinary Nursing and Animal Studies (111)

<http://www.fdf.ac.uk/courses/> (7 November 2008)

Appendix 2.2

Programmes available at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln

Undergraduate Level

Foundation Degrees

- Foundation Degree in Children's Services (Early Childhood)
- Foundation Degree in Children's Services (Children and Youth Work)
- Foundation Degree for Learning Practitioners (formally the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants)

Top-up degrees/Progression routes from Foundation Degrees

- BA (Hons) Applied Studies in Early Childhood
- BA (Hons) Applied Studies in Children and Youth Work
- BA (Hons) Professional Studies in Primary Education (QTS)
- BA (Hons) Professional Studies in Education (non-QTS)

Honours degrees

- BA (Hons) Drama in the Community
- BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies
- BA (Hons) English Literature
- BA (Hons) Heritage Studies
- BA (Hons) Primary Education (QTS)

- BA (Hons) Education Studies and Art and Design
- BA (Hons) Education Studies and Drama
- BA (Hons) Education Studies and English
- BA (Hons) Education Studies and Geography
- BA (Hons) Education Studies and History
- BSc (Hons) Education Studies and Mathematics
- BA (Hons) Education Studies and Music
- BSc (Hons) Education Studies and Science
- BA (Hons) Education Studies and Sport
- BA (Hons) Education Studies and Theology

Postgraduate Level

- MA in Heritage Education
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Primary)
- Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Secondary)
- Graduate Teacher Programme

- MA in Education

Professional Development

- Masters level awards
- Continuing professional development
- Bespoke courses
- Conferences and guest speakers
- International projects

Short Courses

- Church Colleges Certificate in Church School Studies

http://www.bishopg.ac.uk/?_id=10146 (7 November 2008)

Appendix 2.3

Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants

at Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln:

Programme Outline followed by Mel, Sam and Heather, 2004 – 2006

The first year of study (2004 – 2005) followed the first year of the original programme. The programme was revised and revalidated during 2005 and so the second year of study (2005 – 06) followed the second year of the new programme.

| YEAR ONE, 2004 - 05 (Mondays 1.15pm to 8pm) | | | | | |
|---|--|------------|---------|---|----------|
| Module Code | Module Title | FHEQ Level | Credits | Assessment | Semester |
| FES101 | Understanding your own learning and that of others | 4 | 20 | Paired presentation; Essay; Portfolio | 1 |
| FES102 | Language and Literacy | 4 | 20 | Literacy test; Essay; Portfolio | 1 |
| FES103 | Education in Practice | 4 | 20 | Group presentation; Essay; Portfolio | 1 |
| FES104 | Learning and ICT | 4 | 20 | Group presentation; Essay; Portfolio | 2 |
| FES105 | Numeracy | 4 | 20 | Numeracy test; Essay; Portfolio | 2 |
| FES106 | Personal, Professional Communication | 4 | 20 | Individual presentation; Essay; Portfolio | 2 |

| YEAR TWO, 2005 - 06 (Tuesdays, 1.15pm to 8pm) | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|------------|---------|--|----------|
| Module Code | Module Title | FHEQ Level | Credits | Assessment | Semester |
| FES201 | Inclusive Education | 5 | 20 | Case study; Portfolio | 1 |
| FES202 | Research Methods | 5 | 20 | Portfolio | 1 |
| FES203 | Science | 5 | 20 | Essay; Portfolio | 1 |
| FES204 | Action Research Project | 5 | 20 | Research action plan; Research report | 2 |
| FES205 | Assessment for Learning | 5 | 20 | Debate; Portfolio | 2 |
| FES206 | Professional Practice 2 | 5 | 20 | Examination | 2 |

Appendix 4.1

Information sheet for potential case study students

Exciting opportunity to take part in unique research project!

I am looking for volunteers to help me with my research,
investigating the experiences of students on the Foundation
Degree.

Are you willing to keep a diary?

*Are you willing to be involved with me in the collection of short video clips
to illustrate school practice?*

Would you be happy to talk to me about your experiences on the course?

You will get:

- The opportunity to engage in professional development
- Supply cover and travelling expenses
- Anonymity guaranteed
- Full guidance and support at all stages of the research

**The research will be conducted separately to the Foundation
Degree course and will not influence in any way coursework
assessment and marks.**

Please let me know if you are interested in finding out more!

Thanks

Claire

claire.taylor@bishopg.ac.uk

Appendix 4.2

Outline of the project for case study students

| Research Project Outline for Potential Participants | |
|--|--|
| Project Title | Learning Through a Foundation Degree: the impact on students and on the workplace |
| Project Manager and contact details | Claire Taylor Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln 01522 527347 claire.taylor@bishopg.ac.uk |

Background

This research builds upon both the experience of Bishop Grosseteste University College in running a Foundation Degree for Teaching Assistants over the past three years and an ESCalate funded project (2003 – 2004, managed by Claire Taylor) investigating the Assessment and Mentoring of Work-based Learning on Foundation Degrees.

Foundation Degrees across the UK are relatively new. Therefore, research into UK Foundation Degrees, including work-based learning and assessment on Foundation Degrees, and the impact of the course on both students and their workplace, is a developing field for investigation.

The Project

This project consists of a qualitative, longitudinal case study, examining the experiences of students undertaking the Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants at Bishop Grosseteste University College and the impact of the course in the workplace.

From Autumn 2004, the learning experiences of a small group of Foundation Degree students will be followed through the use of video diaries and written journals. Students will be invited to record three video diary entries consisting of a short recording of their own workplace practice (around ten minutes). Camcorders will be provided for this purpose. In addition they will be asked to keep a reflective journal, documenting their experiences during the course. The journal could be written or tape recorded.

The students will be invited to view their videos with Claire Taylor as a starting point for reflecting on the impact the FdA is having personally and on their work.

The use of both video material and reflective journals is designed to minimise disruption in the workplace and it is not anticipated that, at this stage, observations will need to take place on site. The data collection will initially span a period of one year, with potential extension for a further year.

It is expected that over 2004-2005, initial research findings will be able to highlight key issues around the areas of:

- Teaching and learning on Foundation Degrees
- Student experience on Foundation Degrees (including aspirations, achievement, retention)
- Work-based learning and mentoring in the workplace

The outputs will form part of Claire Taylor's personal research work, supervised by the University of Nottingham. In addition it is anticipated that some research findings will be disseminated at a national conference during 2005.

Appendix 4.3

Project consent form

| Research Project Consent Form | |
|--|--|
| Project Title | Learning Through a Foundation Degree |
| Project Manager and contact details | Claire Taylor Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln 01522 527347 claire.taylor@bishopg.ac.uk |
| Please tick as appropriate. This should be completed jointly by the individual participant and a senior manager within the workplace. If you wish to discuss any aspect of the project in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact Claire Taylor. | |
| 1. We have read the project outline | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. We have received enough information about the project in order to decide whether to take part | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. We understand that that we do not have to take part and that we may withdraw from the project at any time | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. We understand that it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent or school in the research report | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. We take responsibility for ensuring that participants (pupils, staff members, parents) not directly involved in the project are appropriately informed | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. We agree to take part in the project | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Signature (individual participant): | Date: |
| Name in block letters: | |
| Email: | |
| Signature (senior manager within the workplace): | Date: |
| Name in block letters: | |
| Position: | |
| Workplace name and address: | |
| Email: | |

Appendix 4.4

Summary of the data collected

| | | Part 1: September 2004 – June 2005 | | | Part 2: September 2005 – February 2006 | | | Part 3: March 2006 – October 2006 | | |
|----------------|------------------|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | | Foundation Degree Year 1, semesters 1 and 2 | | | Foundation Degree Year 2, semester 1 | | | Foundation Degree Year 2, semester 2 and Graduation | | |
| | Data type | Number of DVD recordings viewed | Interviews conducted | Period covered by journal entries | Interviews conducted | Period covered by journal entries | CV submitted and discussed | Number of DVD recordings viewed | Interviews conducted | Period covered by journal entries |
| Mel | | 2 (25/2/05, 10/6/05) | 2 (25/2/05, 10/6/05) | 09/04 - 05/05 | 1 (30/9/05) | 09/05 | 30/9/05 | 1 (24/3/06) | 2 (24/3/06, 13/10/06) | - |
| Sam | | 2 (25/2/05, 10/6/05) | 2 (25/2/05, 10/6/05) | 09/04 - 05/05 | 1 (4/10/05) | 09/05 - 02/06 | 4/10/05 | 1 (24/3/06) | 2 (24/3/06, 13/10/06) | - |
| Heather | | 2 (25/2/05, 10/6/05) | 2 (25/2/05, 10/6/05) | 09/04 - 05/05 | 1 (4/10/05) | 09/05 | 4/10/05 | - | 1 (13/10/06) | 10/06 |

Appendix 4.5

Exemplification of process of analysis

| Stage | Focus | Activity | Example |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| 1 | Achieving familiarity | Reading and re-reading of interview transcripts and journal entries as well as listening to the interview data on tape. | Not applicable |
| 2 | Recognising significance | Underlining key parts of the text that I saw as significant. I also found myself noticing recurring comments and looking for strands in the data aligned to these recurrences. | Extract from interview transcript (Sam 10/6/05): <i><u>I just found at the beginning I felt guilty when I was with my family because I couldn't be doing the college work and I felt guilty doing my college work because I couldn't be with my family and I thought can't keep doing this you know because it, I just constantly felt guilty.</u></i> |
| 3 | Towards thematic development | Capturing the meanings of statements through words or phrases, which become themes. Noting systematically where these occur in the data. | <i>guilt</i> See below for extract from chart showing where theme of guilt appears in interview transcripts for Sam, with reference to extract used above highlighted (also completed for Mel and Heather). Additional lines for each identified theme. 41 themes identified at this stage (appendix 4.6). |

| Participant and interview date | S 25/2/05 | S 10/6/05 | S 4/10/05 | S 24/3/06 | S 13/10/06 |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Guilt theme identified (interview transcript page and lines) | 9:9-13 | 1:33-37 | | 6:1-28 | |

| Stage | Focus | Activity | Example |
|-------|--------------------------|---|--|
| 4 | Thematic clusters | Overarching themes contain clustered data which in itself contain sub-themes, identified more through an iterative rather than systemic process | <p>Theme of 'guilt' clustered with others under overarching themes of <i>relationships</i> and <i>self</i></p> <p>At this stage, four thematic clusters identified: work, self, relationships and academy, with codes added for ease of reference.</p> <p>See below for extract from chart for the coded cluster of <i>self</i>, showing code and where theme of guilt appears in interview transcripts for Sam, with reference to extract used above highlighted (also completed for Mel and Heather). At this stage, 44 themes identified divided between four overarching thematic clusters, with some repetition (appendix 4.7).</p> |

Coded clusters: Self

| | | S 25/2/05 | S 10/6/05 | S 4/10/05 | S 24/3/06 | S 13/10/06 |
|-------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Guilt | SELF-GUILT | 9:9-13 | 1:33-37 | | 6:1-28 | |

| Stage | Focus | Activity | Example |
|--------------|----------------------------|---|---|
| 5 | Unravelling meaning | Critically reading through the data bits related to each theme to understand the characteristics that participants attached to themes with some reorganisation of thematic areas. | This stage led to the rationalisation of four thematic clusters to three following critical reading of the data to understand the characteristics of themes and to identify unnecessary repetition. For example the references that Sam made to <i>guilt</i> under the overarching theme of <i>self</i> were replicated within the overarching theme of <i>relationships</i> and therefore both were consolidated within <i>self</i> . This rationalisation resulted in 32 final codes. |
| 6 | Thematic enrichment | Relating themes back to original data and view the data as a whole in order to extract any missed meanings or newly emerging connections between themes. | The interview extracts identified in relation to specific themes were checked back to the original transcript. |

| Stage | Focus | Activity | Example |
|--------|------------------------------|--|---|
| 7 | Data interrogation | More detailed interrogation of data sections, including investigating choice of vocabulary; the use of metaphors and examples; the significance attached to any emphasised or repeated themes; contradictions, and the possible status of identified themes and sub themes in the context of the research focus. | See below for extract from transcript interrogation (Sam 10/6/06) showing my notes related to the <i>guilt</i> theme already identified: |
| Page 1 | Lines 33-37 | Extract from transcript: I just found at the beginning I felt guilty when I was with my family because I couldn't be doing the college work and I felt guilty doing my college work because I couldn't be with my family...I just constantly felt guilty... | My notes: Organising different aspects of life (<i>link to identity – within family and within college?</i>) Theme of guilt Word guilty used three times. Constant guilt – no escape? How would this affect learning? |
| 8 | Constructing accounts | | The accounts are found in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis |

Appendix 4.6

Analysis stage three: themes identified

41 themes in total

Perception of self as a TA

Working relationships with teachers/TAs

Reflection

Role in school

Mentor

Work-based tasks

School culture

Confidence

Motivation

Making connections

Change in self

Student support

Academic skills and achievement

Success

Workplace discourse

Impact of course in workplace

Emotions

Anxiety

Pressure

Time management/organisation

Guilt

Dyslexia

Student identity

School support

Pre-course experience

Previous higher education experience

Parental pressure and involvement

The academy

Work-based practice

Academic skills

Family

Peer group

Ability

Self-belief

Personal and professional development

Course workload

Independence

Self-esteem

Future goals and aspirations

Self-awareness

Perception of the researcher's identity

Appendix 4.7

Analysis stage four: thematic clusters identified

| Thematic cluster: Work | |
|---|-------------|
| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Code</i> |
| Working relationships with teachers/TAs | WORK-REL |
| Role in school | WORK-ROLE |
| Mentor | WORK-MENT |
| Work-based tasks | WORK-WBT |
| School culture | WORK-CUL |
| Workplace discourse | WORK-DISC |
| Impact of course in workplace | WORK-C/IMP |
| School support | WORK-SUP |
| Pre-course experience | WORK-PRE |

| Thematic cluster: Academy | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Code</i> |
| Academic reflection | ACAD-REFL |
| Making connections | ACAD-CON |
| Academic skills and achievement | ACAD-ACH |
| Time management/organisation | ACAD-TM |
| Dyslexia | ACAD-DYS |
| Student identity | ACAD-STU |
| Previous higher education experience | ACAD-PREHE |
| The academy | ACADE-UNI |
| Academic skills | ACAD-SKILL |
| Perception of ability | ACAD-ABIL |
| Course workload | ACAD-WKLOAD |
| Peer support | ACAD-PEERS |

| Thematic cluster: Relationships | |
|---|-------------|
| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Code</i> |
| Working relationships with teachers/TAs | REL-TEACH |
| Mentor | REL-MENT |
| Guilt | REL-GUILT |
| Parental pressure and involvement | REL-PAR |
| Family | REL-FAM |
| Peer group | REL-PEERS |
| Perception of researcher's role | REL-RES |

| Thematic cluster: Self | |
|---|---------------|
| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Code</i> |
| Perception of self as a TA | SELF-IDEN/TA |
| Confidence | SELF-CONF |
| Motivation | SELF-MOT |
| Change in self | SELF-CHNG |
| Emotions | SELF-EMOT |
| Anxiety | SELF-ANX |
| Pressure | SELF-PRES |
| Time management/organisation | SELF-TIME |
| Guilt | SELF-GUILT |
| Dyslexia | SELF-DYS |
| Student identity | SELF-IDEN/ST |
| Family (identity as a parent) | SELF-IDEN/PAR |
| Perception of ability | SELF-CON/ABIL |
| Self-concept (including esteem, belief and awareness) | SELF-CONC |
| Pre-course experience | SELF-PRE |
| Future goals and aspirations | SELF-FUT |

Appendix 4.8

Analysis stage five: thematic clusters consolidated to three

32 final codes identified in total

| Thematic cluster: Work | |
|---|-------------|
| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Code</i> |
| Working relationships with teachers/TAs | WORK-REL |
| Role in school | WORK-ROLE |
| Mentor | WORK-MENT |
| Work-based tasks | WORK-WBT |
| Workplace discourse | WORK-DISC |
| Impact of course in workplace | WORK-C/IMP |
| School support | WORK-SUP |
| Pre-course experience | WORK-PRE |

| Thematic cluster: Academy | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Code</i> |
| Academic reflection | ACAD-REFL |
| Making connections | ACAD-CON |
| Academic skills and achievement | ACAD-ACH |
| Student identity | ACAD-STU |
| Previous higher education experience | ACAD-PREHE |
| The academy | ACADE-UNI |
| Academic skills | ACAD-SKILL |
| Perception of ability | ACAD-ABIL |
| Course workload | ACAD-WKLOAD |
| Peer support | ACAD-PEERS |

| Thematic cluster: Self | |
|---|---------------|
| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Code</i> |
| Perception of self as a TA | SELF-IDEN/TA |
| Confidence | SELF-CONF |
| Motivation | SELF-MOT |
| Impact of course on self and family | SELF-IMP/FAM |
| Anxiety | SELF-ANX |
| Time management/organisation | SELF-TIME |
| Guilt | SELF-GUILT |
| Dyslexia | SELF-DYS |
| Student identity | SELF-IDEN/ST |
| Family (identity as a parent) | SELF-IDEN/PAR |
| Perception of ability | SELF-CON/ABIL |
| Self-concept (including esteem, belief and awareness) | SELF-CONC |
| Pre-course experience | SELF-PRE |
| Future goals and aspirations | SELF-FUT |

Appendix 9.1

Example work-based learning agreement

Foundation Degree in Educational Studies for Teaching Assistants Pro-forma for Headteachers

If your interview is successful, your offer cannot be confirmed without the support of the Headteacher of your supporting school. The Foundation Degree requires students to undertake work-based tasks as a compulsory part of their programme.

NAME OF HEADTEACHER/EMPLOYER:

SCHOOL/OTHER:
ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE:
FAX:
EMAIL:

NAME OF CANDIDATE:

Additional comments on the suitability of the candidate (if any):

I do support this application.

Signed:

Date:

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