Is Transformative Learning Possible in Neoliberal Post 92 Higher Education in England?

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By

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Acknowledgements

Traditionally this is where doctoral candidates acknowledge the support and inspiration they have received during their doctoral studies.

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Abstract

Keywords: **Transformative Learning; Identity Theory; Education Research; Methodology; Neoliberalism.**

Mezirow's Transformative Learning (TL) theory has become an internationally recognised, enduring signature theory for education researchers. Scholarship has, however, predominantly focused on the process of 'transformation', rather than what is 'transformed', and how that transformation occurs. Scholarly reviews of the theory and its evolution have identified a lack of studies evaluating its efficacy. Nevertheless, advocates of TL theory contend that it is a consciousness-raising, emancipatory, life-changing means of developing critical reflection skills in students. My study seeks to explore the 'completeness' of TL and considers the potential for Illeris's identity theory to be incorporated into a theory of Transformative Education (TE hereafter) in a neoliberal post 92 higher education (HE hereafter) educational context.

A review of qualitative methodological theories found that the incompleteness of theoretical approaches to qualitative research and enquiry offer opportunities to develop TL theory. I offer a conceptual framework which allows Bourdieu's concept of Habitus and Illeris's Identity theory to be utilised as a theoretical and methodological tool to study the impact of transformational learning on undergraduate students. As such, my thesis proposes novel ways in which to undertake fieldwork, and analysis and interpretation of qualitative action research.

The possibilities for TE and transformative experiences for academics is also considered, thus my thesis could have implications for practice in HE. The neoliberal agenda in HE has served both as a means by which the fundamental nature of HE has been transformed and transformed the ways in which students approach their learning. As such, my thesis argues that where student's perceptions and experiences of HE are transformed through TE, understanding the ways in which the neoliberal agenda drives the commodification of education, it is possible to reimagine the UK HE sector.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> "My work on the transformative paradigm as a philosophical framing for research is based on the premise that if we are to contribute to transformative change then we must consciously design our research to incorporate that goal into our research" (Mertens 2017, p.20).

This study explores the impact of neoliberalism in Higher Education (HE) on the transformational learning experiences of undergraduate (UG) students within one post 92 English university. I will argue that transformational learning, that is to say consciousness-raising, emancipatory, life-changing means of developing critical reflection skills, as conceptualised by Mezirow (1978a, b) is a fundamental element of the learning journey of undergraduate students. The development of this essential component of learning is impeded by a neoliberal approach to the provision of HE which I contend has been an all-pervasive agenda, introduced in the 1970s and further embedded by successive neoliberal governments.

This introductory chapter charts the progress of neoliberal management and leadership of HE as it has been rolled out across the sector and explores the impact that this has had at policy, institutional, practitioner and student levels. Transformational learning (TL) will be discussed and critiqued in further detail in Chapter Two.

I argue that as a result of my own activism within UCU, my roles throughout my career and my research for my thesis, I have unique insights viewed through a multifaceted lens. This includes my student, academic and support roles from a national, institutional, and individual perspective My work and activism has enabled me to identify and understand the risks to HE as a result of poor governance and poor financial management. An example of my union work is the motion I co-authored which was submitted to UCU's (2018) annual congress calling for the critical auditing of universities under financial threat due to the:

> "devastating impact of the extensive borrowing, complex financial arrangements and disproportionately ambitious building/property transactions of the institutions and affiliates which have been used by management to justify detriment on pay, pensions and conditions".

The motion – carried – committed the UCU to:

> "commission critical financial accounting reviews to help challenge institutions undertaking so-called 'voluntary' or compulsory redundancies, precarity, outsourcing, or those expressing financial hardship to justify pensions contributions increases or benefits reductions".

This is highly relevant to discussion in section 1.1.3.

1.1 The Rise and Impact of Neoliberalism within English Universities

At this point it would be customary to offer a definition of theory employed in a conceptual framework. However, it is widely accepted that within discourse focused on neoliberalism, definitions do differ. Whilst scholars of neoliberalism including Bell (2011) and Mirowski and Plehwe (2009) have discussed the origins and definitions of the concept, Robertson (2007, p.2) offers a helpful understanding of neoliberalism within the context of higher education as:

> "a class project with three key aims: the (i) redistribution of wealth upward to the ruling elites through new structures of governance; (ii) transformation of education systems so that the production of workers for the economy is the primary mandate; and (iii) breaking down of education as a public sector monopoly, opening it up to strategic investment by for profit firms".

It is important to acknowledge, as McCaig (2018) argues, the notion of neoliberalism in higher education is contested and somewhat problematic, this is a contention I do not dispute. Nevertheless, Robertson (2007) and others had predicted the dismantling of publicly funded education as a project with its roots in ideologically driven neoliberal policies. Patrick's (2013, p.5) review of neoliberalism in HE supports my contention that neoliberalism, the notion of the 'knowledge economy' and the commodification of learning are indeed embedded, arguing that:

> "The doxa of neoliberalism remains largely intact in education policy and practice in the United Kingdom".

For the purposes of my thesis, I employ Harvey's (2007, p.2) widely acknowledged definition discussed in section discussed in section discussed in section discussed in section1.1.1.1.

> "Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices."

'Vocational' post 92 universities were established under John Major's government through the Further and Higher Education Act (1992). The progenitor of the 1992 Act was the election of Margaret Thatcher in May 1979, when according to Hall et al. (1978), Harvey (2007), Hall (2011) and Hall and Massey (2010) neo-liberalism became the prevailing ideology in British politics and, concomitantly, as Gillard (2018) asserts, English education.

I argue that the neoliberal assault on HE in the UK threatens the existence of publicly funded tertiary education. This can be seen through the persistence with which successive governments have pursued an HE model:

> "…in which students are customers and university institutions are service providers which succeed or fail on the basis of a competition over product quality" (Allen 2011).

Through the removal of grants and the introduction of fees and loans, students have become customers in a marketised and commodified HE landscape. According to Chitty (2009) an immediate consequence of this was a significant impact on access to HE for Widening Participation (WP) students, especially mature, part-time, BAME and those from working class backgrounds (Butcher et al. 2012).

1.1.1 The Conceptual framework and research question

A point of significant relevance to this thesis is my conceptual framework, which incorporates TL (Mezirow 1978a, b - 2012), habitus (Bourdieu 1983, 1984, 1985, 1998) and identity (Illeris 2014, 2015, 2018), as will be

discussed in Chapter 2. My framework seeks to allow me to explore and understand the experiences of WP students in a post 92 university faculty. My research aims to answer the research question:

> Is transformative learning possible for students of media studies in a post 92 neoliberal university media faculty?

1.1.1.1 A Brief history

Harvey (2007, p.1) begins his exposition of neoliberalism in the 20th century by identifying the origins of the neoliberal agenda as it manifested, citing the influences of Augusto Pinochet (the then president of Chile) and Ronald Reagan (the then president of America) on Margaret Thatcher's political agenda. Thatcher was elected in 1979, with a mandate to limit trade union power and address the economic crisis of the 1970s, for which the previous Labour government and unions had been held accountable. According to Harvey (2007), the neoliberal agenda under Thatcher's government was distinctly 'pragmatic' rather than 'ideological', although arguably the effects were the same. Maisuria and Cole (2017) however, argue that Thatcher's government was the most right-wing, anti-public sector and pro-market political moment in history.

Under Thatcher's government, the state exerted control over the economy, highly regulating all of its activities, including education. Ironically, as Chitty (1992) discussed in his review of the role of state education, successive endeavours by governments to create an HE system have been ideologically driven since at least the late 19th century.

Thatcher's Secretary of State for education Keith Joseph objected to what he perceived to be state intervention in education (Chitty (1992). Although Joseph's position is consistent with the free market principles of neoliberalism (McCaig 2018), I argue Thatcher's government actions were aligned closely with the neoliberal agenda to privatise the public sector and public services. Conservative party ideology led to what at the time was purported to be a 'modernising' approach to education. This included HE,

whereby school pupils were to be educated in preparation for working in an enterprise economy. Importantly, in order to exert this neoliberal agenda in terms of HE (where markets did not exist, by any means, including "state action") such markets had to be created, as indeed they have been.

The conservative government led by John Major continued Thatcherite neoliberal policies as seen in the Higher Education a New Framework command paper, which stated that:

> "…it is in the interests of universities, polytechnics and colleges to continue to look for increased levels of funding from private sources in particular from industry and commerce, from benefactors and alumni, and from present sources of fee income [...] The Government accepts that public funds will remain the main source of income for funding the projected expansion of student numbers" (Department of Education and Science 1991, p.10)

Thus, the seeds of the marketisation and commodification of education, in particular the neoliberal HE sector, have being sown and watered.

1.1.2 Embedding of the neoliberal agenda in higher education

For context, I provide a brief discussion of the historical background of the embedding of the neoliberal agenda in higher education. Hall et al. (1978), identified the 'moral panic' and so-called crisis about 'mugging', (a street crime attributed to moral breakdown in society) fomented by the media, initially in America, soon after in the UK. Politicians, the judiciary, social commentators, and self-appointed moral guardians, including mass media, claimed a rise in violent street crime. Whilst not the subject of my thesis, Hall et al.'s (1978) analysis of the probable causes of criminality amongst working class youth draws direct links to social and environmental conditions, including class, poverty, and education, and I argue HE. Student unrest in North America and Europe was attributed to small numbers of revolutionary minorities, as Hall et al. (1978, p.251) note:

> "Mr Short Labour Secretary for Education [1968-70], for example, explained, in a convincing statistical display to the House of Commons, that the 'LSE has about 3,000 students. The disruptions which have taken place involve about probably 300 of these [....] The

> real perpetrators are a tiny handful of people - fewer than one-half of 1 per cent [...] are the thugs of the academic world".

Interestingly, the student protests discussed in section 1.3.2 drew similar attention from those same agencies discussed by Hall et al. (1978). I note that the debate in America and Europe occurred at the same time that Mezirow (1978a, b) was theorising TL.

I refer to the events of the late 60s and early 70s as a point of reference for what I contend were early attentions paid by the state to an "education revolution" and rise in social mobility. These events have been attributed to wider access to university for those from social backgrounds who had previously been excluded from access HE. However, that this is the reality is of some debate.

At a time when Mezirow (1978a, b) had identified the emancipatory, consciousness-raising possibilities of university education, the state, as noted by Hall et al. (1978) became acutely aware of a counterculture that challenged hegemonic ideologies. Gillard (2011) refers to this period of education as "progressivism under attack". Sites of education were being held as sources of societal ill and unrest, as Giroux (Giroux and Sardoč 2018) state:

> "From the 1960s on the conservatives, especially the neoliberal right, has waged a war on education in order to rid it of its potential role as a democratic public sphere".

As Chitty (1992) notes, so began the agenda to impose [neo] liberal market forces on the English education system. The impact of these attacks on HE, as a potential site of emancipatory, consciousness-raising education has been significant. This is discussed in the following section which seeks to explain the impact of a number of policies.

1.1.3 The impact of neoliberalism on HE policy [across the sector]

In England, 'New' or post 92 universities replaced former polytechnics, and in a number of instances, former colleges or Institutes of Education and Arts were granted university status under the Further and Higher Education Act

1992. The claimed aim of establishing post 92 universities was to address what was perceived to be a binary difference in terms of qualities and opportunities for students who attended polytechnics from those who attended universities. Boliver (2015) notes however that soon after the introduction of post 92 universities, attempts to evaluate UK universities led to systems of rankings, that although recognised as being crude, continue to be perceived as measurements of the 'quality' of teaching and research undertaken across the sector. Boliver (2015, p.4) points to the first of, now numerous, university rankings:

> "…published by The Times newspaper in a book entitled The Times Good Universities Guide (The Times, 1993). The word "Good" in the title alluded to the book's premise that "it had become obvious that all universities were by no means equal in the new higher education world" created by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (The Times, 1993: 7)."

In the neoliberal context of HE, institutions 'live or die' by these rankings. Boliver's (2015) analysis of 127 higher education institutions measured: Research activity; Economic resources; Academic selectivity and Socioeconomic student mix. Boliver (2015) proposed that rather than a simple binary distinction between polytechnics and universities, there now exists a distinction between 'new' and 'old universities. These distinctions are categorised as comprising four clusters: 1. the 'elites,' Oxford and Cambridge (also part of the Russell group), 2. the remaining Russell group universities, numbering 22, 3. a middle tier cluster and 4. a bottom tier of 19 new universities:

> "…whose continued existence is most imperilled by the growing privatisation and marketization of the UK higher education system" (Boliver 2015, p.16).

Boliver (2015) could not have predicted the introduction of The Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) (2017), which opened the door to privatised, deregulated HE. The act allows private for-profit companies to use the university title (previous legislation required a waiting period of four years), award degrees, and charge unregulated fees: importantly I contend

for TL, they will not be required to establish or fund student unions. This would significantly reduce students' rights and freedoms in terms of challenging neoliberalism in HE.

Academic freedom, as understood by publicly funded HE will not be protected, and for-profit private universities will be able to close unprofitable courses with no liabilities to either staff or students. This is the neoliberal project writ large (Harvey 2007; Hall 1978, 2011). As a result, Morgan (2017) described the act as "the most significant sector legislation in 25 years to further a market approach in England." At the time of writing, it is too soon to know how significantly the HERA (2017) will impact on pre 92 universities, although Holmwood (2017) argued that this legislation is the culmination of the "privatisation of HE in England".

1.1.4 The impact of neoliberal management of universities: governance and marketing

Viewing the management, governance, and marketing of universities in England through the lens of my UCU roles and 'insider' knowledge as an activist, I have identified that in recent years a number of universities have faced significant financial difficulties due in large part to financial mismanagement, and failures in governance. This has been recognised by the Office for Students (OfS), and includes the University of Chichester, the University of Sunderland, Buckinghamshire New University, the University of Reading, and the University of Southampton (Bryant 2019) and others yet to be publicly identified. Interestingly, neither the University of Reading nor University of Southampton fell into Boliver's (2015) 'at risk' cluster. This is not to say that any of the highly marketed and commodified universities are not at risk, as Bryant (2019) observes:

> "…higher education isn't close to being a functioning market. It really shouldn't have been compelled to become one in the first place".

Boliver (2015) was in many ways prescient as the marketisation - whether or not a functioning one (Bryant 2019) - has led to a crisis whereby the global

pandemic of Covid 19 has exposed the combined weaknesses of university governance, financial mismanagement and incompetence, and the funding model itself.

1.1.5 Governance

Bryant's (2019) observation is brought into stark relief by the resignations of Vice Chancellors implicated in what the OfS obliquely refers to as "governance irregularities". In three notable cases, Vice Chancellors resigned in controversial circumstances: Swansea University's Vice Chancellor Professor Richard Davies; Liverpool John Moores University Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Weatherill and Vice Chancellor of De Montfort University, Professor Dominic Shellard. In Professor Shellard's case, his resignation was prompted by an investigation by the OfS, leading to what Wright (2019) has described as "a decision that has raised fresh questions about higher education governance standards".

Arguably, governance irregularities arise more readily within a neoliberal landscape of HE due to the way universities are operated: that is to say, as businesses rather than places of research and of education. This is attributed, for example, to recent exposures of excessive pay rises for Vice Chancellors suggesting that there are various ways in which universities are spending income to the detrimental financial health and reputation of their organisation (Adams 2019). Attention has been paid by student unions to the remuneration of Vice Chancellors, including that of Durham University. In an interview with Chakraborti (2018), Megan Croll, Durham's student union president, stated that she raised the issue of Professor Corbridge's membership of the institutions remuneration committee from which he subsequently resigned. Megan Croll added that she aimed to fill:

> "…this space on the committee with a student representative to make sure that the students who pay so much to attend this University have a say about how much the VC and other senior staff are paid" (Chakraborti 2018).

This matters, because increasingly in the neoliberal environment, where students understand that they are paying for ‘services’, they expect what they perceive to be ‘value for money’. In section 1.1.5 I discuss what that might mean in terms of marketing HE.

A University College Union (UCU) (2017) report on the pay and expenses of university Vice Chancellors makes note of the University of Southampton £697,000 Vice Chancellors' pay, as well as the University of Bath whose total remuneration was £451,000. According to the report, two other vice chancellors were awarded pay increases of more than 20% and fifty-four vice-chancellors were paid in excess of £300,000 (UCU) (2017). University Vice Chancellors’ arguably excessive pay is, I contend, an unavoidable and perhaps expected consequence of the marketisation of HE because it is a landscape where governance is done for, by, and on behalf of the senior managers whom governors reward. In the contemporary landscape of 2020, and the apparent crisis in HE, the wholescale restructuring of many institutions, both elite Russel Groups and post 92 institutions, has led a widespread questioning of these arguably exorbitant salaries. As university senior managers are implementing aggressive cuts in workforces and pay, their own positions are under increasing scrutiny.

The University of Reading, Imperial College London, the University of Liverpool, SOAS, the University of Southampton and the University of Sheffield all pre 92 institutions, the so-called elite – and Roehampton University (post 92) are facing unprecedented cuts (at the time of writing, July 2020). The motion passed at UCU’s congress (discussed in section 1) has been pivotal in efforts to challenge attacks on higher education. The University of Reading proposed plans to dismiss and re-employ all staff on significantly reduced terms has sent the sector into chaos. It is possible, I argue, that in the midst of this push back against the neoliberal agenda, educators may look to their own practice and praxis, especially as increasingly, postgraduate students who teach, and postdoctoral researchers

have been involved in defending jobs and HE. By which I mean with the aim of embedding TL in their curriculum.

1.1.6 The marketing of HE

Most universities now publish information about the ways in which what they typically refer to as 'how our income' is spent, although rarely is this done so in detail, and such information as is available is often outdated. Universities UK (2019) has published information about university funding and expenditure for the years 2014 to 15. Again, the figures are macro and there is no micro-detail. Such information, as is available, seems to suggest that just over half of university income is spent on teaching and research (55.7% of £26 billion) (Universities UK 2019). For students, this figure often seems to be inexplicably low, and in response, various government ministers including Jo Johnson have "warned against the "endless upwards ratchet" of vice-chancellors' pay" in response to student [as customer] criticisms (Busby 2018). Needless to say, these criticisms have had little impact on the pay of vice chancellors and senior university management staff.

No mention of surplus or reserve funds is made on the Universities UK (2019) website page which explains how income is spent. However according to available data UK, universities were operating a surplus of £2 billion with total reserves of £44.27 billion for the year 20016/17 (Higher Education Statistics Agency 2018). Neither is there mention made in most published data about universities' marketing budgets. Whilst it is not possible to retrieve this data (most institutions argue commercial sensitivity), David Farrow, Aston university's director of marketing has stated that the "average marketing budget British universities was currently around 4-5%" (Mathews 2012).

In the same article Matthews (2012) cites deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Exeter, Mark Overton, as stating that marketing budgets "were a consequence of the regime that introduced student fees" and claimed that universities were "behaving as sensible economic actors". This has

transpired to be singularly not the case. Taylor (Taylor and Cranton 2012) cites one Deputy Vice Chancellor who stated that universities "would soon be spending more than 20% of their revenue on marketing". Recent exposures of university governance irregularities suggest that there are other ways in which universities are spending income to the detriment of the financial health and reputation of the organisation (Adams 2019). This has been clearly evidenced in the 2020 'crisis' in HE. I argue that in a neoliberal environment this excess of spending on marketing inevitably militates against TL, as often practitioners are labouring in a field of highly marketed and commodified HE.

1.1.7 Commodified learning: the neoliberal agenda

The neoliberal project has led to the creation of neoliberal universities whose focus is on generating resources and income, principally through student fees and other profit-making ventures (Melrose 2018). This is discussed further in section 1.4.1. Increasingly, the post 92 neoliberal university has become a highly commodified site of teaching, learning and arguably to a lesser extent, research (as the competition for research income is geared toward pre 92 universities), positioning students as consumers/customers requiring 'service excellence' by staff, who labour in highly managerial conditions (Canaan et al. 2013). In what was to become known as the Jarratt report (Shock 1985), a committee of university Vice Chancellors and Principals examining the efficiency of the management structures and systems of universities recommended, as well they might - in terms of university governance - that a Vice Chancellor should be designated as Chief Executive Officer with responsibility for the management of the institution.

There is a lineage here, whereby the neoliberal agenda to privatise HE in England can be plotted from 1985 through to the introduction of the Higher Education and Research Act (2017). Three decades later, Holmwood (2017) identifies that the complicity of senior university leaders is key to the privatisation of HE.

In Chapter 4, in order to support understandings of the complexities and challenges facing HE in England, I develop a 'DNA' double helix model as a metaphorical illustration of the underpinning foundations and 'building blocks' of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle publicly funded education. The model is intended to be a signifier of the 'embeddedness' of neoliberal ideology in the English political landscape, in particular the public sector and especially education. It will also allow understandings of the ways in which HE in England has been corporatised.

1.1.8 The Corporatisation of HE

Charting the increasing corporatisation of HE in the UK, Blass (2005) noted that Tony Blair's New Labour government's agenda for education sought to meet a purported gap in the needs of employer organisations which should be filled by educational institutions, in other words a 'demand and supply' model. This was to be achieved through the expansion of universities, which would compete for students in a globalised sector, offering highly marketised e-learning, and postgraduate courses including Continued Professional Development (CPD) and Masters in Business Administration, to meet the perceived needs of employers. As Savigny (2013, p.434) observes, whilst purporting to challenge the elitism of HE, it was the Blair government which "introduced the first tranche of student fees in the form of top up fees". Guilbault (2016, p.133), firmly positions students as customers and argues that:

> "…in the specific case of HE, market (and customer) orientation is an important issue... [and that] HEIs should include a market orientation in the strategic planning".

In this way, as well as creating an HE environment where it was 'implicitly' and 'explicitly' contended that students should be perceived, positioned, and responded to as consumers, their education experience was premised on the needs of employers: before pedagogical or emancipatory purposes. In a neoliberal landscape this is to be expected, and Guilbault (2016) is not alone

in arguing the case for 'student as customer'. After all this, is the premise on which the neoliberal university is based.

No area of the English HE landscape has escaped the influences and impacts of neoliberalism. For the purpose of this study, my focus is on a humanities faculty within a post 92 University, characterised by institutional managerialism, reliant on bureaucratic processes and mechanisms. This managerialist approach, to all intents and purposes, controls the activities of academics and students based on the principles of neoliberalism. Staff and students are subject to constant restructuring of the organisation, within its departments, and programmes, with the proposed aim of meeting efficiencies and targets (McCaig 2018), which Asher (2015) describes as being:

> "…deeply authoritarian and hierarchical, commodify[ing] relations across the university, taking precedence over values of collaboration and co-operation in the interests of communities and society".

I turn here briefly to the Russell Group of universities, formed in response to the establishment of post 92 universities, which are widely perceived to be 'higher status' institutions (Boliver 2015). This group of universities have employed in their marketing efforts the language of neoliberal HE. Leyva's (2018) analysis of the use of neoliberal language in Russell Group universities' published education strategies supports my contention that the English HE landscape is widely and heavily influenced and impacted by neoliberalism. Leyva (2018) found that Russell Group universities were employing neoliberal language that denotes and/or connotes employability, value for money, performativity (mechanisms through which to measure institutional and staff performance e.g., the NSS, REF and TEF) and:

> "…applied research...which has immediate commercial or industrial utility…policy 'impact; and/or some other potential to generate income from interested private, governmental, or third-sector organisations" (Leyva 2018, p.84).

I argue that these terms can be directly related to perceptions and experiences of working and studying in a neoliberal university. Leyva (2018, p.92) further contends that:

> "…the Russell Group's current and long-term plans for pedagogy and research strongly mirror the language of the neoliberal policy agenda for higher education and have largely abandoned the academy's historically humanist and enlightenment principles and commitments".

Seemingly, these institutions are being swept up in the march towards the dismantling of public sector HE.

1.2 Neoliberalism at institutional level: the neoliberal university

It is important here to consider neoliberalism at both national sector and institutional level in framing an understanding of the issues. The impact of neoliberalism has been felt for many years, although arguably more keenly since the late 1990s. Certainly the current climate has led to significant changes in the ways in which those engaged in education and research must dance to a neoliberal tune. Through the agency of HEFCE (on behalf of the then funding bodies in UK HE), Performance Indicators (PI) were introduced in 1999, as metrics-based indicators of 'performance' in the higher education sector (Pollard et al. 2013). It was explicitly stated that PIs would not be employed to create "league tables" by which a university's performance could be rated. However, history tells us that these have become one of the many neoliberal measures which internally and externally have now morphed into Key Performance Indicators which are deployed for a variety of neoliberal management purposes.

In their first iteration these indicators were described as:

- Access to higher education.
- Non-completion rates for students.
- Outcomes for learning and teaching in universities and colleges.
- Research output.
- Employment of graduates.

Later redefined as:

- Widening participation indicators.
- Non-continuation rates (including projected outcomes).
- Module completion rates.
- Research output.
- Employment of graduates.

Note the subtle shift of language here, where access to education is now referred to as indication of widening participation, the inclusion of 'projected outcomes' and the change from outcomes for learning to module completion rates. It is arguable that any of this data is useful, as discussed later. Universities now set their own Key Performance Indicators, as well as publish data for the PIs, and as with other measures, they are used as tools of management. I mention this to place in context the following discussion about my experience of the neoliberal ideological shifts in measurements of success in HE. For me as a researcher, investigating the neoliberal agenda in higher education, a union activist, and an educator in a post 92 media faculty - where arguably both staff and students are more critically and politically engaged - these tools of management, which I refer to as instruments of torture, are being challenged, albeit be with to-date, little success.

1.2.1 Instruments of ~~torture~~ measurement

When I began working in higher education, measures of success were for the most part spoken and thought about in terms of the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of labouring in academia. These included the satisfaction of seeing a struggling student develop and thrive, and personal delight amongst colleagues when students received awards both from internal and external bodies for their successes and excellent work. Success and 'excellence', much talked of concepts in HE, are now ostensibly evaluated through mechanistic measures such as the National Student Satisfaction Survey (NSS), introduced in 2004 (Shah et al. 2017), the Research Excellence Framework (REF) (Kelly and McNicoll 2011, and to an extent the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (Office for Students 2019): note the use of neoliberal language in these instruments of measure, 'satisfaction' and

'excellence'. Each of these measures purports to offer stakeholders in HE, such as prospective students, education partners, research funding bodies, and government funding bodies, information on which to base judgements about the success of a particular HE institution.

Interestingly, McCaig (2018, p. 20) challenges the notion, that the TEF is neoliberal instrument, positing that it:

> "Potentially threatens the existing market hierarchy of institutions (as exemplified by league tables) by changing the definition of what constitutes excellence. Can this be said to challenge the notion of a neoliberal system in which the state holds all the regulatory cards, or does it merely represent a shuffling of levers?"

I argue that McCaig's question as to whether the TEF is specifically a neoliberal instrument, is already asked and answered, as these mechanistic measures are indeed part and parcel of the neoliberal landscape in HE in England.

These metrics were introduced against the background of rapid and widespread expansion of HE institutions, discussed previously, and attributable in large part to the introduction of post 92 universities and the Dearing report (1996).

1.2.2 The National Student Survey

At this point, it is useful to briefly review the key metrics that most impact on academics working in HE. The National Student Survey (NSS) was introduced as part of an agenda to measure student 'satisfaction', although it was positioned as a means through which students could assess and evaluate university degree courses to which they were considering applying. The methodology for the survey has been widely critiqued as being fundamentally flawed, failing to meet its stated objectives of providing data to allow universities to improve the quality of teaching and learning as Shah et al. 2017) observe.

NSS scores are employed as torturous performance management tools, in some instances used to discipline and make staff redundant. Moreover, as Dawes (2011) argues, this "audit culture" encourages students to measure the quality of their teaching by the number of contact hours:

> "…regardless of content, and […] hours which students […] are expected to spend reading, writing, researching, thinking, engaging et cetera in "their own time".

See also the discussion regarding the TEF in section 1.2.4. Widespread criticism of the NSS, led to a recommended boycott by the National Union of Students (NUS) (as a result of the introduction of the TEF) (Buckley-Irvine 2017). Nevertheless, Shah et al.'s (2017) critique of the impact of the NSS notes that it is now widely used as a 'quality assurance' measure. Extensive institutional efforts to improve NSS scores strongly suggest that it is perceived to be an important indicator to the potential student 'customer', of the level of satisfaction they can expect to enjoy studying a particular course at a specific university. It is interesting that Buckley-Irvine (2017), discussing the 2017 boycott of the NSS by 25 universities, argues that it was advantageous for those institutions that did meet the participation threshold, for example:

> "Bristol, which has performed poorly in the NSS in recent years, [the boycott] has given some cover from the public embarrassment which accompanies poor results".

It is against this backdrop of the quantification and pseudo-scientific measurement of education that I contend the neoliberal agenda is being relentlessly pursued.

1.2.3 The Research Excellence Framework

The first Research Excellence Framework (REF) (2014), which replaced the Research Evaluation Exercise, is not without criticism. Notwithstanding the perhaps obvious critique that much of the research undertaken in HE is not quantifiable, or measurable, the REF, was originally intended to "ensure that research funds were well spent" (Balbuena 2018, p.2), yet has become a

burdensome and excessively costly exercise for universities, both financially and in terms of time spent preparing submissions.

Arnold et al. (2018) acknowledge that the 2014 REF exercise has subsequently been used as a management tool, with reported detrimental impacts on academics, who are deemed not to be 'REFable', disproportionately affecting younger and female academics. These detriments include loss of progression, disciplinary action and in some cases dismissal. Somewhat presciently, in the context of the contention of perceptions that teaching had been downgraded as a lesser academic pursuit, Arnold et al. (2018, p.6) noted that:

> "The fact that the REF's focus on research has not been counterbalanced by a similar system for teaching has changed UK academics' understanding of their role".

Not in a good way.

O'Regan and Gray (2018, p.538) argue compellingly that the REF is a neoliberal mechanism, designed to enforce competition in HE, instancing the use of neoliberal language such as "excellence… accountability and information… driving competition… quality and commercialization" throughout REF documentation. In their analysis of the REF, O'Regan and Gray (2018) found that it has led to what they refer to as an "ideological narrowing" of research activities, to the point where the work of academics undertaking contemplative research, which is not empirically measurable (for example those traditionally situated in Arts and Humanities faculties) has been discounted, in terms of their 'REFability'. A disconnect was noted between the rhetoric of the REF and its stated aims, which they refer to as a "hypocrisy". This has major implications for research such as that which I am engaged in. Funding is increasingly ring-fenced for those activities most likely to enhance an institution's REF rating. Research challenging hegemonies and orthodoxies is unlikely to fall into those categories which enhance REF ratings.

Arnold et al.'s (2018) extensive and thorough review of the REF 2014 concluded that current research data, "its outputs and impacts in the UK", cannot provide meaningful information on which to judge or evaluate these important activities. This leads me to O'Regan and Gray's (2018, p.546) proposition for the "the reconstitution of the university as a public good rather than a private one". They go on to state that this can be achieved through the publishing of research which critiques and challenges neoliberalism in HE, through:

> "…the free and open pursuit of knowledge and learning, and by 'the elaboration and defence of the public interest" (O'Regan and Gray 2018, p.546).

The 'measurement' of research is not a new concept and has been advocated since the early 70s, as Martin (2011) contends. I concur, arguing that the rise of neoliberalism in HE, publicly funded research has been subjected to 'market' led mechanisms of accountability. Problematically, as previously discussed, there is scant evidence that the REF produces useful measurements. Arnold et al. (2018) and O'Regan and Gray (2018) argue the contrary is more likely the case, with REF exercises costing HEA institutions dearly. This is not to mention the deleterious effect on academics labouring in mock and actual REF exercises, especially those whose work is not 'valued' according to the REF metrics against which the institutions that they work accordingly value them.

1.2.4 The Teaching Excellence Framework

The TEF, begat it could be argued, by the REF, as Arnold et al. (2018) obliquely predicted, has similarly been subjected to criticism for its failure to measure that which it is intended to do: that is to say the 'quality' of teaching. As previously noted, the TEF aims to concretely commodify HE, as explicitly stated by the Office for Students (2018). Bishop (2019) argues that the TEF is an ill-conceived ideological response to a market-driven National Student [satisfaction] Survey which itself is methodologically flawed (Shah et al. 2017) and that it damages students' engagement with critical thinking and severely limits the development of their intellectual skills. Moreover, the TEF

has had significant negative impacts on academics. As Hayes (2018) asserts, the TEF requires HEIs to evidence and measure levels of 'student engagement' without offering a useful definition of what this means. The TEF, for example, refers to 'optimum' and 'appropriate' levels of 'contact time', offering no acknowledgment of the labour required by lecturers to fulfil such contact time. In turn, the TEF has led to HEIs issuing policies regarding required 'office hours', contact time, including lectures, seminars, and tutorials, that bear a scant relationship with the reality of the labour academics undertake.

Helpfully, Bishop (2019) points to the Royal Statistical Society's (2018) report to the Department for Education's consultation on the introduction of the TEF. The report highlights the serious flaws found in the consultation process, and more latterly argues that the TEF exercise in benchmarking universities is flawed, and that not only can the TEF be 'gamed', as has been identified with the REF, there is indeed no evidence that students make poor choices in selecting university courses. The Royal Statistical Society (2018) states that there is an absence of evidence of any cost benefit analysis to indicate that the TEF is "adding very high-quality subject assessment", with an explicit criticism that the TEF is itself not 'high quality', and as is the case with the REF, the costs of the assessments are poor value.

The seemingly connected NSS, REF and TEF fail to provide a framework within which the work undertaken in universities can be evaluated or valued. On a positive and constructive note, Kelly and McNicol (2011, p.15) have proposed a holistic university valuation framework that:

> "Uses fundamentally sound methodology…cover[ing] all of the activities in which universities engage …capable of application and interpretation at different levels of analysis… (macro), sector-level (mezzo), individual institutional level (micro)…empirically tested at these levels, with sufficient available input data to enable rigorous analysis and inferences to be drawn".

Kelly and McNicol (2011) went on to argue that qualitative analysis could be added to "'both tell a story' AND back it up with hard numbers." The albeit

limited research I have undertaken into the mechanics and instrumental measures discussed concurs with Kelly and McNicol's (2011) contention that this has yet to be achieved.

1.3 Neoliberalism and the student experience, being a student in neoliberal HE

The Browne (2010) report claimed to make the case for greater choice for HE students. Referenced throughout the report is the notion that the introduction of, and subsequent increasing of, student fees would lead to an expanded sustainable 'high quality' education system, allowing access to all. The report also states that:

> "The relationship between the student and the institution will be at the heart of the system; and institutions will have more autonomy than today to respond to what students want" (Browne 2010, p.27).

This statement soon became synonymous with the consumption of education, positioning the student as a customer. Guilbault (2016), in her call to reframe the debate on 'students as customers' (acknowledging that this is a contested notion), claims that not only must students be treated to 'service excellence' so as to raise their levels of 'satisfaction', HE institutions should develop a marketing culture, and customer 'mind set', adding that all staff working in those institutions should think of students as important 'customers'. Guilbault's (2016) principal argument is that increasingly, higher education is a highly marketable global commodity. High fee-paying students, for which the competition is ever more fierce, are attracted to universities that brand their institutions as offering 'service excellence' and 'satisfaction'.

Interestingly, Scullion and Molesworth (2016) in reviewing amongst others, Guilbault (2016), note there exists resistance to the marketisation of HE, and perceptions and treatment of students as customers amongst those academics who object to managerialist processes. However, they add that:

> "…others, and perhaps the majority of those new to the system accept - however reluctantly - that the university needs to attract students or jobs are at risk" (Scullion and Molesworth, 2016, p.129).

I find this an interesting comment, as it appears to argue that those involved in teaching and researching in HE, by which I mean both students and academics, must accept, albeit possibly pragmatically, the neoliberal landscape within which they work and study. I concur with Canaan and Shumar's (2008, p.15) contention that:

> "…the discourse of access entails commodification as universities seek to paper their bottom line by bringing in more tuition paying students who substitute income generation for state funding (as well as by encouraging academic income generation through winning grants and doing consulting and other work with the private sector)".

Disturbingly, the acceptance of neoliberal language in the university workplace is for the most part unchallenged. Universities are now marketed and branded in competition with 'benchmarked' competitors in ways that belie notions of public service education. This lack of challenge is deeply problematic, as Meek (2015) argues, public service education is a fundamental necessity of universal networks, the governance of which should be subject to democratic accountability.

1.3.1 Linking the Marketisation and Commodification of Higher Education

Canaan and Shumar (2008, p.4) define marketization and commodification (in the context of higher education):

> "…as interrelated concepts: Marketisation refers to the process by which the state uses market principles and disciplinary apparatuses to create greater efficiencies in non-market institutions. Commodification, on the other hand, refers to the process of turning social goods and processes into commodities".

The marketisation and deregulation of HE in England has been the subject of much discourse amongst scholars including Hall (1978, 2011), Harvey (2007), Collini (2010, 2012, 2017), Hall and Massey (2010), Freedman and Bailey (2011), McGettigan (2013, 2015), Bowen et al. (2014), Nind (2014),

Holmwood et al. (2016), Holmwood (2017), Giroux and Sardoč (2018). Of course, this is not an exhaustive list because the debate continues, with ever-increasing pessimistic predictions for widely accessible, publicly funded tertiary education). Whilst the Labour Party Manifesto (Labour Party 2017) stated that university education would be free, and maintenance grants reintroduced, at the time of writing with a Conservative government in power, undergraduate students continue to be charged fees and accrue debts, which according to the government's own statistics can amount to £32,000 (Bolton 2019).

This is a somewhat contested claim. For example, the campaigning organisation Save the Student (2019) has an online student loan calculator which reckons that a student embarking on a three-year degree course in 2018 who takes three years of tuition fees and maintenance loans will accrue a debt of £57,375 on graduating. This will take approximately 24 years to repay at an average payment of £227 pcm, paying in total, at the time of calculating, £66,203 (February 2019).

Save the Student (2019) campaigns for better education in schools on personal finance, guidance on student finances, banking, accommodation, and other personal matters. Although established and run by relatively recent graduates, with presumably student debts of their own, the organisation does not lobby for an end to student fees.

Whether or not an unintended consequence of the commodification of HE, the Competition and Market Authority's (2015) consumer advice to students, regarding UK legal frameworks protecting consumers' rights, encourages students to adopt a consumerist approach to education. One Oxford graduate recently lost an attempt to sue the University of Oxford for their failure to achieve a first-class degree, arguing that they had received "negligently inadequate teaching" (Mortimer 2018). This is a phrase indicative of the notion that the 'student customer' is entitled to an education concomitant with the notion of graduate employability.

As Dawes (2011) so saliently argues, putting consumers "at the heart of the system" is not the same as putting students at the heart of the system, as was claimed by Browne (2010).

> "Consumer sovereignty substitutes market relations for the whole variety of social relations […] reducing the "well-informed student" to an economically calculating individual with access to league tables which quantify the "student/consumer satisfaction" of a hierarchized list of institutions, rather than an actively and intellectually engaged "student" of their chosen discipline" (Dawes 2011).

1.3.2 The impact of marketisation on the student

Reflecting on my own experiences of working in HE for the past 16 years, I am struck by the changing relationships and discourse between academics and students. During the early years of my career, my sense was that students highly valued higher education for what it was, an opportunity to learn and share knowledge with academics who were subject experts. For the most part, students I worked with were keen to broaden their knowledge about the subject they were studying, and the wider world. Discussions about the financial costs of their studies mostly centred around those students from low income backgrounds, and the small numbers who were reliant on student grants and loans. Many of these students worked at least part if not full-time and were financially disadvantaged. In my experience very few instances of these discussions led to a consumer response to participation in higher education.

1.3.2.1 Enter the Office for Students

The Office for Students (OfS), which replaced the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) has established a clear line regarding its purpose and function. According to Boyd (2018) the raison d'être of the OfS is the encouragement and support of competition in the HE "marketplace". Employing business and marketing language, in particular neoliberal language, rather than fore-fronting pedagogy, research and other common principles of universal education, the OfS website focuses on "value for money", "services and opportunities

offered…by providers", "information on the destinations and earnings of graduates", and "Student funding, finance and value for money". The university 'brand' has become intrinsically linked with brand reputation, indeed Jenkins and Wolf (2016) noted the increasing reliance on universities for student fees claim to have evaluated an:

> "…impact of reputation and 'brand' on university finances, and specifically on the fee income an institution attracts."

According to Jenkins and Wolf (2016) the most attractive students are international students, as universities are able "to charge them fees that are as high as possible". It is important to note that Jenkins and Wolf's (2016) assertions regarding the demographics, and indeed nationalities to which and to whom UK universities should target their recruitment activities, pre-dates the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. As yet, the impact on international student recruitment is unknown: potentially due to what has been described as a "hostile environment" for international students in the UK (Geidel et al. 2018). Nevertheless, Jenkins and Wolf's (2016) core contention is aligned with the increasing branding and marketisation of HE.

Interestingly, the OfS website offers no obvious links to data and information about the real cost of student loans and student funding, nor any mention of the privatisation of student loan England which currently charges RPI plus 3% (6.1%). On graduating, loans will begin to be repaid at RPI (3.1%) for those earning more than £21,000 per annum (Student Loans Company 2018). The cost of student loans to postgraduate students is similar, for the academic year 2017/18, borrowers in England and Wales will pay RPI + 3% (6.1%). Arguably these are abstract notions for undergraduate students who do not typically have a grasp of the way in which compound interest works. However, most are aware that they will be accruing in the region of £50,000 of debt whilst studying for a three-year degree. According to Belfield et al. (2017):

> "…the combination of high fees and large [means tested] maintenance loans contributes to English graduates having the highest student debts in the developed world".

I argue that this situation has become deeply problematic for WP students. Gunn (2017) claims that almost two thirds of students will never repay their student loans. This level of indebtedness is a significant barrier for students from lower socio-economic group backgrounds who traditionally abjure debt at this scale. The likelihood that many billions of unpaid debt will sit in a private loan book is slim. It is probable that at some point the debt will be transferred to the Treasury, and as a consequence taxpayers will foot the bill for a highly profitable loan company which will 'pass off' its debt. In this landscape, it is difficult to discern how the commodification and marketisation of HE benefits students or academics, the wider academic community, or society.

Recent history tells us that successive governments have entrenched the concept of student-financed higher education. Interestingly, there is a legacy from the student protests in England in 2010, as leading student activists have gone on to organise and campaign around student and education issues. Clare Solomon (Counterfire 2019), one of the leaders of what was termed the 'student rebellion' and an occupier of Millbank (the Tory headquarters) during the November 2010 demonstration, continues to campaign for changes in HE.

Michael Chessum, who also led the student protests is now a writer and campaigner, Labour Party Momentum activist, and pro-European Union activist (Open Democracy 2019. Ashok Kumar, who was arrested for participating in student protests and later compensated, is now a lecturer in International Political Economy at Birkbeck University (Birkbeck University 2019) and Vicki Baars works on campaigns on sexual harassment in HE (Goldsmiths University 2017). In this sense it can be said that those former HE activist students' experiences were transformative, as conceptualised by Mezirow. It is my contention that these former student activists experienced Mezirow's 10 phases of transformative learning, their disorienting

experience(s) being their student activism, and in their final phase, their reintegration into their lives based on these experiences. Concomitantly, this marketisation of HE has led to identifiable shifts and the ways in which these academics now pursue their pedagogic practice.

1.4 The impact of the neoliberal agenda on university staff and their education practice.

Reflecting on the inspiration for this study, I thought about my experiences as an academic working in the field of Learning Development, and how my professional practice has changed in recent years. My initial proposals for the doctorate focused on ways in which academic skills could be embedded in curricula. I spent the first 6 to 9 months of my doctorate looking at research around the pedagogy of embedding learning development against a background of reflecting on the perceived 'importance' of Learning Development as an academic discipline. In turn, this led me to explore research about working in the HE sector, which I began to understand more specifically in relation to my own experience as an academic labouring in a post 92 university. My early years as an academic were spent predominantly teaching, whilst undertaking programmes to develop my own career, which included a PG Cert in Education, and various institutional staff development programmes such as the Education Excellence Programme and becoming a Learning and Teaching Fellow, predominantly focused on education and pedagogy.

During my second year working as an academic I was asked to lead a Personal Development Programme (PDP) unit, with a strong focus on employability. The personal development programme initiative, driven and supported by The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2009), was an intrinsic part the government's agenda to drive individualistic approaches to participation in HE. Rafts of guidance and policy documents were provided by the QAA so that universities could embed this 'concept' within their policies and procedures. It could be said to be yet another gift from the Dearing (1996) report, and was intended amongst other things, to capture

data about students as part of a range of metrics purportedly used to measure 'quality' in teaching in HE. PDP also fitted the neoliberal e-learning proposition, promoted by New Labour in their HE agenda.

1.4.1 The employability agenda

I found leading this unit particularly challenging as I do not hold the belief that the pursuit of higher education, in and of itself, should be premised on or driven by employability. That said, I began to notice increasing concerns among students about the cost of a degree education just after the so-called variable maximum £3000 fee was introduced in 2006, enacted by a New Labour government in 2004 (Higher Education Act 2004). This was an increase on the £1000 fee introduced six years previously (Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998), which almost all HE intuitions charged to the full (Universities UK 2007).

My experience was that the students I taught - in a post 92 university with a relatively high level of WP student intake - felt somewhat aggrieved about being charged for what had for previous generations been a free education. A sentiment I wholly supported. At more or less the same time, I became actively involved in the University and College Union (UCU) which represents Further and Higher Education teachers, academics, and related academic staff. My university branch successfully challenged proposed redundancies, working in hand with the university's Student Union. This was the beginning of my own realisation of the neoliberal agenda in HE and the managerial conditions in which I was working. And the possibilities of student activism.

My second alignment of realisation occurred when I began thinking about my proposal for an earlier iteration of my doctoral study, and at the same time became involved in the 2010 student protests against the increase in fees from £3000 to £9000. For a period of time, it seemed possible, through a coalition of UCU in the National Union of students (NUS) for activists to challenge what by then had become an entrenched agenda to dismantle publicly funded education in England. This challenge was never to

materialise as the government and its agents moved to quash student protest.

1.4.2 Teaching and learning in the neoliberal university

The ideological drive toward teaching *for* employability *rather than* TL education and learning is of concern to academics labouring in post 92 universities, particularly those working in fields of arts, humanities, and social sciences. Hallward (2011, p.36), with reference to the introduction of £9000 fees, stated that it would:

> "…destroy publicly funded further and higher education [and] accelerate the conversion of genuine education into market-driven job training".

Alongside challenges to what *can* be taught, and *how* teaching and research must take place, academic labour is routinely measured and evaluated. The TEF, REF and NSS, albeit deeply flawed instruments of measurement discussed in section 1.2, all impose conditions on academics in pursuit of their daily work. The notion of the university as a site of production is synonymous with the neoliberal language employed throughout policies and procedures within universities.

Of particular concern for educators seeking to engage their students in TL are the strictures imposed on academics by neoliberal management seeking to restrict discussion and debate between academics and students, especially within the classroom, on any matter perceived to encourage student disruption. This was seen starkly during the student protests against education cuts and fees in 2010 when lecturers were instructed by management not to enter into these discourses. Power (2011) refers to an email sent to London universities asking academics to forward any information about possible demonstrations or occupations to the Scotland Yard counter-terrorism unit. Similarly, university neighbourhood police officers visited UCU branch officers, including me, asking for information about potential student protests. It is possible to see how what would typically be expected, or at least understood, to be the prerogative of

students at university - critical discourse, challenges to hegemony, protest, and civil engagement - have become anathema to the marketised commodified university in which lecturers are selling a product and students are expecting a highly promoted ‘excellent service’. The implications for the possibilities for TL are clear, yet in the neoliberal HE context, the challenges are considerable.

1.4.3 Casualisation and precarity

HE academics are facing increasing casualisation, with the rise of what is being described as the ‘precariat’. As Melrose (2018) argues, the function of the neoliberal HE is to generate revenue and undertake “corporate research and development and meet employers’ perceived training needs”. Melrose (2018) discussing students as customers, adds that “staff are either leaders or workers to be directed by the leadership class”.

Interestingly, the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECRA) called for applications to a task force to monitor working conditions in academia as "starting point for policy transformations" (Reifová 2019). The ECRA is raising an alarm about the detrimental working conditions of overloaded, underpaid, precarious, and vulnerable staff working in neoliberal HE subjected to:

> “self-exploitation and self-marketing or pressures to publish unrealistic quantity of research outputs in a short period of time” (Reifová 2019).

Against the backdrop of higher workloads, increased precarity and casualisation, requirements to embed employability in teaching doing in practising TL, is challenging. As discussed in previous sections, instruments by which our work is measured including the NSS, REF and TEF have significant precarious implications for academics as typically they are unable to build the necessary profiles to gain secure employment in HE. I argue challenging neoliberalism in HE through TL it is an absolute necessity, for the benefit of academics, students and to protect the HE sector, which Meek (2015) describes as a necessary publicly funded universal network. The

recent events in HE, attributed to the global pandemic, have shown the failure of the marketisation of HE and the precarious environment for the workforce who have borne the brunt of the neoliberal agenda in HE.

1.5 Discussion and chapter summary

Mezirow (1978a, b) posited his theory of Transformative Learning in an historical and socio-economic context quite different from that of the current landscape of neoliberal HE in England, for those working and studying in post 92 universities. Mezirow's theory was intended to allow the embedding of the development of emancipatory, consciousness-raising, life-changing critical reflection skills in teaching and learning. Although Mezirow developed his theory over the following three decades, for the most part TL was adapted to incorporate and meet critiques by scholars. These scholars were predominantly interested in the transactional 'properties' of TL and the 'process' of transformation, rather than 'what' is transformed and 'how' that transformation occurs. My thesis seeks to explore how TL can occur in a neoliberal post 92 university faculty in England; a landscape markedly different from that in which Mezirow originally worked and conceptualised his theory.

I am seeking to add to understandings of the ways in which the neoliberal agenda (to dismantle public sector HE in England) has been embedded in the teaching and learning experience, through instruments of measurement such as the NSS, REF and TEF. I have discussed issues identified in relation to governance of universities, as these relate both directly and indirectly to student perceptions of HE, not least because they are positioned as customers within a highly commodified and marketised environment. This environment has given rise to student expectations of 'customer service excellence', offering a route, and access to professional employment which previously - it has been posited by successive governments - were unavailable to students from WP backgrounds. The clue is in the nomenclature, widening participation reportedly synonymous with 'widening access'.

Academics labouring in this neoliberal environment must contend with increasing workloads, threats to, and limits on, academic freedom to teach emancipatory, consciousness-raising critical skills. My research suggests that notwithstanding the long-standing, largely successful neoliberal attack on HE, possibilities do exist to challenge the neoliberal agenda. These possibilities are bound in notions of TL, which I reconceptualise as Transformative Education, done in collaboration and partnership with students who have become alert to the neoliberal agenda in which they are engaging in learning.

1.6 Introduction to the thesis

In order to explore and understand the possibilities for transformative learning in an English neoliberal HE institution, this thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2: The Literature Review, in which I identify links between Transformative Learning, as conceptualised by Mezirow (1978 a, b – 2012), Illeris's (2014) Identity theory, and habitus and class (Bourdieu 1983; 1984; 1985; 1998). This chapter establishes the premise of the research method and methodology, and my conceptual framework.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and 'messy'/complex method, detailing: my methodological approach, ontological and epistemological approaches, ethical position, and influences on the choices and decisions I made in challenging methodological orthodoxies. I outline my position and activism both within UCU and as an educator. The chapter further offers a discussion of, and reflection on, the rationale for the approach I adopted in order to meet the principle aim of my study: to explore the impact of neoliberalism in Higher Education (HE) on the TL experiences of undergraduate (UG) students (within one post 92 English university).

Chapter 4: Analysis, Interpretation, and Understandings of the data. In this chapter, I outline the ways in which I have worked with my co-participants and co-researcher to achieve my stated aim of giving voice to

my co-participants. I argue that this adds to the authenticity of my research. I also offer an account of the 'messy' method which we employed in order to reach the interpretations and understandings of the data.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications for Policy, Practice and Further Research. In this chapter, I discuss the ways in which the development of my novel methodological approach took place, explain the applicability of my proposal for Critical Compassionate Communicative Exchanges (CCCE), based on Mason (2014) and Ekman (2015), and I discuss my co-researcher's role in the analysis interpretations and understandings (Chapter 4).

A number of further research proposals are made, and I explain the usefulness of my proposed 3D model to better understand the neoliberal agenda to dismantle publicly funded higher education for education researchers.

Chapter 2: Literature review: Identifying the relationships between Transformative Learning, Habitus, and Identity

Part one

2.1 Key theories

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the reader to key research within the field of transformative learning (TL), as conceptualised by Mezirow (1978, b) and Bourdieu's (1977, 1983, 1985, 1998) theory of habitus. I also discuss Illeris's (2014) identity theory, and the ways in which these three theories interlink. The review of literature that I undertook strongly suggests that these theories, when considered as a conceptual framework, can be applied to the possibilities of TL in HE. I discuss the development of TL theory, its identified strengths and weaknesses, and the ways in which habitus and identity could be incorporated into a theory of TL. This review is not intended to be exhaustive, as its aim is to better understand the work of major theorists whose scope is expansive, incorporating concepts that have been the subject of ongoing scholarly discourse for more than 40 years. My aim is to demonstrate how my study can make a useful and original contribution to the existing knowledge base.

As Lather (1999, p.3) notes, any review is inherently "situated, partial and perspectival". This is acknowledged as the review is intended to inform educational research and practice from the epistemological, situational perspectives of the reviewer the partiality is, I argue necessary, as are the limits of the scholarship reviewed. Mertens (2007, p.29) contends that:

> "…we need good research and evaluation because there are real lives at stake that are being determined by those in power".

Similarly, Rubin et al. (2014, p.199) contend that:

> "…in order to maintain its relevance, the education research community needs to provide robust and informative research that accurately defines, describes, and communicates the increasingly

> diverse demography, experiences, and outcomes of university students".

Rubin et al. (2014) add that habitus must be considered in the context of research into socio-economic status and HE attainment. Importantly, Davies et al. (2013) note the reluctance of WP students to enrol in 'professional' courses, which, it has been widely argued, promote social mobility (a problem which purposefully designed Transformative Learning (TL) could begin to address).

Notably, 81% of professionals are graduates (Universities UK 2012), which has implications for aspirant working-class students and social trajectory. Whilst it is accepted that Davies et al.'s (2013) study primarily focused on policies regarding degree choices and the cost and benefits of HE study, their position on the likelihood of students applying to courses, which are perceived to engender upward social mobility, is relevant. According to Marr (2012), as many as 30% of UG students are over 21, with 7.5% over the age of 30. Pearce (2017, p.59) reflecting on the transformative experiences of the increasing numbers of mature students who are entering HE, argues that:

> "because the identities and perspectives being transformed are more entrenched, the effect [of TL] can be greater with age."

Nevertheless, retention rates are low and poorer outcomes (lower degree classifications) have been identified in this group (Marr 2012), suggesting that the widening participation agenda – in relation to mature students - has yet to be met.

One way in which social mobility could be addressed, as required by government policy, and the recommendations of adult education researchers, would be to undertake further research identifying factors that impact on retention and attainment of Widening Participation (WP) students. Such research could also be applicable to wider groups of students, since newer insights into the effects of TL could be beneficial to all demographics. I contend that any advances in the development of either TL theory, or

understandings of the way in which TL impacts on learning, is applicable to education theory in general.

In order to better understand the ways in which TL and education occurs, a critical review and analysis was undertaken of key signature concepts:

> "…those ideas that have become so well recognised as belonging to a researcher or research tradition that authors in higher education are more likely to use that version of the concept over any other version in the field" (Kandlbinder 2015, p.243).

2.2 Setting the context

Arguably, the signature concept in the field of transformational learning and adult teaching is Mezirow's (1978a, b; 1991; 2000) theory of Transformational Learning (TL). Further key concepts considered are those of Bourdieu (1983, 1984, 1985, 1998) and Illeris (2014, 2015, 2018). Bourdieu offers understandings of class, power and social space, and concepts through which to examine habitus as they impact on transformative learning and teaching. Illeris (2014) argues that identity is central to learning contexts, offering an example of personal and part identities, contending, as an example, a central identity which incorporates: work, family, everyday, political, religious, national identities. The review is divided into two sections: the first of which will offer an overview of the development of Mezirow's (1978a, b, 1991, 2000) TL theory; the second section will review literature proposing the application of Bourdieu's (1983, 1985, 1998) theory of habitus and identity (Illeris 2014) to the study of transformative learning. Bourdieu's (1984, p.170) simplified definition of habitus, that it is "a structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices" will be applied to the perceptions and practice of TL. Illeris's (2014) claim that the redefining of TL as an identity theory may address Kegan's (2000, p.35) unanswered question will also be considered, which is:

> "'what "form" transforms?': what is it that TL transforms or changes, beyond perceptions and mean-making?".

2.2.1 Mezirow's (1978a, b - 2012) theory of Transformational Learning

Transformative Learning - as originally conceptualised by Mezirow (1978a, b) and later developed from 1991 to 2000 - is defined as:

> "…the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow 1996, p.162).

Previous reviews of Mezirow's theory assert its enduring appeal to scholars of educational research. Dirkx (2011) for example notes the impacts of Mezirow's body of work including the establishment of the *Journal of Transformative Education*, conferences, and a plethora of books and journal articles. Mälkki's (2010, p.43) critique of Mezirow's theory acknowledges that it is one:

> "…of the most sophisticated conceptualizations of reflection within a larger frame of adult learning theory".

Taylor (2000b) argues that no other adult education theory has been given more attention, referring to its significant impact on adult education. Most helpfully, Taylor (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of research offering insights into TL theory in predominantly qualitative research (which he appears to problematize in terms of its validity), highlighting the widening use of Mezirow's (1978a, b, 1990, 1991, 2000) theory in mixed method and "creative" research including the use of video recordings and photo-elicitation interviews. Taylor (2007, p.189), however asserts (notwithstanding his purported limitations of Mezirow's theory) that it is the "iconic...philosophy" of adult learning theory. According to Kitchenham (2008, p.107) not only has TL theory "become a paradigm" in its own right:

> "...it has explained many of the unanswered questions about adult learning and created its own group of specialised practitioners..."

Mezirow's (1978a, b) theory of TL was based on analysis of a qualitative study of mature female students re-entering education. These students would be classified in a UK HE context as WP/non-traditional students. Mezirow argued this cohort of mature students had undergone a

'transformational process' as a result of engaging - in particular, ways - in education programmes. A major tenet of Mezirow's theory is the significance of critical reflection on, change in, or development of, new perspectives, which he explained as being:

> "…synonymous with viewpoint [...] concerned with the content of a perspective rather than the structure of cultural assumptions that have shaped it" (Mezirow's 1978a, p.52)

I acknowledge that this is a contested notion, and the subject of considerable discourse amongst scholars of adult education theory, nevertheless it remains an enduring and much utilised theory. As Mezirow (1978a, b - 2000) continued to develop his theory, he emphasised notions of:

> "contextual understanding, critical reflection and validated meaning by assessing reasons" (Calleja 2014, p.118).

Mezirow's (1978a, b - 2000) reference to cultural assumptions will be examined in section 2.15 through the lens of Bourdieu's theories (1983, 1985, 1998). In its earliest iteration, Mezirow (1978a, b) proposed 10 phases of TL which remain the core elements of his theory. The student who undergoes a transformative experience through learning is first exposed to:

Phase 1	A disorienting dilemma.
Phase 2	Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame.
Phase 3	Critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions.
Phase 4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change.
Phase 5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.
Phase 6	Planning of a course of action.
Phase 7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.
Phase 8	Provisional trying of new roles.

Phase 9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
Phase 10	Reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective.

Table 1: 10 phases of TL (Mezirow, 1978a)

It should be noted that these phases are not necessarily experienced only within the context of education, rather that they are educative, pre-requisites of TL. Mezirow (1978a, b - 2000) asserts that the 10 phases are not explicitly linear, as they can be experienced reiteratively within a spiral of critical reflection. Significantly, according to Mezirow (1978a), it was the transformative 'process', that led to critical reflection allowing the creation of a 'new perspective', or 'meaning making' (interpretation), which participants in the study experienced as life-changing, hence 'transformative' (in adult learning theory a concept often synonymous with Mezirow).

2.3 Influences on Mezirow

Mezirow (1978a, b, 1991) acknowledges the influence of Kuhn's (1970) concept of paradigm shift on his understanding of critical reflection: that is to say that critical reflection is developed by redefining or re-framing a problem in such a way that it is reoriented to be more effectively solved. Mezirow (1991) references Goffman's (1974) use of the term 'frame' to assert that people behave in ways that are predicated on implicit, collectively held meaning perspectives, which are socially and contextually predetermined. Mezirow (1991) is principally concerned with the *re*framing of 'perspectives', contending that critical reflections leading to changes in meaning perspectives are a product of TL. Aspects of Habermas's (1991) theory of communicative action were developed and incorporated into Mezirow's (1991) theory. These include the notion of analytical rationality, in the sense of analytical interpretation of understandings. Mezirow (1991, p.125) asserts that rational analysis (by the learner) is determined by their experiences and "the fit of the experience within the learner's frame of reference". Habermas's

(1989 p.124) influence can be seen here as he contends that an individual's 'lifeworld' is a "culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns", which Mezirow (1991) conceives as 'perspectives'. The significant influences on Mezirow (1978a, b, 1990, 1991) are summarized (see Figure 1).

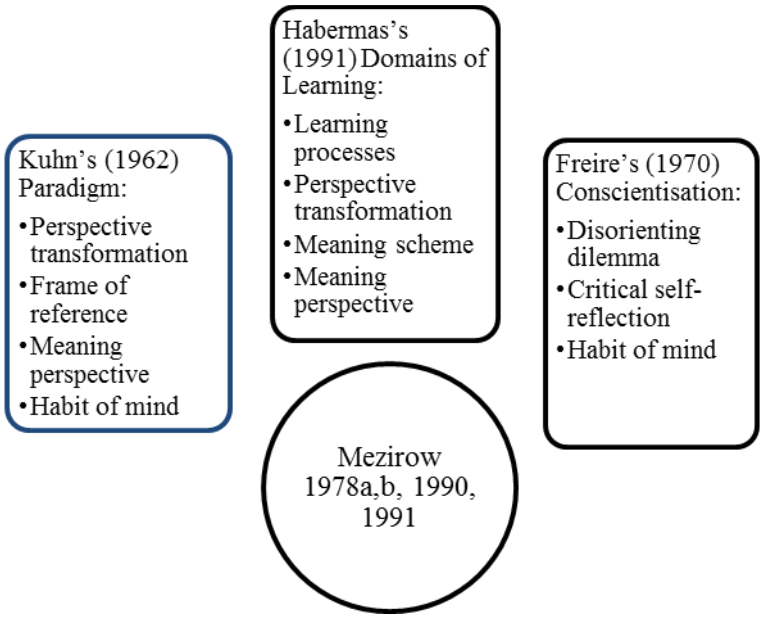

Figure 1: Model of Influences on Mezirow.

Mezirow (1991) posits the notion of two 'domains of learning'- instrumental and communicative - based on Habermas's (1991) epistemological understanding and theory of communication. The instrumental domain (instrumental learning) refers to problem solving and understanding cause and effect relationships through empirical discovery. Communicative learning, which Mezirow (1991, p.75) argues is how most adults learn, is undertaken:

> "... to understand what others mean and to make ourselves understood as we attempt to share ideas...".

2.4 Summarising Mezirow's development of TL

Kitchenham (2008, p.110) offers a useful review of Mezirow's development of TL summarised (see Table 2).

1985	● Expanded theory to include instrumental, dialogic, and self-reflective learning. ● Defined meaning scheme and meaning perspective. ● Introduced three learning processes: learning within meaning schemes, learning new meaning schemes, and learning through meaning transformation.
1991	● Added an additional phase, stressing the importance of altering present relationships and forging new relationships. ● Expanded earlier notion of the distorted meaning perspective. ● Argued that there were three types of meaning perspectives: epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological. ● Presented three types of reflection: content, process, and premise.
1995	● Stressed the importance of critical self-reflection in perspective transformation.
1998	● Articulated critical reflection of assumptions, which included objective and subjective reframing.
2000	● Presented a revision of transformative learning by elaborating on and revising his original terminologies. ● Acknowledged the importance of the affective, emotional, and social aspects of transformative learning. ● Introduced habits of mind and points of view.
2003	● Provided clear definition of his theory.
2005	● Debated with Dirkx at the 6th International Transformative Learning Conference and conceded that the two points of view could coexist (Dirkx, Mezirow, and Cranton 2006).

Table 2: Model of Influences on Mezirow

Mezirow (2012, p.80) further developed his thoughts on critical discourse, in response to critiques, positing that “to more freely and fully participate in discourse, participants must have the following”:

- More accurate and complete information.

- Freedom from coercion and distorting self-deception.
- Openness to alternative points of view: empathy and concern about how others think and feel.
- The ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively.
- Greater awareness of the context of ideas and, more critically, reflectiveness of assumptions, including their own.
- An equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse.
- Willingness to seek understanding and agreement and to accept a resulting best judgment as a test of validity until new perspectives, evidence, or arguments are encountered and validated through discourse as yielding a better judgment.

Although Mezirow does pay some attention here to notions such as empathy and the feelings of others, I argue that the limited attention paid to emotional aspects of TL, privileging rational discourse and objectivity rather than acknowledging the impacts of emotional responses to TL, is problematic.

2.5 Discussing emancipatory learning

The perspective transformation, a change in 'meaning perspective', is, according to Mezirow (1978a, b), fundamental to adult development. Mezirow also incorporated critical consciousness-raising through radical education within his theory (Freire 2005). It is important to note that Mezirow (1991) believes that educators have a responsibility to foster the emancipatory possibilities of TL. This notion is widely accepted by proponents of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning as a significant and important aspect of TL. Hughes (2017, p.24) argues in her study of emancipatory transformation that education is:

> "Inherently transformative, and that a purposeful pedagogy is a key means of challenging the neoliberal episteme and enabling students to engage critically with their worlds".

Loughlin (1993, p.47) argues that adult educators can act as facilitators of change for "social reconstruction [and] mean-making of life experiences", which aligns with Freire (2005) and Mezirow (1991). According to Loughlin

(1993, p.47), adoption of Mezirow's (1991) theory as a means of understanding transformational learning and teaching facilitates the "ongoing development of self-direction and reflection", - as posited by Kolb (1984) - and as such is a key theory for understanding praxis. Taylor (2000b, p.2) states that:

> "transformative learning theory is uniquely adult, abstract, idealized, and grounded in the nature of human communication".

TL seeks to explain how adults' expectations, framed within cultural assumptions and presuppositions, directly influence the meaning individuals derive from their experience.

Developing his theory, Mezirow (1990, 1991) proposed that TL requires both critical reflection on personal experience, and a desire to change, in order to engender making 'meaning' (as opposed – it is assumed – to 'taking meaning'). Adding that emancipation from previously held perspectives is essential. A fundamental principle of Mezirow's theory is that it is rational discourse together with critical reflection on experience which leads to TL. This contention has been questioned by scholars including Dirkx (1997, 2011) and Mälkki (2010, 2012) as being an incomplete notion of the process of TL.

In addition to these preconditions, Mezirow (1997, p.11) is prescriptive about the requirements of TL, which include, but are not limited to reflection on:

> "… critical incidents, metaphor analysis, concept mapping, consciousness-raising, life histories, repertory grids and participation in social action".

2.5.1 The disorienting dilemma

Mezirow (1997) makes arguably bold claims as to the impacts of TL and teaching, principally based on the logicality of his theory, which is heavily reliant on the pillars of critical reflection, thoughtful action, and the reframing of suppositions through the creation of new perceptions and mean-making. Of note, Mezirow (1978a, b, 1990, 1991, and 2000) proposed the deliberate

disruption of the learner's world view to stimulate disruption, uncertainty, and doubt, so as to create a disorienting dilemma. This is an important point as it gives rise to notions of identity and the emotional impact of 'disruption'. It is in response to this aspect of TL that Janz and Timmers (2002) propose the notion of 'emotional dissonance' discussed in section 2.9. In his development of the theory Mezirow (2000, p.6) has acknowledged the importance of emotional aspects of TL, stating:

> "… especially when it involves subjective reframing, [TL] is often an intensely threatening emotional experience in which we have to become aware of both the assumptions undergirding our ideas and those supporting our emotional responses to the need to change".

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Mezirow does not fully address what others regard as the importance of emotion and spirituality in TL. This is an important distinction as Mezirow (1997) claimed that his theory allowed a set of conditions through which the socio-political conditions, that both militate *and* foster adult learning, and the quality of adult education may be evaluated. It was further asserted that "fully realized TL" (echoes of Maslow 1968) would lead not only to autonomous thinking, but also to students as emancipated agents of social change. These claims have been questioned by scholars including Dirkx (1997, 2011), Taylor (2000a, 2007) and Inglis (1998). Mezirow (2006) has accepted that his theory lacks attention to holistic aspects of learning in the learning environment, posited by scholars questioning Mezirow.

2.6 Theorizing and questioning Mezirow

Dirkx (1997) claims that Mezirow's theory of TL was limited as it failed to account for the spirituality of learners, proposing that better understandings of transformation were necessary in order to foster transformation. Dirkx (1997, p.87) posited that learning is "rooted in a consciousness of the soul", which must be nurtured and attended to in the learning environment. Mezirow (2012, p.24) notes this critique of TL, acknowledging the interrelatedness of emotional intelligence, being "emotionally capable of

change", "emotional maturity", knowing and managing one's emotions and recognizing emotions in others (Mezirow 2012, p.79). Yet, in this further exposition of his theory Mezirow (2012) does not make specific reference to the inclusion of 'emotional intelligence' with attendant explanation in his core concepts of TL. Seemingly, paying regard to emotional intelligence is a step too far for Mezirow in his development of the theory.

2.7 Developing an understanding of TL

O'Sullivan et al. (2002, p.xvii) offer a useful and expansive conceptualisation of TL per se, which they contend:

> "…involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our ways of being in the world […] involv[ing] our understanding of ourselves… self-locations… relationships with others and with the natural world… relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender…body-awareness… visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and personal joy".

Similarly, Mälkki (2010) poses questions about the lack of attention Mezirow pays to the emotional components of learning. Dirkx (2011) however, maintains that Mezirow (1981) had introduced an important paradigm of adult learning theory that was previously not well understood. Furthermore, Dirkx (2011, p.141) argues that Mezirow's body of work is a "legacy' on which a variety of research and scholarship is premised, which has led to the:

> "…bridging [of] socially transformative perspectives with more personally transformative approaches".

Dirkx's (2011) proposition is that incorporating aspects of emotional and psycho-social concepts in TL are both necessary and applicable to the process, practice, and theory of TL. There is much support for the contention that TL lacks attention to these human conditions, which cannot be dismissed as outside of the process of transformation. There is also a lack of attention to the connectivity of relationships that impact on TL.

Taylor (1998) proposed reconceptualising Mezirow's (1978a, b) theory to address an absence of connected understanding of the relationships between social action and power, critical reflection, and affective learning, arguing for a broadening of Mezirow's (1996) definition of TL to incorporate other models such as Boyd and Myer's (1988) concept of individuation. Boyd and Myer's (1988) contend that Mezirow's (1981) positioning of perspective transformation within psychoanalytic theory, whilst basing transformative education on analytical psychology, is relevant, as it illustrates longstanding criticisms of TL as being overly reliant on notions of rational problem solving with limited attention to the earlier phases of TL. Boyd and Myer (1988) do however note the importance of the concepts disorienting dilemma; self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame and critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions (Mezirow 1978a, 1978b). Taylor (2000a) also argues that in general, transformative learning and teaching is not well understood or practiced. Similarly, Van Gulick (2006, p. 22) argues that, in order to be successful, a learning process must be understood within the psychological significance of the process undertaken, and "the intentional contents of the processes it modifies".

Nevertheless, Taylor (2000a) acknowledges the wide range of research into TL from studies of informal experiences of popular television to scholarship of teaching. Taylor (2000b, p.20) claims that for TL's potential to be fully realizable (in willing, predisposed learners) educators must understand that they should:

> "…develop authentic positive relationships with their learners, use creative experiential activities, encourage group ownership and individual agency, discuss value-laden course content, [be] *willing* to engage learners on the affective level in concert with critical thinking, and have ample classroom time".

Taylor (2000b) is clearly signalling the importance of the 'educator' in the transformative experience of the student. Taylor urged that further research be undertaken to better understand the teacher-student relationship, including notions of authenticity and trust and the dynamics of relationships

in the learning context. Additionally, the impacts on educators of their experiences of transformative teaching, the emotional aspects of TL (especially for students) and the skills required to do transformative teaching, factors such as diversity (class, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation) all required further research and should be addressed in the theory (Taylor 2000b). In part this is what my study seeks to achieve.

2.8 Developing TL theory

Continuing this theme, Taylor (2007, p.176), whilst accepting that there existed a body of research about transformative learning *per se,* argued that there was lack of empirical evidence of "…the nature of a learning experience and how it informs our understanding of transformative learning". Taylor argued that whilst TL offers a framework in which to understand reflective processes in learners, action research (which he contended is highly compatible with TL), an effective method of classroom research, should be undertaken to gain insights into the practice of TL to foster TL. Taylor (2007, p.189) also argued for further research into emerging:

> "…divergent conceptions of transformative learning theory [and] the ways in which people revise their interpretations about the world around them".

Mälkki (2010), like Dirkx (1997) and Taylor (2000b) questioned Mezirow's (e.g.,1978a, 1991) reliance on cognitive learning and in particular, rational discourse, and his lack of attention to the social and emotional contexts of learning. Mälkki (2010, p.46) contends a "tension between reflection and meaning perspective" (the recurring theme of Mezirow's lack of attention to the non-rational amongst critics of TL). Mälkki (2010) acknowledges that Mezirow (2000, p.3) does not wholly disregard emotional aspects of critical analysis, for example she cites his reference to the 'threats of chaos', and the effects of challenges to firmly held meanings and perceptions on an individual's sense of identity. However, as others have noted, TL is predominantly premised on rational analysis and cognitive processes.

Noting Mezirow's (e.g., 1978a, 2000) assertion that critical reflection can be triggered by challenges to assumptions and perceptions, Mälkki (2010) proposes an integration of Damasio's (1994, 1999) neurobiological theory of emotions and consciousness, which would mediate understandings and insights into the impacts of emotion on reflection and meaning perspective. This, it was claimed would "bridge the gap between these two theories" (Mälkki 2010, p.59). Unsurprisingly, Mälkki (2010) argues that it is important that the social, cognitive, and emotional dimensions of reflection are better understood through further research. Mälkki adds, interestingly, that the dynamics of the relationships between TL learners and teachers, especially notions of safety (trust) and support also require further attention, as is also argued by Taylor (2000, 2007).

Mälkki (2012) revisits her exploration of the ways in which emotionally disorientating and chaotic experiences can trigger reflection, and how that reflection is, and could be done. Mälkki questions levels of reflection, and ways in which it functions in terms of effects on the individual and relationships. Recognising that hers is not a study of education contexts, Mälkki argues that its findings can still be related to TL theory as the participants found that reflections on a disorienting dilemma, that gives rise to negative feelings, could diminish the impact of the perspective thus allowing new meaning making to occur. Significantly, Mälkki argues that the role of reflection is worthy of further attention, her study suggests that it varies according to the phases of negotiation on chaotic and disorienting dilemmas. Mälkki identified a social dimension of disorienting dilemmas, contending that 'second-wave' triggers for reflection can occur. Most interestingly, Mälkki (2012, p.223) claims that:

> "working through emotions is prerequisite for reaching the problematic assumptions that TL entails".

In essence, Mälkki's contention is that greater attention should be paid to emotional and social aspects of TL.

Kegan (2000) proposed a constructive-developmental model of learning based on the notion that human development is engendered through learning, positing three dimensions of learning: the logical-cognitive, the social-cognitive and the intrapersonal-affective domain. Calleja's (2014) discussion of the literature that informed his longitudinal study of Catholic Church school teachers in Malta, argued that TL had been promoted with benefits beyond a continuing professional development (CPD) programme. According to Calleja the teachers - who had engaged in a CPD programme which he coordinated – had benefitted significantly, as had the community in which they taught. Calleja attributes this success to TL, however the paper adds little to understandings of how TL fosters or engenders transformation, although he does offer a thorough explanation of the process of TL as conceptualised by Mezirow (1978a, b, - 2000). Calleja's study is interesting as it speaks to the possibilities of incorporating transformative learning and education into teaching, a further evaluation of the participants in the study's continuing practice would add valuable insight into TL.

2.9 Transformative Learning practice.

Christie et al. (2015) analysed four case studies seeking to explore the possibilities of TL. Their research employed Action Research as proposed by Lewin (1946). Christie et al. (2015), along with Taylor (2007) and Mälkki (2012) point to the lack of attention to emotional aspects of TL and the socially constructed nature of human development. Additionally, Newman (2012) calls into question the future viability of TL as an applied theory, proposing an alternative concept, which has not gained significant attention amongst scholars of TL. Nevertheless, there exists a body of scholarship which is to varying degrees critical of the perceived limitations of TL.

The reconceptualisation of TL is justifiably posited according to Christie et al. (2015), as numerous scholars and researchers had critiqued Mezirow, proposing the development of TL, to incorporate notions of 'context', that is to say, the "link between meaning and experience" the "socially constructed nature of development" and "other ways of knowing" (Christie et al. 2015, p.

12). The authors acknowledge the considerable critical discourse surrounding TL, although they claim that their studies support Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b) contention that TL can lead to consciousness-raising. Furthermore, they argue that a combination of action research and TL should be undertaken to add value to organised learning, to better understand both theories, and enhance TL (Christie et al. 2015).

Spais (2010) claims to have successfully utilised Mezirow's (1991) theory in an educational programme designed to stimulate critical reflection in agricultural entrepreneurs, with the aim of evaluating the efficacy of entrepreneurial education. According to Spais (2010, p.339) the transformational impacts extended beyond the participants in the programme, who became entrepreneurial agents of social change, adding that it also "...opened new directions (sic) farmers" education in entrepreneurship in terms of corporate globalization and the knowledge economy. This contention has echoes of Patrick (2013). Spais (2010) found that TL deepened understandings of empowerment of the individual through critical reflections on their teaching practice's effectiveness and organizational value of adult education institutions. The programme was held to have effected significant transformational change at both individual and organisational levels. Importantly, Spais (2010) argues that researchers should pay greater attention to the efficacy of transformational learning.

In an attempt to facilitate TL in a study of the possibilities of intercultural learning Namaste (2017, p.3) incorporated the Integrative Processing Model (IPM) developed for "human services or service-learning courses" into Mezirow's theory. Whilst Namaste acknowledges that students found the critical reflection to be challenging, personal growth was identified, although clear evidence of TL was not. Proposing the importance of travel to study, Namaste contends that the intended outcomes of 'studying abroad' (an endeavour commonly undertaken throughout high school and higher education institutions, in the Northern Hemisphere), TL and deep, insightful intercultural learning (described as cultural competencies) need to be aligned

and embedded in coursework undertaken while students are studying abroad. The study found that the generic intended learning outcomes of studying abroad are rarely met.

Markedly, no reference was made in Namaste's study to aspects of TL, other than 'cognitive dissonance', a striking limitation in an evaluation of TL. The concept of cognitive dissonance was proposed by Festinger (1957) who hypothesised the existence of a psychological discomfort, which he contended was the obverse of consonance, or compatibility with actions, conditions, situations, or information that would lead the individual to attempt to reduce or avoid that discomfort. Festinger (1957, p.11) proposed that dissonance is:

> "…the existence of non-fitting relations amongst conditions is a motivating factor in its own right".

This is a notable feature of Namaste's (2017) study as it can be linked to Janz and Timmers's (2002) theory of 'emotional dissonance', analogous to Festinger (1957) and synonymous with Mezirow (1978a, b – 2012), whereby the individual experiences dissonance when they feel threats to their own identity. Namaste's (2017) study considered TL as originally proposed by Mezirow yet did not account for any of the limitations identified in challenges to TL. It is noteworthy that the study was premised on experiential learning, which also failed to lead to the intended learning outcomes, supporting Illeris's (2014) contention that established theories e.g., Biggs and Tang (2007) can, unless continually developed, become outdated. In this sense Illeris (2014) supports the claim that Mezirow's theory has similarly failed to be developed, contending that it must do so in order to remain relevant.

2.10 Mezirow challenged

Mezirow's work (e.g.,1978a,1991) was challenged by Inglis (1998) who questions his reliance on consciousness, that is to say on perceptions derived from the ideas and thoughts of others - mean taking leading, through transformational learning, to mean-making - in relation to emancipatory

learning. According to Inglis, consciousness is influenced by socio-economic and political factors, which should be critically reflected upon in order to understand the "way they think, believe and behave" (Inglis 1998, p.2).

Inglis (1998) argues that for TL to be an agent of change it is essential that learners understand political, economic, and institutional structures, to effect emancipation. Furthermore, Inglis (1998) contends that the failure of Freire (2005) and by extension Mezirow (1978a, b, 1990, 1991) (who, as previously noted, was influenced by Freire) to incorporate theories of power in their own theories is a weakness in their application: as Foucault (1980) argues, power produces knowledge.

2.11 TL power and neoliberalism

According to Foucault (1980), power has distorting effects which require an "ascending analysis" by the individual in order to understand the self. Foucault (1980, p. 99) goes on to state that the:

> "mechanisms of power have been - and continue to be invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination".

In this sense, whilst not explicitly aligning his position with neoliberalism, Foucault (1980) does speak to notions of power directly linked to globalism, in and of itself synonymous with neoliberalism. Speaking of the notion of "public economic resources", and neoliberal globalism in education, Apple (2005, p.215) contends that for neoliberals "the world is in essence a vast supermarket", in which education has been placed. Apple's observation speaks to the links between emancipatory TL and understandings of the impact of neoliberalism on education endeavours.

Turning here to Mezirow's claim that TL should be emancipatory, radical and consciousness-raising, it is important that I point to Inglis's (1998) claim that without an understanding of the discourses of power, it is not possible for individuals to develop tactics and strategies to promote change. Loughlin

(1993, p. 8) supports this position, contending that actions arising from feminist consciousness-raising, generated through TL, occur within a 'discrete' purposeful process (unlike, it assumed, other educational endeavours), which requires "structural analysis of society from a personal perspective".

Mezirow (1998), in responding somewhat ardently to Inglis (1998), rejects his critique that TL leads to a false understanding of emancipation, arguing that:

> "…transformative learning is about emancipating we from these taken-for-granted assumptions about social being. It involves bringing the sources, nature, and consequences of this received wisdom into critical awareness so that appropriate action--including social action--can be taken" (Mezirow 1998, p.6).

Inglis (1998) in response to Mezirow made clear his belief that both scholars were arguing a fine albeit critical point, adding however that TL was a significant key theory in adult learning. This assertion strikes a chord with Dirkx's (2011, p.140) contention that Mezirow's theory "has perhaps generated more questions than it has answers", meaning that answering these questions could give rise to the constructive development of Mezirow's theory. Dirkx (2011) also acknowledges that scholars are continually adding to the theory, rather than deconstructing its relevance: again, asserting that Mezirow's is an important theory.

2.12 The 'scientification' of TL theory

Moss et al.'s (2009) discussion raises interesting questions about differing paradigmatical positions in research, and the problems associated with bringing these together in collaborative endeavours. The authors attempt to bridge divisive positions, the seemingly diametrically opposed paradigms of so-called "scientific research" and the social sciences. Indeed, Arends (2014) argues that the scientific paradigm is, in and of itself, limited, and no longer prevailing in dominance over social science research. I acknowledge that this is a contentious position, though not the focus of my research, is of interest. Such differences occur within both disciplines and are identified in

ontological discourse (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Whilst this review is not concerned with these arguments, they are noted in as much as they relate to critiques of Mezirow (1996) as both he and Moss et al. (2009) refer to the ways in which notions of truth are postulated via language 'games' as posited by Wittgenstein (1968) and understood by Kuhn (1970) and Habermas (1991).

Arends (2014) adds to the growing calls for the development of TL to address contended weaknesses, arguing that rationalism plays too great a role in conceptualising critical reflection. According to Arends (2014, p.358):

> "…reflection based upon rationalism [...] may in fact counter the very goals of transformative learning".

Arends (2014) forcibly argues that rationalism may "reinforce dominant ways of thinking", antithetical to notions of emancipatory or radical TL. Arends (2014, p.360) also notes criticism of Freire's (2005) supposed enforcement of:

> "… western modes of thinking onto learners which subjugates them further to the dominant forms of knowledge production and ethnocentricity".

Positing the possibility of 'global consciousness' (in respect of increasing globalisation) and 'collaborative reflection', Arends's proposed development, or extension of Mezirow's theory offers powerful potential in terms of emancipatory, radical, consciousness-raising. Arends also notes influences on, and modes of reflection including: emotion; use of language; versions of 'truth'; imagination and intuition. Rather than wholly abjuring rational reflection, Arends (2014, p.363) acknowledges its potential value for educators in reflecting on their own practice and the rehabilitation of TL by considering whether they are:

> "… open to acts of sensemaking... relationship building" collaborative TL, the value of TL, emotions and "global consciousness development".

I argue that the latter, global consciousness development, is important if students are to be equipped to challenge power, hegemony, and growing globalisation. This position is supported by Loughlin (1993) and Inglis (1998).

2.13 Research using Mezirow's Transformative Learning

Morgan (2015) suggests an intriguing approach to future conceptualizations of TL, positing 'second and third waves' of transformative theory that are, incorporated into contemplative education and practice. Morgan (2015 p.210) argues that all contemplative and transformational education is no longer seen as distinct and separate, claiming that increasingly "both take a holistic approach to education and share elements of their histories". The integration of contemplative (meditative, mindful, and attentive to the emotional and social aspects of learning) and transformative (rational, cognitive) education could offer a means through which to meet gaps in both approaches. Here there are echoes of previous critiques of Mezirow's lack of attention to emotional aspects of transformative learning (e.g., Dirkx 1997, 2011; Mälkki 2010, 2012). Reflecting on previous discourse surrounding TL, Taylor and Cranton (2012, p.555) cite seven "tensions" within TL theory, as being between:

> "Theoretical... Imposing, coercing, and supporting, Community-based and collaborative transformative learning, Culture, gender, and positionality, Emotion and rationality, Researching transformative learning [and] the transformative teacher and learner— an empathic relationship".

2.13.1 Applying TL in research: future possibilities

Reviewing these tensions, Taylor and Cranton (2012) point to similarities, for example the ways in which TL is conceptualized as being associated with dramatic change. These claimed differences are largely bound in epistemological and ideological positions, unsurprising for such a widely employed and theorised concept. Purported critiques of the application of TL in research employing theories associated with studies of community, storytelling, sociocultural and learning concepts, according to Taylor and

Cranton (2012, p.559), lack “thorough theoretical analysis”. The authors offer specific examples of future research that could be undertaken to develop theoretical understandings of TL, including: the feasibility of a unified theory of transformative learning; the enduring dominance of transformative learning and the “inclusion of other perspectives as frameworks for research” (Taylor and Cranton 2012, p.560).

2.14 Incorporating Illeris and Bourdieu into Mezirow’s TL theory

Developing Mezirow’s theory is not without considerable challenge. As discussed in section 2.3, Mezirow himself has acknowledged the challenges and limitations of TL as conceptualised by him in the late 1970s, and consequently expanded his original theory and incorporated aspects of Habermas’s (1991) domains of learning theory. That said, to date, there have been no significant revisions of Mezirow’s theory that incorporate other key theories. My thesis is that Mezirow’s is an incomplete theory that could be developed to incorporate Illeris’s (2014) theory of identity employing aspects of Bourdieu’s (e.g.,1983, 1998) theory of habitus. Nairn et al. (2012) to a lesser extent, argue that Mezirow and Bourdieu’s theories are incomplete, as Mezirow relies on critical reflexivity, whilst failing to account for cultural and structural influences on behaviour, whereas Bourdieu’s (1977, 1999) theory places an emphasis on habitus lacking attention to conscious critical reflection.

Abes (2009) in critiquing Mezirow, discusses the notion of theoretical ‘borderlands’, an ‘incompleteness’ of theory. In this instance Abes (2009) is referring to experimental methodological opportunities arising from the ‘borderlands’ between theories, whereas I am arguing that the theoretical borderlands between Mezirow, Illeris and Bourdieu offer a similar opportunity. I also call on the long tradition of the development of theories as justification for my contention that TL can be further developed in ways thus far, Mezirow has not.

2.14.1 TL and Illeris - Identity matters

The historical overview of learning theories offered by Illeris (2018), from early 20th-century German Gestalt psychology, American behaviourism, Russian cultural-historical theory and Piaget to Freud and Dewey's mid-20th century, through to behaviourism and humanistic theories, sets a useful background for understandings of learning. Turning briefly to 1970s theories of emancipatory learning, Illeris (2018, p.90) refers to Mezirow as a "great pioneer in emancipative learning". Nonetheless Illeris (2014, p.574) states that TL has been much criticised as "being too narrow and too cognitively orientated". Illeris proposes the redefining of TL as an identity theory, arguing that this may address Kegan's (2000, p.35) unanswered question of:

> "what "form" transforms?': what is it that TL transforms or changes, beyond perceptions and mean-making?".

Importantly, Illeris (2014) argues that identity is central to learning contexts and offers an example of personal and part identities to illustrate his position. He posits a central identity with further multiple identities, which can be adapted to the individual to include for example, religious, political, family and work identities.

Illeris (2014) is profoundly concerned with issues of identity and the progressive, restorative yet potentially regressive possibilities of TL. According to Illeris, TL can be problematically challenging, particularly to a learner's sense of identity, thereby leading to regression and possible withdrawal from learning. In support however of the importance of TL, Illeris adds that where this identified by the educator, the transformative process can be addressed. For example, by reviewing the learner's goals, thus creating a restorative condition.

Illeris (2014) offers an important theoretical concept through which to understand the emotional impacts of TL on students as they struggle with challenging experiences that cause at times, deeply disorienting shifts in their sense of self. As previously noted, this is a concern raised by scholars

of TL including Mälkki (2010, 2012), Dirkx (1997, 2011) and to a degree, Mezirow (2000). Illeris (2015) later argues that adult educators must better understand how learning is done, arguing that learning has been reduced to that which can be measured, without account for the efficacy of learning. He argues that reforms in education have led to:

> "insufficient learning, especially in the human and social dimensions, and an increasing number of drop-outs and students who do not meet the current needs of society" (Illeris 2015, p.39).

This concern is also discussed by Apple (2005) in the context of the impact of neoliberal global policies on education. Illeris (2014, 2015, 2018) is one of many scholars arguing for further development of TL, in his case reconceptualising TL as an identity theory, in order to undertake research into learning. This could be extended into practice to the benefit of the learner, and praxis orientated research.

As previously briefly noted in section 2.5.1, Janz and Timmers (2002) relate their theory of emotional dissonance to identity, contending links between feelings of shame and anger which feature in Mezirow's (1987a, b) core concepts of TL. Janz and Timmers (2002, p.81) posit that emotional dissonance is the "immediate consequence of evaluating an experience", whilst acknowledging that emotions are complex reactions to challenges to identity. Of note are Janz and Timmers's reference to reflections on, and evaluations of experiences: emotions synonymous with the core concepts of TL and rationality. The theory of emotional dissonance could have implications for the development of Mezirow's theory to the relationship between identity and TL. Although it is acknowledged that Janz and Timmers (2002) contend gender differences in respect of responses to emotional challenge and identity, this consideration is not the focus of the study for which this review has been undertaken. Nevertheless, it could be of interest in future research into the relationship between Bourdieu's (e.g., 1983, 1998) habitus and TL which similarly does not consider gender or intersectionality. As a feminist researcher I argue that these are important distinctions within

educational research and habitus, of which there is a dearth of extant literature.

At this point it is worth noting that as Walker (2017) states, the field of adult education has eschewed the incorporation of emotions in theories of learning. Walker (2017) notes Mezirow's (1991) acknowledgment that understanding of the self requires engagement with others and that shame can be a catalyst for learning. The impact of shame on both formal and informal learning settings is discussed by Walker (2017), both for those who have traditionally been oppressed as well as those who begin to understand, through transformative experiences, that they belong to a privileged group responsible for those oppressions. These are complex notions which students from WP backgrounds experience similarly and differently, adding to gaps and understandings of the ways in which identity, as conceptualised by Illeris (2014) relates to habitus and TL.

2.14.2 Linking Habitus – Bourdieu: theory and methodology

It is important to acknowledge that Bourdieu's (e.g.,1983, 1984, 1985, 1998), theories are widely researched and the subject of expansive critical discourse, not least regarding the validity of his theoretical propositions. Riley (2017) for example argues that Bourdieu "fails" as a theorist, claiming that his theories lack empirical evidence, and that his analysis of class is not linked to his concept of 'social reproduction'. According to Riley (2017) Bourdieu does not:

> "…specify either an empirically tractable meaning of the term "class," or to show any compelling evidence for the existence of "habitus" in the sense of a "generative mechanism" that can be applied to numerous domains".

Riley (2017) does however acknowledge that Bourdieu continues to hold considerable appeal for academics seeking to explain or understand sociological phenomena from a social science perspective. His explanation for this enduring popularity is somewhat excoriating as Riley's (2017)

analysis of Bourdieu's oeuvre concludes that his theories offer something of a refuge or defence for academics claiming it is a:

> "…basic social ontology [which] resonates with the lived experience of elite academics, who are the main consumers of this social theory".

I acknowledge, and to a degree understand Riley's (2017) claim, however his analysis, situated within the context of 'elite' American academia, is not analogous to my own lived experience as an academic in a post 92 neoliberal University. Like many scholars, including Wacquant (2014), I utilise and adopt Bourdieu's widely accepted theory, as this review is concerned principally with literature exploring and evaluating TL in relation to habitus, the limitations of which I recognise. Bourdieu (1998, p.8) conceptualises habitus as a disposition, "generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices", including although not limited to everyday behaviours such as food consumption, expression of political views, taste, recreation, employment, and pertinently, education. According to Bourdieu (1998, p.81) habitus:

> "is a socialised body, a structured body…which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world, or a particular sector of that world - field - and which structures the perceptions of that world as well as structures in that world".

2.14.3 What can TL tell us about shift in habitus?

Understanding the preconceptions and perceptions embodied in habitus could allow researchers of TL to explore potential shifts in the habitus of learners. According to Wacquant (2014, p.119) habitus is ideally suited to empirical study, "as both object and means of investigation". Wacquant argues that habitus is an intellectual and practical tool, although, he does recognise that the common critique of the theory and Bourdieu's notion of the 'scholastic fallacy'. This contested notion posits the question: what is it in our disciplinary heritage that structures interpretations and blinds us to a reality which mediates against wide acceptance and use of Bourdieu's theory as a method; which he formulates as (habitus) x (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu1984). Nevertheless, having successfully employed habitus as a

tool in his own research, Wacquant (2014) makes a compelling argument for its utility as a means to examine and analyse a phenomenon.

Lehman (2007) investigated attrition amongst working class students, identifying a negative correlation between social class and early exit from university, noted also by Marr (2012) and Pearce (2017), as previously discussed. Lehman (2007, p.91) cites Quinn (2004) who argues:

> "that dropping out of university is more probable for students from lower class backgrounds".

According to Lehman (2007, p.92) habitus provides "the perhaps most salient concept for addressing" attrition, arguing that working-class students:

> "…experience a sense of discontinuity between their social origins and their anticipated educational destinations [and] a sense of being cultural outsiders" (Lehman 2007, p.96).

In effect, this discontinuity is synonymous with the chaos posited by Mälkki (2010), and a challenge to notions of identity with which Illeris (2014) is concerned. Lehman (2007, p. 96), whose study of first generation students explores habitus transformation, proposes that research should be undertaken on:

> "successful completion of degrees by first generation [WP] students who persist and successfully complete university".

Pointedly, Lehman asks whether the students in his study have experiences habitus transformation. Whilst not specifically related to Mezirow's theory of transformation, Lehman's (2007) study offers insights into habitus that could be applied to studies of transformation and the relationship between TL, identity, and habitus.

Illeris (2014, p.61), conceptualising TL and Identity, argues that habitus:

> "…can only be changed by continuously changed life conditions that shape a different basis for experience".

Of course, this presupposes that a change habitus can be affected, in itself a contentious proposition. However, TL, with its emphasis on emancipatory

'lifeworld' changing possibilities, is one such potential means of achieving a change or shift in habitus. Significantly, Reay (2004, p.435) states that:

> "…implicit in the concept [of habitus] is the possibility of a social trajectory that enables conditions of living that are very different from initial ones".

2.14.4 Habitus as a methodological tool in education research

Reay (2004) is emphatic that habitus can be used as an adaptable, methodological tool in the context of education research. A position extant research supports, including that of Lehman (2007) and Wacquant (2014). Reay et al. (2010) posit the notion of institutional habitus, that is, the academic status of an HE institution, which they argue exerts a strong influence on student identity. Merrill (2014) also supports the use of habitus as a methodological tool, referring to both Bourdieu (e.g.,1983, 1984, 1985, 1998) and Wacquant's (1992) contention that habitus can shift or be transformed. Like Reay et al. (2010), Merrill (2014) also identified that institutional habitus can impact on the experiences and perceptions of WP students. Whilst Merrill (2014) does not explicitly propose habitus as a methodological tool, she does relate Bourdieu's concept to notions of transformation.

2.15 Habitus and Identity - links to WP students' learning

Hurst (2013) disputes a prevailing perception in American academia that working-class undergraduate university students are a causal effect in contended lack of intellectualism and increasing 'vocationalism' amongst students, as well as 'grade grubbing' and grade inflation. Employing habitus, Hurst (2013) claims that academic hegemony is at play in perceptions of working-class anti-intellectualism. Hurst (2013) asserts that these behaviours are found across the social strata, especially in elite institutions, and that the literature does not support the notion that wider access to HE (for which she claims there is scant evidence) has a negative impact on HE. Rather Hurst (2013, p.57) states that:

> "…both working-class and more elite students are primarily using college to gain access to [professional and managerial] occupations and that the difference lies in their differential understandings of how this process works (the relative ease of the transition) reflecting underlying class-based predispositions".

Hurst touches on a point which is of interest, as Foucault (1980, p. 74) contends that notwithstanding the influence of universities on social upheaval in the 1960s, through the complexity of bourgeois academic interests:

> "…the university and the academic emerge, if not as principal elements, at least as 'exchangers', privileged points of intersection".

2.15.1 Institutional habitus and WP students

Reay et al.'s (2010) claim that institutional habitus impacts on student identity can be seen as an extension of the privilege which academics may wittingly or unwittingly seek to perpetuate through their own willing or unwilling engagement in the neoliberal education agenda (Apple 2005). Whilst not directly linked to the study of TL, Hurst (2013) has applied habitus as a theoretical framework within which to examine student experience within neoliberal higher education. Habitus (e.g., Bourdieu 1983; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) therefore offers a framework within which to examine those 'differential' understandings and their effects on TL.

As previously discussed in section 2.1, research into the experiences of undergraduate students has been undertaken exploring the impact of Habitus on retention, institutional Habitus, Habitus and working class/non-traditional students' success (Zepke and Leach 2005; Lehmann 2007; Reay et al., 2010; Byrom and Lightfoot 2012, 2013), and habitus and transformation. However, a review of the literature has identified a dearth of scholarship regarding habitus as impacted by identity and TL, in respect of UK HE undergraduate media students. This contention is supported by Reay et al. (2010, p.109) who state:

> "There is limited UK research comparing student experiences across the university sector, and even less that compares and contrasts working-class students' experiences".

At this point it is useful to note that studies investigating habitus tend to focus on the experiences of working class, and WP and non-traditional students, loosely defined by Butcher et al. (2012) as being; black [Asian] or minority ethnic; from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds; with a background in the care of Local Authorities; those with disabilities; no prior family background in HE; the opportunity to study only part-time, and students with non-traditional qualifications. Whilst not the explicit focus of my research WP/non-traditional students are typically, although not exclusively, associated with post 92 HE institutions.

2.15.2 The impacts of family habitus and institutional habitus

Zepke and Leach's (2005) study, whilst useful in the sense that it considers 'institutional fit' and 'institutional habitus' in relation to student retention and success, is a synthesis of post 1990 studies rather than a study directly investigating student experiences. Byrom and Lightfoot's (2012) mixed method longitudinal study of UG students of a 3 year joint honours programme at a post 92 university focused on habitus and notions of transformation through higher education, which they termed 'transgression', that is shifting from family-based habitus (working class lower socio-economic) to university educated status, and institutional fit. Significantly, Byrom and Lightfoot found that whilst family habitus provides support for student transformation, institutional habitus, as posited by Reay (2001), is less adaptive to WP students who struggle to align with the institution, potentially negatively impacting on progression and retention.

In a later study Byrom and Lightfoot (2013) found that WP students coping with academic failure were better supported by family habitus than their institution, and they demonstrated reliance and determination to succeed, aspiring to upward mobility (Lehmann 2014). This has important implications for attrition, which is a perceived problem and the subject of considerable efforts by institutions to retain struggling students. It is also a potentially interesting point of reference for educators seeking to embed TL in teaching and learning efforts. A shift in habitus is discussed as being desirable and

potentially an 'inevitable' outcome of successful transformation through HE in both studies, rather than being problematic. Neither study directly addressed TL and habitus. These studies suggest a gap in existing research to which my research aims to add.

2.15.3 Habitus social mobility and government policy

The notion that a shift in habitus, resulting in upward social mobility, is a positive outcome of HE education is widely posited. It is highlighted throughout government policy (David et al., 2008; Cabinet Office, 2010; BIS: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2012, OFFA and HEFCE, 2014; BIS: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2015) However, there is a dearth of research exploring this social phenomenon through the prism of habitus and transformative education. Saunders (2012) challenges the notion that social mobility through education is strongly determined by socio-economic factors - as understood through theories of habitus - arguing that ability and inherited intelligence are the major determinants. However, he does acknowledge that there exists an 'underclass': the most deprived children who are seriously educationally disadvantaged, and who arguably form a significant number of WP students. Similarly, Alvesson (2013) argues that the educational backgrounds of the parents of students are the greater determinants of their "learning" and employability on graduation. Moreover, Alvesson (2013, p.91) claims that the:

> "…very long history of attempts to create equality via education have persistently failed".

Part 2

2.16 The neoliberal agenda in HE

As noted in chapter 1, The Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) (2017), pushed further the open door to privatised, deregulated HE, placing the student as consumer: albeit with limited 'rights' in what would otherwise arguably be a commercial transaction. Academic freedom, as understood by

publicly funded HE, will not be protected, and for-profit private universities will be able to close unprofitable courses with no liabilities to either staff and their employment or careers, or students. Morgan (2017) described the act as:

> "…the most significant sector legislation in 25 years to further a market approach in England".

It is also important to note that as Morley (2016) observed, privatised HE is antithetical to critical thinking, a cornerstone of the pursuit and creation of evidenced-based knowledge, and the foundation stone of TL.

For academics working in the humanities and social sciences, the reduction of funding for these disciplines has been keenly felt. Holmwood (2017) cites the complicity of senior university leaders as key to the privatisation of HE. His pessimism echoes that of Collini (2017, p.203) who refers to the failure of academia to resist and defend against the act describing this as a "loss of nerve" in universities: in effect an inability to defend publicly funded HE. Again, as discussed in Chapter 1, the consequences of the commodification of HE, and the Competition and Market Authority's (2015) consumer advice to students regarding UK legal frameworks protecting consumers' rights have yet to be fully realised.

Gillard's (2011) historical account of more than 145 reports by charities, commissions and government departments, government bills, acts, and reviews regarding education in England identifies an agenda to dismantle publicly funded education, whilst diverting public funds to private education. This is a classic manifestation of the hegemonic neoliberal project, as proposed by Harvey (2007), Hall (1978, 2011) and Hall and Massey (2010). It is this neoliberal project that I identify as a purposeful agenda to redefine publicly funded education as a for profit provider. Significantly. Meek (2015) calls for essential "universal networks", the list of which includes medical treatment, education, and utilities, arguing that these are essential features and functions of civil society. Again, this argument aligns with the aims of TL.

2.16.1 Charting the Neoliberal Agenda

As previously noted, Gillard's (2011, 2018) account of the past 40 years of government acts and associated legislation relating to education in England charts what I contend is neoliberal project to privatise education. Gillard's (2018) updated resource makes clear that almost every government act between 1979 and 2017 has had a concomitant impact on the funding of education in England. For example, the Education (Student Loans) Act (1990) led to the removal of student grants; this was preceded by a grants freeze in 1989, which began the indebtedness of students studying in HE in England. The resulting effect of removing the cost of student grants from the public deficit created a student loan book that it is predicted will never be fully repaid by the recipients of student loans. Analysis of the extensive resources Gillard (2018) provides allowed me to identify an agenda pursued since the 1970s that has led to the dismantling of publicly funded education. As previously noted in Chapter 1, this ideological agenda has been pursued by successive Conservative, Conservative and Liberal Democratic Alliance, and Labour governments.

2.16.2 The neoliberal agenda: dismantling public sector education in England

As I closely reviewed Gillard's (2011, 2018) extensive work, together with wider research, a pattern, or theme emerged that seemed to me to be synonymous with the DNA double helix. This led me to conceptualise a metaphorical model of the neoliberal agenda which I propose is the 'DNA' of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle public sector education in England (see Figure 2). I was inspired to create this model as the concept of DNA is commonly employed as a signifier of the foundation and 'building blocks' of phenomena.

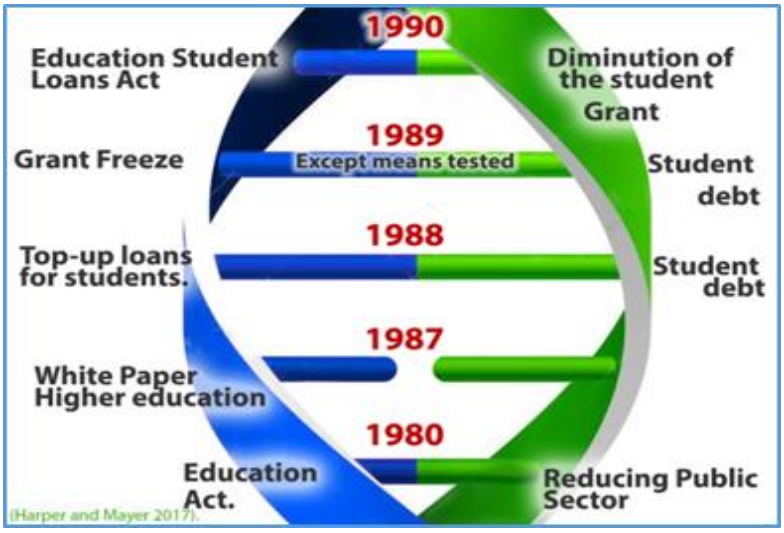

Figure 2: Conceptualisation of the DNA of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle sector education in England

This earlier conceptualisation led me to develop the 2D model (see Figure 3), which I discuss in further detail in Chapter 5, where I outline the possibility for its further development as an interactive model. It is anticipated that this would be a useful contribution to research into the neoliberal agenda. It would vividly represent the ways in which publicly funded education in England has been dismantled, and allow researchers ready access to data in order to contribute to the ongoing debate around neoliberalism in HE.

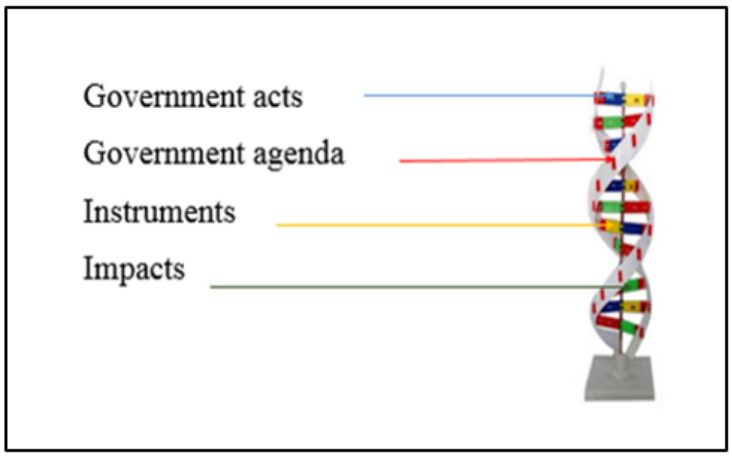

Figure 3: The representation of a potential 3D interactive model: the DNA of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle sector education in England

The dismantling of public sector education has given rise to the positioning of HE as a “trainer” of workforces, rather than democratically organised places of learning and the creation of knowledge. This is an important development in HE, which academics could be well placed to challenge through TL as practitioners. As Bowen et al. (2014) argue, the authoritarian neoliberal agenda pursued by successive UK governments must be widely exposed, challenged and resisted. McGettigan (2013, 2015) states that the rapid expansion and increasing marketisation of the sector is a core function of a neoliberal economic policy, claiming that it is possible to challenge this ideology.

2.16.3 Challenging the neoliberal agenda in HE in England

Morley (2016), Holmwood et al. (2016), Freedman and Bailey (2011) and others urge academics and students to challenge and resist the neoliberal agenda in education, and to expose increasing socio-economic inequalities. According to Nind (2014), through evidence-based research, the UK HE sector can be re-invigorated, adding that knowledge production pursued as a site of transformation and radical, emancipatory, transformative education and learning can be achieved. As previously noted, Hughes (2017) supports the contention that education is a force for individual and social transformation, arguing that it is possible to embed emancipatory education in HE. Mayo (2003) contends that adult education can and should be a transformative endeavour, undertaken to challenge the neoliberal agenda, and whilst not specifically the focus of the research questions, I anticipate that findings may offer insight into the ways in which transformative learning has the potential to impact HE.

I acknowledge that although higher education is seen as a wider societal economic good, which has been posited by successive governments, such benefits are a contested contention. Nevertheless, the notion that upward social mobility is a positive outcome of HE education - as espoused through government policy - suggests that through widening access and greater inclusivity, all of society may benefit (Cabinet Office 2010; OFFA and HEFCE

2014; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2015). Embedding TL within academic endeavours in HE opens up possibilities and opportunities for WP students when purposefully designed for that effect. My research may therefore have wider implications for policy and practice in HE, and implications for the development of learning and teaching within institutions.

2.17 Chapter summary

This review has identified ways in which Mezirow's theory could be developed in order to add to understandings of the ways in which TL occurs. The literature also identifies the determining factors of TL, Identity (Illeris 2014) and Habitus (e.g., Bourdieu 1983, 1998) that could be utilised as a conceptual framework within which to undertake research. As discussed, Bourdieu's theory has been utilizable as both a framework and methodology in studies, as has TL.

Notwithstanding the purported limitations of theories discussed in this chapter, habitus continues to be regarded as a valuable concept for addressing issues of interest to HE both at institutional and policy making levels (Lehman 2007; Reay 2004; Reay et al. 2010; Hurst 2013; Merrill 2014; Wacquant 2014). Significantly, TL has been the subject of calls for its development over the past five decades. This includes Illeris (2014), who persuasively proposed the development of TL incorporating identity theory, society the research of Mälkki (2010, 2012) Dirkx (1997, 2011) and others. Thus, my conceptual framework incorporates habitus, identity (Illeris 2014) and TL (Mezirow 1978a, b – 2000).

In challenging Mezirow, Newman (2012) questions the continued relevance of Mezirow's conceptualisation of TL. Moreover, there is a substantial body of scholarship critical of the limitations of TL. Notably, whilst Mezirow does pay attention to aspects of empathy, his privileging of rational discourse and objectivity over emotional and spiritual aspects of TL has been found to be problematical (Mälkki 2010, 2012; Dirkx 1997, 2011). It was significant for my research that Illeris (2014) argues for the continuing development of theories

less they become outdated, thus supporting Newman (2012). Of course, I acknowledge that Mezirow's theory has been developed, as Kitchenham (2008) illustrates. However, the discussed limitations strongly support my research seeking to further develop TL.

Loughlin (1993) is one of many scholars who have employed TL theory in order to explore emancipatory transformation. Along with Freire (2005) Loughlin (1993) urges educators to facilitate social change, advocating TL (Mezirow 1991) as a means through which to achieve this aim. Christie et al. (2015) argue that action research should be undertaken incorporating TL, and that doing so would add to better understandings of both research methodology and, I argue potentially enhance the efficacy of TL. I am intrigued by Arends (2014) posit that TL offers potential for educators to reflect on their own practice, an argument that resonates with my own experience of undertaking doctoral research, whilst at the same time reflecting on my practice. My methodological approach discussed in Chapter 3 employs creative action research within which I embed TL principles.

I turn now to my identification of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle publicly funded HE in England, and the impact of neoliberal global policies on education. I argue that my discussion aligns closely with Mezirow's concept of TL. If students are to be equipped to challenge power, hegemony, and growing globalisation as I and others, including Apple (2005), Loughlin (1993) and Inglis (1998) have discussed, TL should be further developed to incorporate these concepts. There exists a possibility, as discussed in Chapter 1, that the impacts of the commodification of HE, for example the Competition and Market Authority's (2015) consumer advice to students which has led to litigation, could be mediated by TL as students begin to critically engage in and reflect on their own learning experiences. By this I mean facilitating the means through which to critically reflect with, and engage in, rather than passively consume their education.

Scholars including Taylor (2000a) aver that research seeking to better understand notions of authenticity and trust, and the power dynamics within

the teacher-student relationship should be undertaken. The complex and 'messy' method I have developed, discussed in Chapter 3, seeks to add to understandings of TL identified by Taylor (2000a). Taylor also recommends that further research should be undertaken exploring the ways in which TL can be practised, highlighting impacts of intersectionality, which in respect of TL are not well understood. I discuss these aspects in Chapter 5 as potential areas of interest in future research into the relationship between habitus (e.g., Bourdieu 1983, 1998) and TL, which similarly does not consider gender or intersectionality. As a feminist researcher, I argue that these are important distinctions within educational research and habitus, and that my research will contribute to extant literature.

For academics working in the humanities and social sciences, the removal of funding threatens the future of these disciplines. My review of literature has found growing concerns regarding a perceived sector wide institutional failure to defend publicly funded HE (Freedman and Bailey 2011; Morley 2016; Holmwood et al. 2016; Holmwood 2017; Collini 2017). This brings me to Mezirow's (1978a, b - 2012) often cited contention that education practitioners have a duty to facilitate emancipatory, transformative TL, which I seek to do both in my own research and through the further development of TL theory. Findings of such research could be extended and applied to practice to the benefit of the learner and further praxis-orientated research.

In Chapter 3, I detail my methodological approach to answering the research question: is transformative learning possible for students of media studies in a post 92 neoliberal university media faculty? I discuss my ontological and epistemological approaches, my ethical position, and the influences on the choices and decisions I made in challenging methodological orthodoxies. I also discuss the complex and 'messy' method which my co-participants and I developed, and the equally complex method for undertaking interpretation and analysis, which my co-researcher and I worked through together.

Chapter 3: Methodology and theoretical framework

This chapter details the theoretical underpinnings of the methodological approach I employed in order to explore whether TL is possible within a neoliberal post 92 HE context. As scholars including Mezirow (1978a, b - 2012), Harvey (2007), Hall (1978, 2011), Hall and Massey (2010), Meek (2015), and others have argued, this is important, because if HE is to be of civic and societal importance - as it should - consciousness-raising and emancipatory education must be the aim and purpose of academic and pedagogical endeavours. I justify my use of creative action research, incorporating critical and compassionate communication as the most effective means of answering my research questions (Mason 2014; Ekman 2015). Fundamental to this, a strategic aspect of the overall research design included the triangulation of analysis between the co-participants and myself over the course of many Critical Compassionate Communicative Exchanges (CCCE) with the inclusion of Serena as my co-researcher. This provided multiple, layered, and rich interpretations which were true to the co-participant's narratives. The role of my co-researcher was a tactical part of my methodological approach as it led to valuable data insights throughout the research process, and enabled me to extend, compare and contrast our understandings from the CCCEs. I argue that working with a co-researcher brought insights to the research logic which both challenged methodological approaches in this domain and confirmed and contrasted my own interpretations of the 'messy' research process and findings.

Here, I discuss my epistemological position and introduce a novel approach to cogenerative, collaborative research methods, underpinned by Mellor's (2001) 'messy method' which enables theoretical developments to unfold and evolve during the research process itself (Clark et al. 2007, Sullivan et al. 2016). As a "turn towards new constructions of knowing that lead to transformation in practice" (Cook 2009, p.227), this 'messy' method paradigm facilitated a new kind of learning to emerge in both practical and theoretical significance throughout the collaborative research process

between me and my cocreators of knowledge. In seeking to answer the research question: Is transformative learning possible for students of media studies in a post 92 neoliberal university media faculty?, I was especially interested in the potential for co-creating knowledge with media studies students. Contrary to the generalised view of such programmes, my understanding, and experience, through working in a media faculty is that criticality and critical thinking is built into the pedagogy of media studies.

To be clear, my sense was that creative media studies student would be familiar with the prerequisites of critical evaluation of information, so as to situate them 'comfortably' - or less uncomfortably - within the potential challenges of 'doing' TL, in the process of co-creating knowledge. Fowler-Watt and McDougall (2019) for example emphasise the importance of developing critical evaluation of information in undergraduate journalism students in their study in relation to 'fake news'. As a researcher, my aim was to develop a general awareness and understanding of a range of approaches, in order to make informed choices about how my research could 'give voice' to students with whom I was working, and to identify ways in which to generate understanding through interpretations of their critical reflections on their undergraduate experience. In order to evaluate the most appropriate methodology, I sought initially to clarify and justify in my own mind my epistemological stance, which I discuss in section 3.2.1.

It was important to me that my research captured, as authentically as possible, the experiences of students with whom I was working, whilst at the same time meeting the research question and developing an approach effective for both research inquiry and transformative education.

3.1 My Overall Approach

Scholars including Crotty (1998) Denscombe (2007, 2014) and Creswell (2013) contend that researchers undertaking methodological decision making must first develop an understanding of the ways in which knowledge is created in order to inform their own epistemological position in relation to their research. In developing my methodological approach, I am seeking to

add to understandings of the learning experiences of undergraduate creative media students, whether, and if so how, their experiences have been transformative (Mezirow 1978a, b, -1991; Snyder 2008; Cranton and Taylor 2012; Newman 2012; Taylor and Cranton 2012). In order to do this, I employ a method that challenges current orthodoxies, to offer new ways in which to gain insights and reflect the voices of co-creators of knowledge and their unique contributions to my research (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Blaikie 2000; Denscombe 2007,2014; Blaxter et al. 2010; Bryman 2012; Creswell 2013).

At the initial stage of the research process, it was important to both critically evaluate potential research methodologies, and justify the methodological framework I deemed most appropriate for my research (Crotty 1998; Denscombe 2007, 2014; Creswell 2013). There are a number of reasons why this is important, not least as Grix (2010, p.27) notes, the:

> "...researcher's ontological and epistemological positions can lead to different views of the same social phenomena".

From this, it is assumed that Grix (2001) is contending that such differences would lead to different findings arising out of the same research topic. It has however been acknowledged by scholars including Blaxter et al. (2010), Tight and Huisman (2014) and Mason (1996) that grasping the complexities of epistemology and ontology is a challenge for new researchers in all fields of academic research. My epistemological position has determined the methodology and methods I have employed (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Grix 2001; Denscombe 2007, 2014; Bryman 2012), although it is noted that Guba and Lincoln (1994) assert that any changes in the individuals involved in the research and/or the context in which it is done will alter the 'reality' of the research and, it assumed, data generated. At this juncture I feel compelled to briefly emphasise that my research does not involve an exploration of, or investigation into, the subjects my co-participants were studying as undergraduate media students. Rather, I was seeking to co-create knowledge about their own experiences within the context of TL. It is important to note that we did not touch on 'media studies' per se, and for this reason I argue that the methodology and method is suited to the study.

Interestingly, Bennett et al. (2011, p.6), discussing the notion of media studies argue that scholars would:

> "do well to return to the project of theorising everyday life (and the part of our lives that cultural products of various kinds connect with) by 'forgetting the media'".

Whilst there is a breadth and depth of research exploring the pedagogy of media studies, again this was not my aim. Crotty (1998) proposes that it is the methodology and method(s) to be utilised that first need to be identified, followed by the justification for this choice, which in turn lies within the research question. Blaikie (2000, p.272) discussing the "research strategy" (whether qualitative or quantitative) argues that it is "central in the design of social research". Thus, it was essential, as Blaxter et al. (2010, p.8) recommend, that I identified clearly and early on in the process:

> "the research topic; why the research is being undertaken and how it should be done",

proposing a representation of this process, although adding the caveat that this is likely to be revisited.

3.2 The research question – the conceptual framework

Before I discuss my ontological and epistemological positions in the following section, I wish to emphaise that I was seeking to answer the research question: Is Transformative Learning possible in neoliberal post 92 Higher Education in England through a novel approach. I developed a conceptual framework which was subject to 3 iterations. I began with synthesising the theories of habitus and cultural capital within the field of Transformative Learning (Mezirow 1991 - 2000) to allow me to gain understandings of these aspects of learning, and their effects on creative media students (Bourdieu 1997; Reay 2004; Reed-Danahay 2005; Hurst 2013). I reviewed methodology and methods literature, including feminist theory, in an effort to find a way to locate myself and the co-participants in the data collection and analysis phase of the study (discussed in section 3.5.1). My strong sense was that the data collection could be done through cogenerative learning,

whereby the co-researcher and co-participant collaborate to co-create knowledge and learning (Reason 1994; Eldin and Levin 1991; Bradbury and Reason 2003; O'Neil and Marsick 2007; Costello 2011; Levin 2102).

My aim was to collaboratively cogenerate data and thereby knowledge, whilst at the same time exploring and challenging the boundaries of qualitative research. As Bradbury and Reason (2003, p.156) state:

> "Action research is grounded in lived experience, developed in partnership, addresses significant problems, works with (rather than simply studies), develops new ways of seeing (i.e. theory) and leaves infrastructure in its wake".

Reflections on the cogeneration of knowledge and pushing the boundaries of qualitative research are worthy of discussion in two parts: in terms of the cogeneration of knowledge and the analysis, interpretations and understandings discussed in Chapter 4. I offer an example of interpretation of data which suggested that TL is intrinsically linked to notions of habitus and identity. Regarding my intention to challenge the orthodoxies surrounding qualitative research, findings are less emphatic, however these are again discussed in Chapter 4.

Mason (1996) suggests that the researcher should be aware of the challenge of positioning themselves as an active and reflexive co-researcher/co-participant in qualitative data collection. This is an important point, as in order to gain understandings of students' experiences, it is necessary to interpret accounts of those experiences in such a way that they represent the voices of the cogenerators of knowledge. The method collaboratively developed by me and the co-participants was subject to continued reflection and redesign as we sought to capture the experiences of each individual. The collection and analysis of data is discussed in detail in sections 3.6 and 3.12.

The theoretical framework I developed (amended from Thomas 2014) supported by the work carried out with my co-researcher Serena, incorporated Abes's (2009) concept of borderlands. The framework, which we conceptualise as cogs, incorporates key signature theorists including

Mezirow (1978a, b - 2000), Illeris (2014) and Bourdieu (1983 - 1985). I was attracted to Abes's (2009) position as she contends that the incompleteness of theoretical perspectives offers opportunities for the adoption of experimental methodological, and by extension experimental methods approaches, through working within the 'borderlands' of multiple theories.

In line with this, the 'messy method' encourages cogenerators of knowledge to embrace new and unknown discoveries which may arise from experimental approaches to research (Mellor 2001). It was important for my co-researcher Serena to be part of the framework conceptualisation, in order to strengthen the interactive exchange of learning, sense-making and collaborative thinking between us (Reason 1994). This remains a fundamental part of challenging methodological orthodoxies (Fairclough 2008).

3.2.1 My Ontological and Epistemological approach

Crotty (1998) proposes four 'elements' of social science research: epistemology (objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism); theoretical perspective, which others discussing the research process refer to as ontology (Guba and Lincoln 1994; Blaikie 2000; Creswell 2013) and methodology and methods, adding that these are all interrelated. At this point it is useful to acknowledge that there is a degree of debate about many of the terms applied to research, in particular social science research. Crotty (1998, p.11) for example challenges Blaikie's (1993) use of the term ontology in relation to:

> "...the claims or assumptions that a particular approach to social enquiry makes about the nature of social reality".

As Guba and Lincoln (1994) helpfully acknowledge, the discourse surrounding philosophical positions regarding the epistemological, ontological, and methodological beliefs cannot be proven, in terms of their 'truthfulness' and must be treated as an article of faith. It is also worth noting that any 'new' knowledge generated must be treated in such a way as to

acknowledge its relative positioning in relation to extant knowledge. A point I would like to offer here is that ontological and epistemological traditions are being challenged across all research disciplines.

3.2.2 Epistemology

Turning to one of the key decisions a researcher must make, which epistemological or theoretical perspective (Crotty 1998) may be adopted, positivist and interpretivist epistemologies were each considered. According to Denscombe (2010, p.119):

> "'Positivism' centres on the idea of using scientific methods to gain knowledge, and it regards the observation and measurement of the properties of objects as crucial to the way we find out about social reality".

Qualitative researchers, particularly those engaged in emancipatory and feminist research, question the assertion that the positivist approach deals with that which is 'real' and therefore 'apprehendable' and 'explainable' (Creswell 2013). Rather they 'explain' or offer a framework within which to study social realities (Grix 2001), as opposed to allowing insight into and understandings of phenomena. Interpretivism requires the researcher to reach an understanding of the meaning or meanings behind social actions from analysis of data generated through associated methodologies. As Bryman (2012) notes, interpretivist researchers 'construct' or 'produce' knowledge by making sense of reality in the absence of structure and order. Denscombe (2007), facilitating understandings of the 'how and why', offers insights into social processes (Creswell 2013). I have adopted an interpretivist approach as this allows researchers to study complex, contextually challenging topics in ways that the participant can adapt. I offer as an example, changes in method or data collection, which I anticipated may occur throughout the process (Blaxter et al. 2010). This fulfilled the need for my research to be dynamic and respond to the data generated in a way that allowed analysis and interpretation within my chosen ontological

framework (Blaikie 2000). It also offered opportunities to answer the as yet unanswered questions: how and why TL occurs.

Lincoln and Guba (2013, p.37) contend that the nature of knowledge is not limited to ontological, epistemological, and methodological considerations, or questions, arguing that that which is most "valuable... truthful... beautiful, and life-enhancing", 'axiological' knowledge, is the fourth element of constructivism. Heron and Reason (1997, p.297) propose that the axiological element:

> "...is a necessary complement to balance and make whole the concern with truth exhibited by the first three questions [epistemology, ontology, methodology]. And the first value question to be raised is about the valuing of knowledge itself".

This notion fits with the epistemological position of interpretivism, where research is done in order to generate knowledge about individual experiences; to gain understandings of a phenomenon in ways that are valued as being 'truthful' and life enhancing (Lincoln and Guba 2013). A fundamental tenet of action research is that it should be relevant to, and undertaken by, and for those engaged in the 'action' (Bradbury and Reason 2003) which in the case of my study was the potential for transformative experience. Similarly, the principles of TL focus on the acquisition of knowledge and skills, enhancing competence and self-confidence through consciousness-raising and emancipatory critical assessment reflection (Mezirow 1978a, b), therefore an interpretivist approach was deemed most appropriate.

3.3 Subjectivity and Objectivity

Mason (1996) states that the qualitative social science researcher's ontological position is that of an explorer of experiences and understandings, which aligns with the epistemological stance of an interpretivist approach to generating and analysing data in the pursuit of constructing new knowledge. Creswell (2013) argues that the worldview of constructivism is strongly associated with interpretivism and as such was worthy of consideration.

According to Lincoln and Guba (2013), constructivists make sense of things, and in its own way, this simplistic view explains the ontological essence of constructivism. Bryman (2012, p.36) argues that constructivism is the "ontological orientation" of interpretivism, and that the 'meanings' of social phenomena, as accomplished by its actors, those who 'do' whose actions are being studied, are in constant state of flux. Crotty (1998, p.42) interestingly argues that constructionism is:

> "The view that all knowledge and therefore meaningful reality ...is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social construct".

Crotty's point speaks to my own view that TL is a more reiterative and nonlinear process than Mezirow (1970 a, b) originally proposed, and that researching TL experiences, which are inherently constructed as actions and importantly interactions between many parties within educational contexts, requires a constructivist approach. The constructivist ontological position I adopted offered a framework within which to construct knowledge through my interpretations of the experiences of the students' and co-creation of knowledge I was seeking to gain.

3.4 The Method

Firstly, it is useful to outline the strategies typically associated with qualitative research methods, in particular interpretivist research, which include a wide range of approaches, including interview methods, observation, and the analysis of documents and discourse. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) discuss the notion of multiple methods as being intrinsic to qualitative research, posing the notion that it is a 'bricolage' of close knit practices, positing the co-participant as a bricoleur, utilising strategies as and when they are required within the context of the research question. It is widely argued that the choice of topic inevitably influences the research approach and strategy (Crotty 1998; Blaikie 2000; Bryman 2012; Creswell 2013), although the order in which the epistemological approach, methodology and methods are to a degree prescribed is contested. Creswell (2013) contends that there are

three approaches to research, informed by the epistemological assumptions of the researcher, which in turn will dictate the research design and method according to the research question or problem. This was my starting point for developing the creative method I propose in section 3.1.3.

Blaxter et al. (2010, p.67) propose four social science techniques "... the study of documents, interviews, observations or questionnaires". Whilst these are data collection 'techniques' they are noted here as each are typically, although not exclusively, associated with a distinct paradigm, either qualitative or quantitative. As I developed my thoughts and understandings of my research stance, I began to formulate a means of data collection based on Mason's (2014) concept of communicative exchange, and critical and compassionate interviewing (Ekman 2015), which I discuss in section 3.7.4 As Blaxter et al. (2010) discuss, I made a number of adaptations throughout the process of data collection, steering a carefully considered path through my epistemological stance, the methodological framework and ethical considerations (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Blaikie 2000; Blaxter et al. 2010; Creswell 2013). My actions are supported by the idea that the changing nature of the research process should in itself, be 'messy' in order to enable new ways of thinking to materialise and evolve through the course of data collection (Clark et el. 2007; Cook 2009).

One of the adaptations to my method which became necessary early on in the process was reviewing the locations in which I met with co-participants. Having been keen to ensure that we met in places where they felt most comfortable, I met with one participant in an open learning space in a student building on our campus. It became apparent early in the CCCE that we could not properly record our conversation, this led us to relocate within the building and then for further meetings use my office, which ironically all co-participant stated felt most comfortable for them.

Blaikie (2000, p.62) contends that the research question:

> "define[s] the nature and scope of the research...determine[s] what is to be studied and ...how it will be studied".

This required careful consideration and was subject to many reiterations as the research progressed (Lincoln and Guba 2013; Mason 1996; Denzin and Lincoln 1998). I developed a conceptual framework which as previously stated was subject to 3 iterations. I began with the theories of habitus and cultural capital within the field of Transformative Learning (Mezirow 1991 - 2000) to allow me to gain understandings of these aspects of learning and their effects on creative media students (Bourdieu 1997; Reay 2004; Reed-Danahay 2005; Hurst 2013). I reviewed methodology and methods literature, in particular feminist theory, to find a way to locate myself and the students in the data collection in order to generate data for the analysis phase of the study.

My strong sense was that the data collection could be done through cogenerative learning, whereby the co-researcher and co-participant collaborate to co-create knowledge and learning (Eldin and Levin 1991; Reason 1994; Bradbury and Reason 2003; O'Neil and Marsick 2007; Costello 2011 and Levin 2002), whilst at the same time exploring and challenging the boundaries of qualitative research. As Bradbury and Reason (2003, p.156) posit:

> "Action research is grounded in lived experience, developed in partnership, addresses significant problems, works with (rather than simply studies), develops new ways of seeing (i.e., theory) and leaves infrastructure in its wake".

The theoretical framework I developed (amended from Thomas 2014) incorporated Abes's (2009) concept of borderlands. The framework within which I conceptualise my research incorporates key signature theorists including Mezirow (1978a, b – 2000), Illeris (2014, 2015, 2018) and Bourdieu (1983 - 1985). I was attracted to Abes's (2009) position as she contends that the incompleteness of theoretical perspectives offers opportunities for the adoption of experimental methodological, and by extension experimental methods through working within the 'borderlands' of theories.

3.5 Ethics - challenges for education researchers in practice

Ethical considerations are much discussed and potentially misunderstood, misused and abused in research. They are viewed from vastly differing perspectives, in a wide range of contexts. Most HE institutions tend to have generic, formulaic policies regarding ethics, which has the potential to devalue or 'process-ise' ethics. These policies typically negate the importance of co-generated knowledge created through close collaboration with the researcher and co-participants doing action research. They pose challenges for education researchers that must be met. Process-driven ethical policies also underestimate the importance of what Hayes (2018, p.26) describes as:

> "The shared and intimate practices of engagement between students and staff [which] should not be hidden, but instead be celebrated"

My own ethical position is informed by humanistic, person-centred approaches to teaching, placing the learner at the centre of any teaching/learning experience, being empathic and respectful, and listening actively and meaningfully to others (Rogers et al. 2013). This requires the development of a rapport, a relationship between the 'educator' (who in some instances may be the student, as for example, I argue, is the interlocutor in co-constructed and cogenerated knowledge creation), and the 'learner' (Fairclough 2008).

I established an initial rapport with my co-participants by corresponding with them prior to the data collection phase. I paid close attention to their responses to questions I asked when I first contacted them inviting them to participate in the study. I explained very clearly the commitment I was asking them to make in terms of giving up their time to meet with me, and I was highly flexible about how we might achieve the CCCEs. I spent a considerable amount of time trying to determine what they hoped to achieve from engaging in the study, and agreed the principles of informed consent, assuring all of the co-participant of confidentiality and anonymity. I made clear my belief that they were essential participants in the cogeneration of

knowledge and understanding I was seeking to create, and at the beginning and conclusion of each of the communicative exchanges we spent time chatting informally about their extra and curricular activities, in which I was genuinely interested.

The principles of humanistic or person-centred approaches to teaching offer a framework within which I can confidently and comfortably practice. The importance of practicing “unconditional regard”, “valuing the learner as a human being” is stressed by Fairclough (2008, p.33), is a core tenet of my own ethical stance. Ethical considerations are not a recent concept, the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) posited a practical ethical framework by which “man” should live: Nichomachean Ethics (Aristotle 2015). Interestingly, in a discussion on ethics Bourdieu refers to Aristotelian concepts, the ways in which groups respond to ‘virtue’ as an ethical consideration, arguing that it is the “appearance of virtue” achieved through adherence to “official rules” that gives rise to the legitimisation of that which may otherwise be contested (Bourdieu 1998, p.142).

I endeavoured to avoid ‘performing’ ethically, through instruments such as ‘checklists’, adhering to the philosophical ethical stance I outline here. McCormack et al. (2012), discussing the ‘fit’ or as I claim, tensions between qualitative research and Research Ethics Boards (committees) call for “qualitative expertise” in membership of boards, I echo this sentiment as where there is a lack of expertise in education research, ethical considerations are not well understood and typically managed via checklists and frameworks suited to so-called ‘hard sciences’. That said, the British Educational Research Association’s Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA 2011) offer meaningful information and advice for education researchers, and as such were the guiding principles for my own ethical conduct. The BERA (2011) guidelines call on researchers to consider at all times, the person or people involved in the research, the nature and purpose of the knowledge they are creating, the democratic values they are adopting, their responsibility to the quality of educational research and

respect for the principles of academic freedom. These guidelines were helpful to me as a researcher as they reminded me to focus on both the co-participants, and potential audiences for the research, as well as the need for vigilance in all of the processes and procedures, for example data collection, storage, and retention.

3.5.1 Feminist approaches to ethics

According to Preissle (2006, p.515):

> "Feminist ethics developed in part as an explicit challenge to conventional patterns of Western epistemology and ethics".

Feminist scholars have generated a wealth and breadth of discourse focused on the ethical challenges of carrying out emancipatory research, which whilst not a key tenet of my own research framework is of interest and I argue applicable as the literature I have reviewed, albeit in brief, aligns closely with my ontological and epistemological stances. Addison (2010, p.144) questions the notion that there is "such a thing as a purely feminist method", she does however state that:

> "...there are ways in which certain types of research and certain methods can be enacted via feminist standpoint theory that lead to improved knowledge of marginalized people".

I have attempted to situate my research, focused on the transformative experiences of undergraduate creative media students, within that tradition. This is important to consider, for knowledge exchanges in collaborative, emancipatory research can be linear, interactive, and multidimension, yet consistently produce knowledge gains for the co-researchers involved (Monk et al. 2003).

This position also engenders a commitment to the shared responsibility of exchanging ideas, and a mutual accountability for learning growth between co-researchers (Mattessich et al. 2001). Kirsch (1999, p.5) proposed that feminist research commits the co-participant and the co-research to seven principles from which I have adopted the following four:

> "ask research questions which acknowledge and validate women's experiences'…
>
> collaborate with participants as much as possible so that growth and learning can be mutually beneficial, interactive, and cooperative…
>
> analyze how the researchers' identity, experience, training, and theoretical framework shape the research agenda, data analysis, and findings…
>
> take responsibility for the representation of others in research reports by assessing probable and actual effects on different audiences…".

I collaborated as closely with my co-participants as possible so that our "growth and learning [could be] mutually beneficial, interactive and cooperative" (Kirsch 1999, p.16). I continually critically reflected on and analysed how my:

> "identity, professional and research experience, training and…theoretical framework shaped [my] research agenda, data analysis, and [interpretations]" (Kirsch 1999, p.16).

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I took:

> "…responsibility for the representations of others in the study by assessing probable and actual effects on the intended audiences [educators and policy makers] whilst acknowledging the limitations of and contradictions inherent in the data and considered alternative interpretations" (Kirsch 1999, p.16).

Whilst challenging, these principles provided the basis on which I managed to maintain data collection, and as I discuss in section 3.13, analysis that was congruent with the research question. The first of Kirsch's (1999) principles required continual 'sense checking' with each of the co-participants to ensure that our communicative exchanges were mutually understood, for example by clarifying or confirming my understandings during our exchanges. It was important for my co-researcher Serena to be involved in the interpretation of our data, to both enhance our learning in practice, and ensure my personal biases did not influence the analysis. Applying Kirsch's (1999) principles also supported our endeavours to acknowledge and validate each other's unique understandings of the data, encouraging a

research process that was both reactive, and fair throughout (Rawson and Schell 2010).

Similarly, when co-participants talked about their families and peers, I facilitated communications that encouraged TL, again without questioning the 'truthfulness' of their experiences. Throughout the exchanges, I did however confirm the instances where my understanding of my own growth and learning took place for example, using phrases such as: "that's interesting I hadn't realised that", or "well that's really helpful, your account clarifies [an issue or problem] I have struggled to understand". Typically, I would ask whether talking about their particular experience added to their understanding of an event or perception. During the communication exchanges and throughout the analysis phase, I took care to reflect on whether my thoughts and interpretations were influenced by my own perspectives where I could. This is where doing some of the interpretation and analysis with Serena, my co-researcher, was especially helpful, as we analysed the same tracts of transcriptions, independently and then reviewed each other's interpretations.

There were no significant differences in our interpretations, although there were points of clarification needed, which involved reflecting and explaining our ideas through an interactive process (Rawson and Schell 2010). For example, Serena would vocalise her thoughts on a co-participant's narrative or a theme, and I would respond with my own thoughts, which may have been vocalised differently, but through clarification we identified that our interpretations were aligned. Where minor differences in our interpretations arose, Serena and I adopted a reflexive stance in our mean-making, with a commitment to mutual recognition of each other's analysis. We had agreed and accepted that decision-making 'power' is always shifting in collaborative endeavours (Kirby and Gibbs 2006) (discussed further in section 3.6).

This was also applied to the well-focused discussions between me and each co-participant, in which ideas were challenged and thoughts are articulated and justified, as they become aware of how they are thinking and what that

might mean for their own idea ideas. Adey and Shayer (1994, p.44) also claim that metacognition, or the development of:

> "thinking about one's own thinking turns out to be a feature of almost all successful programmes designed to enhance thinking)".

The final principle Kirsch (1999) offers required me to be mindful of the purpose of research, which is to add to the existing body of knowledge, in particular to areas of practice and policy. I found this helpful as it prevented me from wondering off on tangents that would have of interest to me but not an answer to the research question, for example when co-participants discussed their perceptions of prejudices about ethnicity and sexuality within family and friendship groups.

Having outlined my own philosophical ethical position, I turn now to the considerations I have detailed in my ethics proposal (see appendix 1). Reflecting on my ethical position I incorporated these as best I could in my ethics checklist (see appendix 2) and participation information sheet (PIS) (see appendix 3). The ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen et al. 2011) became 'below the line concerns'. Maintaining anonymity as an "insider" co-participant became problematic, as two of the participants coincidently met independently in a social space in the faculty in which we are based and entered into a discussion about working with academics. Inevitably they discovered that they had both contributed to my research project, a situation I was aware was possible (Cohen et al. 2011; Floyd and Arthur 2012; Kara 2015). To address this, I had asked participants how they preferred such situations to be managed, all four students responded to the effect they were unconcerned about this possible, and quite likely eventually.

3.6 The Power Dynamic

One of the key ethical considerations is the 'power' issue between me as an academic, and co-participants who are students in my own faculty. Palaiologou (2016) provides a valuable six layer 'ethical helix' through which to reflect on the ethical obligations of researchers. I have endeavoured to apply Palaiologou's (2016, p.54) contention that "ethical praxis", rather than

ethical practice should be the researchers guiding principle, “involving participants in all stages of the research process”. This enduring ethical concern of power relationships was initially addressed in my email inviting students to participate in the study. In this email and throughout the data collection I emphasised the importance of their contribution to the co-creation of knowledge, and their ownership of the interview process, up and until the point of agreement on our initial interpretations of the data. Throughout the fieldwork phase I returned to the topic of consent and clarified with all four co-participant their willingness to continue the CCCEs (Cohen et al. 2011). Maria did indeed take ownership of the process, withdrawing after the first CCCE, suggesting that she felt confident to do so. Conversely, Liam and Peter offered to continue meeting to discuss their experiences, eager to add to the data, suggesting they were also comfortably engaged in the process.

In order to avoid breaches of ethics, I removed identifiers from the coding that might fail to protect anonymity (Kaiser 2009; Saunders et al. 2011). As Ekman (2015, p.131) contends, where ethical dilemmas arise it is essential to “prioritize anonymity above research quality.”

A further concern was the notion of unconscious dynamics, power balances that either I as academic or students as co-participant were not consciously aware of. This dynamic is influenced by issues of “trust... gender, age, and other power-laden dynamics” (Holloway and Jefferson 1997, p.68) of which, as an ‘insider’ researcher, I was acutely aware (Saunders et al. 2011). However, as Saunders et al. (2011) argue, the notion of ‘insider’ research is contested, as researchers, are typically neither wholly an insider nor outsider. Moreover, although I am considered a ‘new’ researcher, I am not new to guidance and principles of professional ethical conduct and as an experienced practitioner, I have responded to ethical “grey areas”, within each unique context (Kara 2015, p.48). I regularly sense checked with each co-participant throughout the exchanges, their sense of efficacy. For example, I was concerned that they may feel a sense of obligation to engage in or continue with our exchanges. This was partly addressed by arranging

the time and place of meetings according to their preferences. I also offered to stop the communications when they extended beyond the agreed time. The nature of the exchanges, which were unstructured, informal, and led by each co-participant allowed them control over the way in which they talked about their experiences and perceptions. This allowed the co-participants to take control as the narrators of their own stories, redressing any potential power imbalance (Sherlock and Thynne 2010).

3.7 Data Collection

An initial plan of action was devised to include a timeframe and agree methods of recording and documenting the collection of data in line with Heron (1996). Ethical considerations and boundaries were agreed in accordance with Bournemouth University's Ethics code (2009) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) code of ethics (Kimmel 1988). In addition, I employed a blend of methods to collect the data, based on Mason's (2014) communicative exchanges and Ekman's (2015) critical compassionate interviewing. This is closely aligned to TL theory, and was also instrumental in allowing me to create a rapport with each co-participant and represent and reflect their voices.

Regarding rapport, which I considered an essential aspect of the data collection, I acknowledge that much is written about the necessity of maintaining 'researcher detachment'. Whilst appropriate in some settings, I argue this positions data collection as an unwarranted 'scientification' of qualitative research, reinforcing a power balance that I aimed to alleviate. Moreover, as Kimmel (2015) notes, where participants are keen to take part in research their own enthusiasm leads naturally to the creating of rapport, and as Ekman (2015, p.121) argues, critical compassionate interviewing renders the researcher "a co-constructing participant", moving "beyond traditional techniques".

3.7.1 Notes on terminology

Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009, p.281) provide a useful overview of terminology associated with various research paradigms; from which I have adopted the terms co-researcher (for researcher) and co-participant (for participant). I found these terms particularly helpful in allowing me to conceptualise and situate the co-participants and co-researcher in the study (Figure 4).

Table 1
Participants' Roles in Different Types of Research

Role	Power Relations	Type of Study	Information & Data Collector	Reference
Participant Respondent	Highly hierarchical	Quantitative research	Researcher	Whyte & Whyte (1984) Mason (1996)
		Qualitative research:		
Informer Informant	Hierarchical	Anthropology Ethnography	Field worker	Whyte & Whyte (1984)
Interviewee Participant	Hierarchical	Sociology Psychology	Interviewer	Berg & Smith (1985) Whitmore (1994)
Participant	Low-hierarchical	Feminist Constructionist	Researcher	Brayton (1997) Torres & Baxter Magolda (2002)
Coresearcher Coparticipant	Equal partnership	Cooperative research Research partnership	Coresearcher Coparticipant	Reason (1994) Archer & Whitaker (1994)
Collaborator	High-egalitarian	Collaborative	Facilitator Initiator	Treleaven (1994)

Figure 4: Participant roles (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009)

I determined a term for the method which I employ, Critical Compassionate, Communicative Exchanges (CCCE), that is both descriptive and acknowledges its genesis, within which I work, and propose as a novel method.

3.7.2 Sampling

The study population comprised final year (Level 6) undergraduates studying a range of media degrees, two in humanities programmes and two aligned to marketing. I employed purposive sampling as it was important that the cogenerators of the knowledge and understandings I was seeking to gain had experienced or had the opportunity to experience TL. Denscombe (2010, p.36) supports this stance, stating that purposive sampling:

> "…allows the researcher to home in on people or events which there are good grounds for believing they will be critical for the research".

Level 6 students were identified as being key to my research as it is widely accepted that:

> "…it is difficult to measure the level of transformation amongst participants when transformation is perceived as an end state" (Snyder 2008, p.172).

The "end state" to which Snyder (2008) refers is assumed to be the completion of the education process in which the student is engaging during their TL experience. As I also discuss in the concluding section of the analysis of interpretations of the data (section 4.5), my strong sense is that the end state of TL can occur when students retrospectively reflect on their experiences, perhaps years after graduating.

Recruitment was undertaken in the first instance by emailing Level 6 students, seeking expressions of interest in the study. I followed up via email those who indicated their willingness to participate, having read a description of my research (see appendix 4). I met with a total of nine students, six of whom agreed to participate, four of whom met the aims of the study. By way of emphasising the potential time commitment I explained the iterative nature of the fieldwork during those initial meetings and stressed the voluntary nature of their participation. This was articulated in the participant information sheet (see appendix 3). We agreed that the fieldwork would take place during the latter part of the final semester so that participants could focus on their academic commitments. Whilst all four co-participants did have submissions during this time, they asserted that this was their preferred time frame.

3.7.3 Consent

Informed consent is a much-debated concept. As Malone (2003) asserts, it is not possible to truly represent to participants the paths that the researcher and participants may take. This is especially relevant to my research, as there were several unanticipated discussion points that were not covered in

the original consent document. In collaborating with one of the co-participants, the opportunity arose to make a significant change to the data analysis. I therefore revisited consent and asked two of the co-participants for their agreement and consent to allow this change (Kaiser 2009).

The co-participants comprised Liam, Peter, Maria, and Serena, anonymised with their chosen pseudonyms. I first contacted potential co-participants approximately six months prior to the collection of data and continued to correspond with them until the commencement of data collection. This was done to facilitate co-participants involvement in the research process (Palaiologou 2016), to establish and build rapport, and to ensure that we met at times that avoided interference with academic commitments. Prior to commencing the data collection, I confirmed with each participant their preferred location for the CCCEs to take place. Somewhat surprisingly, all four participants expressed a preference to meet on campus, and more surprisingly, most meetings took place in my office, again participants requested this. I did ask all co-participants why they preferred to meet in my office, and they contended that it was a comfortable 'private' space. This also addressed notions of power balance.

3.7.4 Critical, Compassionate Communicative exchanges (CCCE): with a purpose

The purpose of what I conceptualise as reiterative critical compassionate communicative exchanges (CCCE), which is a blend of Mason's (2014) communicative exchanges and Ekman's (2015) critical compassionate interviewing, was to gain understandings of the co-participant's learning and educational experiences. Mason (2014) describes communicative exchanges as informal, tailored to the interviewee and conversational rather than interrogative. Interestingly, Mason (2014) discusses the ways in which communicative exchanges can be creative, urging researchers to think "beyond the dialogue" to generate rich, nuanced data allowing interpretive understandings.

Mason (2014) contends that creative communicative exchanges allow the co-researcher to gain insights into the 'meanings' the co-participant attributes to social actions, processes and behaviours, which aligns closely with 'mean-making' in transformative learning (Mezirow 1978a, b). Significantly Mason (2014) adds that this method generates rich data about the complexities and connections between experiences, and importantly refers to the ways in which contextualised.

According to Bryman (2012) deep knowledge of the 'particular' can be co-constructed from creative interviews through interpretations, which aligns with my epistemological and ontological positions and that will allow me to make sense of the data through systematic interpretation

Critical compassionate interviewing (CCI) is intended to address limitations in the research traditions in which Ekman (2015, p.119) works (Critical Management Studies (CMS) described as having "blind spots", including "moral condescension… and predefined subject positions for many of the key research subjects". Ekman (2015, p. 119) proposes that her method:

> "…retain[s] some of the strengths of CMS, namely the sense of solidarity with those on the receiving end of suffering, marginalization or exploitation".

The central premise of CCI is that the reflexive researcher can navigate the tension inherent in qualitative research which involves or generates sensitive, intimate data. Critical compassionate interviewing focuses on the "'lived experience'" of co-participant and structures within which the research is taking place. These, Ekman (2015, p.125) refers to as "micro level experiences and macro and macro level structures". Of relevance to my research is, in simple terms, Ekman's contention that data can be gained that is highly critical of HE yet, that "asking until it makes sense" allows for an uncritical exploration of issues in such a way that I could reach an understanding of the experiences that may facilitate or hinder TL (Ekman (2015, p.125). This allowed me to seek an understanding of co-participant' mean-makings of negative and positive experiences, assisting in addressing

ambiguities and my own misunderstandings and meaning making. Merging Mason (2014) and Ekman's (2015) data collection methods allowed me to explore the research question more fully than any single or fixed position. It is also aligned with Abes (2009) claim that the incompleteness of theories can be met through working within the borderlands of those theories. The exchanges took place over a period of 6 weeks, whereby the initial exchange was followed up by further exchanges. The exchanges returned to themes identified from previous communications by both me and the co-participant, adapting Mason (2014) and Ekman's (2015) methods.

3.8 Reiterative reciprocal CCCEs: how and why.

We recorded the reflections and accounts of meaningful events or developments during their undergraduate endeavours (Mason 2014). This was achieved through reiterative and reciprocal CCCEs (Ekam 2015). As Ekman (2015, p.121) argues compassionate, reiterative exchanges can draw out "the richness of inner lived experience[s]". Prior to recording the exchanges, we agreed that each exchange would be reviewed, and any further exchanges based on emerging themes or reflection by me and/or the co-participant discussed. The CCCEs were recorded using an iPad app, as this allowed me to email the exchanges directly to each co-participant for their review.

3.9 Co-participants

All of the co-participants were classified by the institution as WP students, who might otherwise be described as students from 'Non-Traditional' 'Low Participation Neighbourhoods' (LPN), first generation HE students, disabled students, care leavers, ethnic minorities, and mature and part time students (Thomas 2005; Greenbank 2006). Firstly, Liam, a white male, is a first generation HE student from an LPN. Liam chose to study a humanities undergraduate media communication degree that he believed would meet his aspiration to study at post graduate level (PG Cert Ed). Having excelled at English in school Liam was keen to pursue a teaching career: his choice of

degree was premised on his belief that this would lead to a postgraduate teaching qualification.

Peter is a mature, white male disabled, first generation HE student who chose to study an undergraduate degree in English as a means to "professionalise" his English for Speakers of Other Languages teaching career. Peter had reached a plateau in terms of his career development, having taught English as another language for some years, and had formed the view that the degree would offer advanced career opportunities.

Serena is a white female disabled student and carer, estranged from her family, who had changed degree programme (and institution) to study at a post 92 University as she felt that this would lead to better support for her mental and physical health conditions. Serena struggled with a range of health conditions while studying at a Russell Group university and believed that studying in a post 92 university would be less 'demanding'. She was however keen to stress that she had chosen to study in an institution which had highly regarded and rated courses in her area of study, with high levels of post graduate employability.

Finally, Maria is a white female, first generation HE student from a low participation neighbourhood (LPN), who until she studied a BSc in business was unaware that she had a disability. Maria chose to study at a university, in her words:

> "far enough away from home to be 'away' [approximately 30 miles], but near enough to go 'home' when she needed to, especially as I am needed in the family business".

Whilst not a widely diverse group, aspects of WP were represented by all of the co-participants, namely, carer, first generation, disabled and LPN. None of the co-participants referred to their sexuality or faith, areas I intentionally did not explore as my aim was to co-construct understandings of TL amongst WP students *per se.*

3.10 Timing and duration

The CCCEs took place at the co-participant's requests (unanimously) during the latter part of the final semester so that they could manage their time and focus on their academic commitments (see table 3).

Co-participant	Duration
Liam	Three interventions with over a 3-week period, with each over an hour's duration.
Peter	Six interventions, ranging from half an hour to two hour's duration.
Selena	Three interventions, ranging from 45 minutes to approximately one and a half hours duration.
Maria	One intervention of approximately one and a half hours duration.

Table 3: Participant timing and duration

In total, there were approximately 13 hours of CCCE directly related to the research topic. A further 2 -3 hours, instanced aspects of the CCCEs that did not speak to the research question. These CCCEs were initiated by the co-participants, evidencing the rapport and relationship building essential for the student-centred knowledge I was seeking to cogenerate (Fairclough 2008, Rogers et al. 2014). The co-participants spoke of experiences that met most if not all of Mezirow's (1978a, b – 2000) 10 phases of TL, therefore the exchanges resulted in the generation and co-creation of rich and thick understandings of transformative experiences that allows analysis and discussion (Holloway and Wheeler 2010).

3.11 Reflexivity

Blaxter et al. (2010) offer a model that I have adopted as a method of continued critical self-reflection on the process of research, as it was suited to the research topic and allowed me to develop the method as I undertook the fieldwork (see figure 2). As scholars have argued, revisiting, and reflecting on the methodology and method, including managing data, is recommended, throughout the process especially as reflexivity is a prerequisite of social research (e.g., Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Mason 1996; Blaikie 2000).

As previously noted, Holloway and Todres (2003) acknowledge the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, especially when the researcher is flexible in their choice of method. I refer here to critical reflection on my own practice. According to Loughlin (1993, p.74), adoption of Mezirow's (1991) theory as a means of understanding transformational learning and teaching facilitates the ongoing development of self-direction and reflection - as posited by Kolb (1984) - and as such is a key theory for understanding praxis. Mezirow (1990, 1991) proposed that TL requires both critical reflection on personal experience, and a desire to change in order to engender making meaning and emancipation from previously held perspectives. With this in mind, I purposefully reflected on each stage of the method, returning to the research question: Is Transformative Learning Possible in neoliberal Higher Education in England? as a guide to the usefulness of any changes or developments I was considering.

This had the added benefit of reinforcing contextual understandings of the research (Mezirow 1978a, b, 1991 - 2000). My focus in reflections was to draw together my ethical stance, the feminist and humanistic principles I articulate in sections 3.5.1 and the conditions for action research as posited by scholars including Reason (1994), O'Neil and Marsick (2007) Costello (2011) and Levin (2012).

3.12 Field Work

Liam, Maria, Peter, and Serena were individually invited via email to meet at a mutually convenient location of their choosing to begin data collection. The CCCEs took place by agreement in three university locations, the Student Centre, my own office, and a smaller office within my office. Again, by agreement the CCCEs were recorded using 'voice record pro', which allows recordings to be sent via email as MP3s to the co-participants. And also, to be used for transcription purposes. The recordings were stored on a password protected tablet, and subsequently on an encrypted H drive. In order to meet ethical considerations were destroyed post analysis.

As previously discussed, there were 13 CCCEs resulting in approximately 16 hours of recording and 13 hours of usable data. The first CCCE began with a 'technical check' to ensure that the recording equipment was operating. This was followed by a brief period of discussion regarding the nature of the research, a reiteration of the co-participant's right to withdraw at any point and further assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. I then thanked co-participants and began the CCCE by asking open questions such as, "can you tell me a little about your experiences here at BU as an undergraduate student?" (Liam) and "do you have any preferred areas of discussion you would like to focus on in relation to your experiences as an undergraduate student here?" (Serena).

The recordings of the first CCCEs were sent via email using Gmail (encrypted) to each co-participant for their review, in the first instance to check accuracy and to identify points for further CCCEs. The second CCCE began with a statement by me, typically:

> "You've really kindly gone through the recording and made some notes so I'm not sure how we would do this, um, should we go through both sets of notes and see where they align, and where the gaps are, the differences? Should we do it that way?"

The communicative exchanges were based on emphatic and deep listening so that a rational dialogue could be engendered through which rich

understandings could be collaboratively uncovered (Aalsburg and Mezirow 2000; Mason 2014). Whilst it was important that the CCCEs maintained a focus on rational dialogue, I encouraged mutual listening and understanding of perceptions and meanings within the CCCE (Ekman 2015). With the exception of Maria, this process was repeated until the final CCCE. This ensured that emerging understandings of the data either concurred or differed, allowing deeper exploration in the exchanges.

3.13 Data Analysis Method: Thematic Analysis

Early in the data analysis stage I reflected on my principal intention in respect of the study, which was that I was seeking to reflect authentically the voices of my co-participants. During my earliest attempts to achieve this I came to realise that the most authentic way to achieve my aim was to further develop the method to include one of the co-participants as a co-researcher. Reflecting on this change to the method I returned to the transcripts of the CCCEs to better understand how this adaptation could be approached. At this point Maria had withdrawn from the study, whereas Liam, Peter, and Serena had all participated fully in the reflections on my interpretations of their data. Serena had engaged most enthusiastically, expressing deep interest in the interpretations and understandings of her co-generated data.

During our discussions about her data, I learned that Serena had undertaken several Research Assistant roles within the faculty as she was keen to develop an academic career. After brief conversations with Paul and Liam - who expressed no interest in taking on a co-researcher role - I sought their agreement to allow Serena (whose identity they did not know) to join me in the analysis of their data. My earlier review of literature supports this decision to adapt the method and collaborate with Serena as a co-researcher (Katsouyanni 2008).

As a core aim of my research was to challenge methodological orthodoxy, I adopted this approach, supported by Riazi (2017), who argues that novel research is more likely to be generated through collaborative efforts rather

than 'tried-and-true methods'. After discussion with my supervisors, and further clarification with the co-participants of this adaptation to my method, this was agreed. This further clarification was important as I felt an obligation to ensure that Liam and Peter were as fully informed as possible. I explained that this would be a shared and mutually agreed process undertaken by me and another of the co-participants in the study. Aspects confidentiality and anonymity were uppermost in my mind, however neither Liam nor Paul were concerned about this. I asked whether they had any concerns regarding gender representation, again both agreed consent.

I believe that Serena's contribution to the analysis of the data offered deeper and richer interpretations and understandings of the CCCEs. Whilst arguably Serena's perceptions of her experiences may have differed from Maria, Liam, and Peter's, due for example to themes of habitus and identity the research was not seeking to compare these perceptions. Rather my aim was to understand each of the co-participant's experiences, as opposed to exploring whether transformative learning *per se* is experienced explicitly and differently through habitus and identity. It is important for me to state here that although Serena had previously attended a Russell Group institution, Thematic analysis of her statements led me to the interpretation that her habitus and identity were not bound in elitism. In some respects, Serena most embodied definitions of widening participation, both as a disabled student and a carer, without extended support having been estranged from her family.

Serena and I established a commitment to sharing responsibility for exchanging ideas and devised protocols for undertaking the analysis by consensus and reciprocal reflection (Mattessich et al. 2001).

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns and themes within data, in such a way that it can be readily understood and interpreted (Braun and Clarke 2006; Creswell 2014). It was agreed during the devising of the method that I would take the role of principle lead, and in areas where Serena and I reached differing

perceptions, this would be noted and explored further throughout the analysis process in open-ended and exploratory reflections between us (Cook 2009). Serena and I agreed how we would both undertake the thematic analysis, where and when we would do the work, and subsequently devised a protocol that best fitted our own analysis of the data. Serena is a highly visual thinker, preferring to conceptualise ideas in images, whereas I record my thoughts and ideas, using a digital recorder, which I then transcribe into text. Supporting this, we decided that during the very first stage of capturing our initial ideas we should employ our own methods and then come together within an agreed timeframe to share those thoughts.

I propose this method for the creation of co-generated knowledge the research took, through CCCEs and co-research as a novel approach (Mason 2014; Ekman 2015). The analysis was firstly, informed by the principles of thematic analysis, in particular Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines of thematic analysis, which they suggest can be completed in 6 phases (see figure 5).

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Figure 5: Braun and Clarke (2006, pp.87)

The method was underpinned by Mellor's (2001) "messy method" whereby as researchers and cogenerators of knowledge, we designed our own messy method that could be replicated by others, thus facilitating newly found ideas and practices to evolve (Cook 2009). This is supported by the notion that analysis is in itself, always "a messy business" (Blaxter et al. 2010, p.211). Serena and I were able to have free flowing, open-ended discussions

through our analysis, also referred to as 'messy talk', as a vital element for seeing, analysing, and understanding one another during collaborative exchanges (Cook 2009). Although some have described this method as inefficient, 'messy talk' helps to make collaborative projects more effective by encouraging the innovation of new ideas and theory formulation (Clarke et al 2007; Dossick and Neff 2011).

In order to meet ethical considerations discussed previously, i.e., anonymity and consent, prior to carrying out the coding I sought consent from both Liam and Peter to include Serena (without disclosing her identity) in the analysis and coding process. I asked both Liam and Peter to listen again to their interviews, which they did, and subsequently both were willing to agree to the collaborative coding of their data. The complex 'messiness' of this method required vigilance on my part, as Serena reflected on and compared her own experiences whilst doing the coding during the collaborative process. We discussed this at length on two occasions and concluded in agreement that her experience as a co-researcher added to her own TL experience.

Thematic Analysis Stage 1: Familiarity with The Data

For the first phase of the thematic analysis, I transcribed all the recordings, then printed the transcriptions. Serena and I immersed ourselves in the data by reading and capturing interesting features as we identified them. This was done independently of each other whereby through her own sense-making, Serena created visual representations of her initial ideas using a variety of different coloured and sized post-it notes which she attached to an A3 sheet of paper. This enabled Serena to focus on features of the data which struck her as interesting (Braun and Clarke 2006), whilst I used coloured highlighters to note recurring words that suggested emerging themes. We then shared these emerging themes with each other through reflexive discussions, with a joint focus and dialogue to produce agreed interpretations (Cornish et al. 2013).

One of the central motives for the qualitative coding of the transcription process was to begin to identify emerging themes and codes for each of the co-participant involved in the interview exchange process. On the first reading of transcripts we jointly identified overarching themes, which we colour coded in order to signpost further analysis whereby: yellow represented Method, green represented TL, and pink for Habitus. Next, small post-it tabs were used to label codes within themes, and the stages of the transformative learning cycle; for example, comments which suggest a life plan, disorienting dilemma, self-reflection (phases of TL). In addition to highlighting initial codes and themes, we made notes for each page of transcript, to reflect on in our in-depth discussions of our independent interpretations (see figure 6).

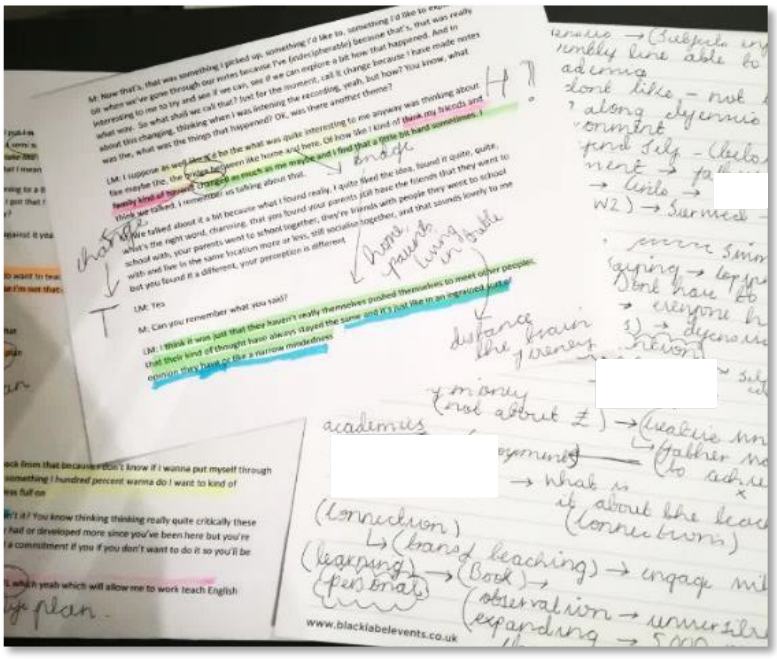

Figure 6: Qualitative analysis of transcripts using highlighters and notes

Thematic Analysis Phase 2: Generating Codes

For the 2nd phase of the thematic analysis, we independently produced tally sheets, which we identified through a deductive process of condensing identified key concepts into major categories (Linneberg and Korsgaard 2019) (see figure 7).

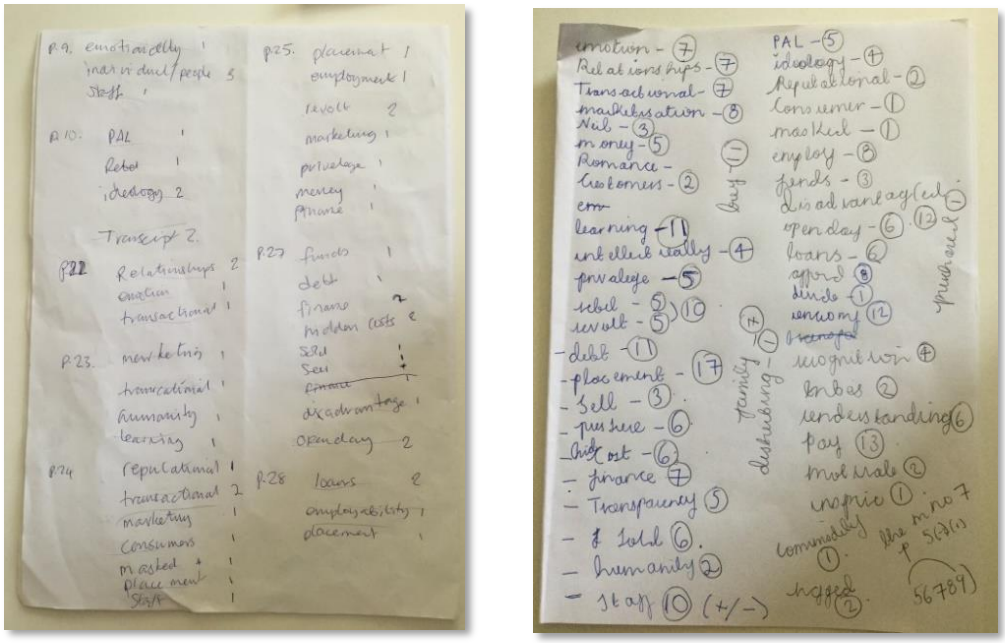

Figure 7: Codes identified from the transcripts with tally charts

The codes identified were written down onto a separate sheet of paper. Those which occurred most frequently formed the main theme headings for the next stage of the coding process. We then discussed, contrasted, critiqued, and synthesized the tally sheets, ensuring the researching possessed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 2013). These are important concepts when conducting qualitative research, since they help to maintain objectivity, whereby the researcher determines and checks the ‘accuracy’ or ‘credibility’ of the interpretations of analysis (Creswell 2014). To address reliability, a tally chart was independently formed by both myself and Serena, checking each one of us had identified the same frequency of codes for each transcript.

During this phase of coding, we returned a number of times to the transcripts in order to sense check our individual and joint understandings of the data. The exchanging of notes and discussion of our interpretations of transcripts ensured leading themes could be identified as salient words, phrases, and thematic indicators became apparent (Braun and Clarke 2006). Where questions arose regarding the intended meaning and inflections of the co-participant, we reviewed relevant recordings in order to confirm our interpretations. Here, the collaborative nature of the coding process was intended to address any viability issues in the interpretations of co-participant's experiences drawn from the transcripts (Willig 2001). In addition, through exploratory, open-ended discussions at a stage which may feel to some as the "most messy", we were able to generate rich insights within our area of investigation (Blaxter et al. 2010, pp.211).

Thematic Analysis Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Building on our initial coding, for Phase 3 we formulated thematic analysis 'maps' based, albeit it loosely, on Braun and Clarke (2006). Emerging from the tally charts, each analysis encapsulated different codes, which were mapped to seminal themes including Habitus, Identity and TL; the oval shapes served as central themes arising from the co-participant's narratives at the first stage (see figure 8 and appendix 5). The number of codes varied in their size naturally, depending on the co-participant' narratives and depth of responses.

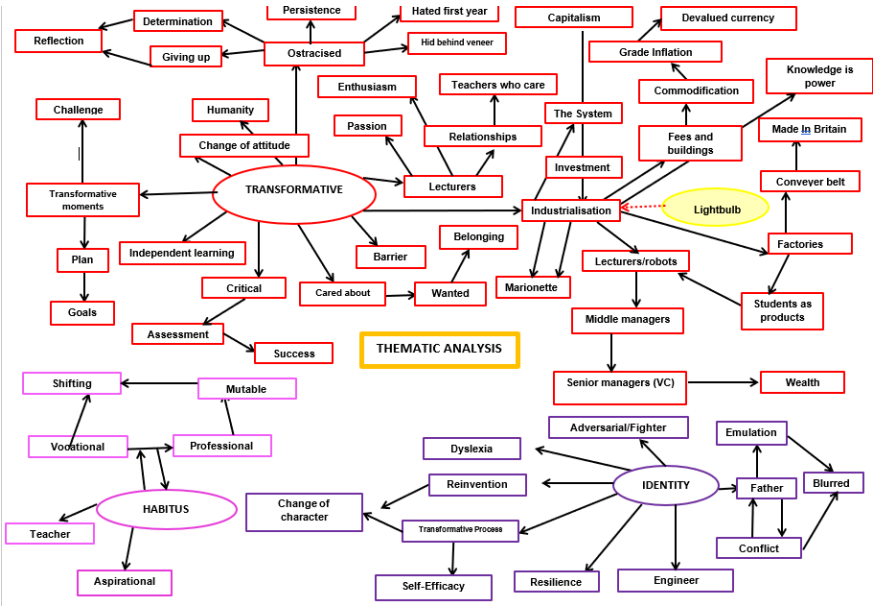

Figure 8: First stage thematic maps

These were further developed to include arrows leading to rectangular boxes identifying codes, where applicable, as we worked towards configuring 3 leading themes, displayed pictorially below (see figure 9 and appendix 6).

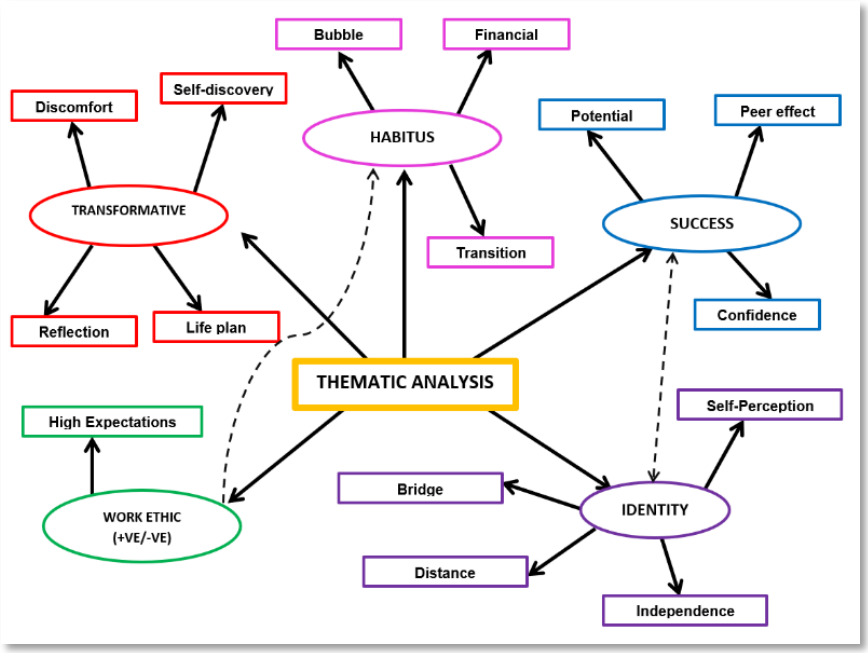

Figure 9: First stage thematic map dotted line developments

We configured the ‘themes’, to encapsulate important findings about the data in relation to the research question, also as a way of generating patterned meanings within each co-participant’s narrative (Braun and Clark 2006). As

shown, dotted lines were also employed to demonstrate the links which arose between each co-participant's themes into Habitus, Identity or TL, where the narratives supported this. This technique is supported by the idea that traditional definitions of thematic analysis should be expanded to include more flexible approaches, based on either dual discussions, or exploratory methods (Tattersall et al. 2007) using visual aids. Thematic mapping is highly adaptable and has been identified as a credible technique that can demonstrate how people visualize relationships between various concepts (Johannes and Faubert 2009). This was particularly pertinent for the study, thereby enabling us to identify connecting codes under the main themes for each co-participant, serving as visual representations for understanding the narratives of their higher education experiences (Wheeldon and Åhlberg 2012). Through our continued analysis, the diagrams evolved several times, finally configuring into the three themes of TL, Habitus, and Identity (see figure 10 and appendix 7).

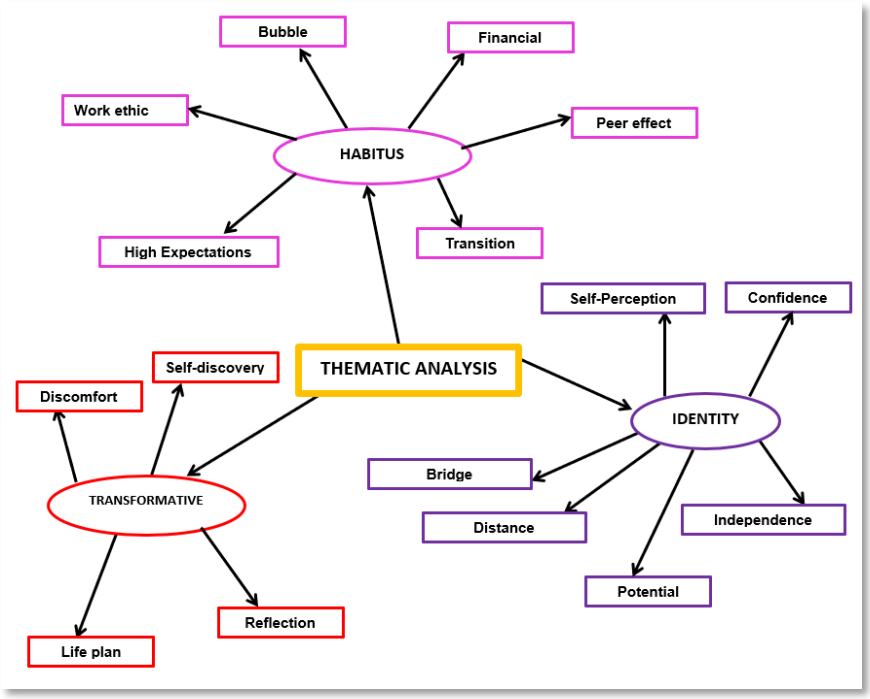

Figure 10: Second stage development of thematic maps (colour-coded)

Thematic Analysis Phase 4: Reviewing Themes for Cog Conceptual Framework

We defined Phase 4 as the 'cog formulation' stage, which was arguably the most valuable part the analysis in terms of enriching our understanding of the data, as we begun to formulate our conceptual framework. To achieve this, for each of the co-participants, in typical schematic form, we developed the thematic analysis maps towards a 'doughnut' conceptualization (section 3.13.5 final phase). Firstly, we synthesized the thematic maps for each of the co-participant into a 'cog' like design, which aligned with the conceptual framework incorporating TL (Mezirow 1978a, b), Habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and Identity (Illeris 2014) (see figure 11). Once more, dotted arrows were employed where we felt there were overlaps between these seminal themes, to demonstrate how these would interconnect to form a round cog-like conceptualization of the data.

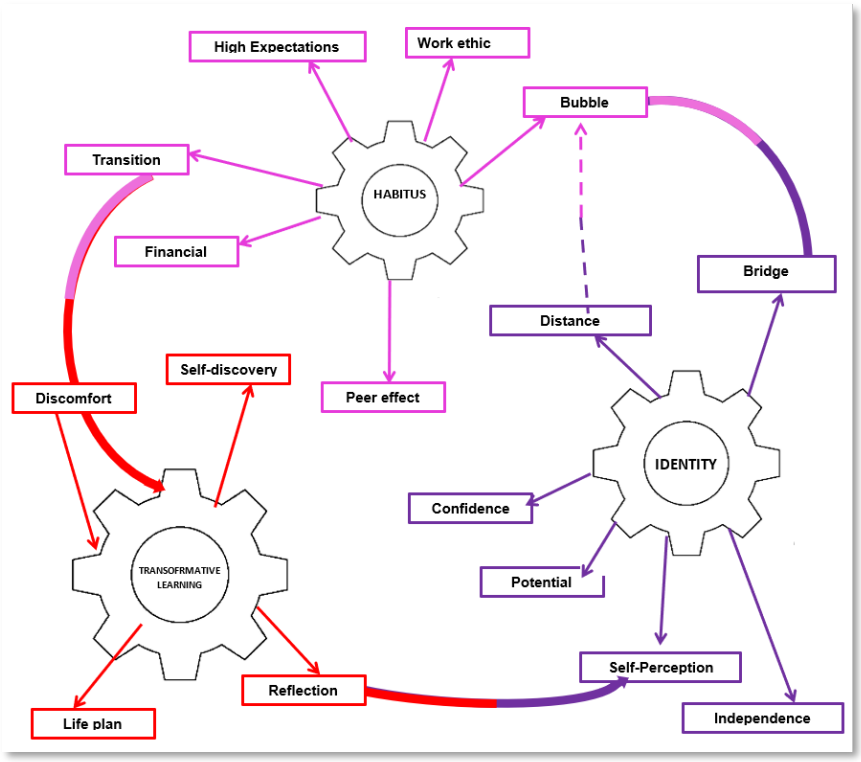

Figure 11: Conceptual Framework 'cog' development

Whilst time-consuming, this phase of the analysis strengthened our confidence in the themes we had identified. Upon further discussion and development of this, we formulated the final cog diagram, encompassing seminal themes for each co-participant, incorporating aspects of identity, TL, and Habitus (see Figure 12 and appendix 8).

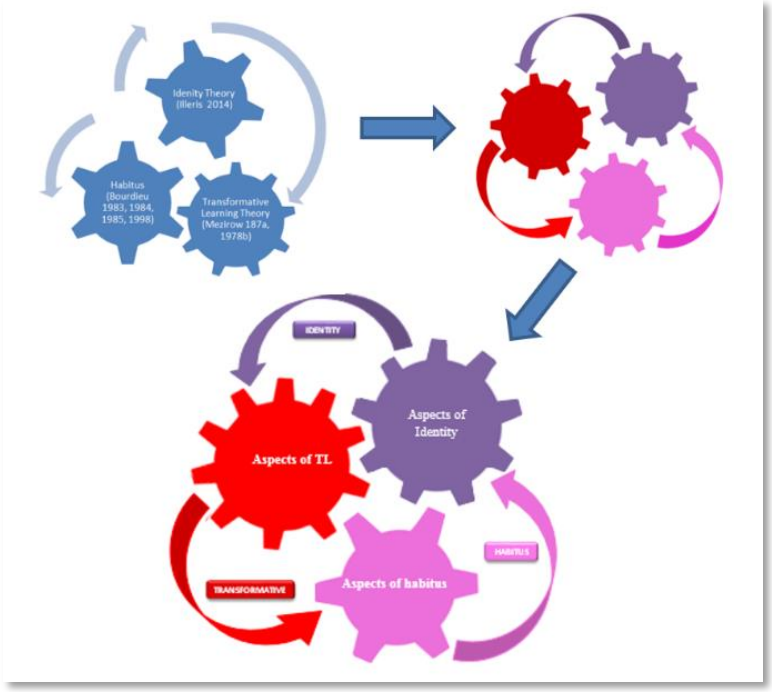

Figure 12: Development of Cog Conceptual Framework

Thematic Analysis Phase 5: Defining Themes

Developing this further, for the 5th Phase of our analysis, Serena and I compared all of the themes identified for each of the co-participants in the thematic cog diagram and began aligning them with Mezirow's (1991) 10 stages of transformative learning, in order to reconceptualise this theory (see figure 13).

Figure 13: Reconceptualising Mezirow incorporating Illeris and Bourdieu

Here, we created a method within our method through flexible and 'messy' means (Kara 2015; Mellor 2001), by not only conceptualising our data in rich detail, but by taking this further to interpret different aspects of the research topic itself (Braun and Clarke 2006). The final evolution of the conceptual framework was formed by developing and finalising the alignment of the co-participant' themes with their own stages of TL, as well as the seminal aspects of their habitus, displayed in the diagram's outside border, shown here in Peter's framework, as an example (see figure 14).

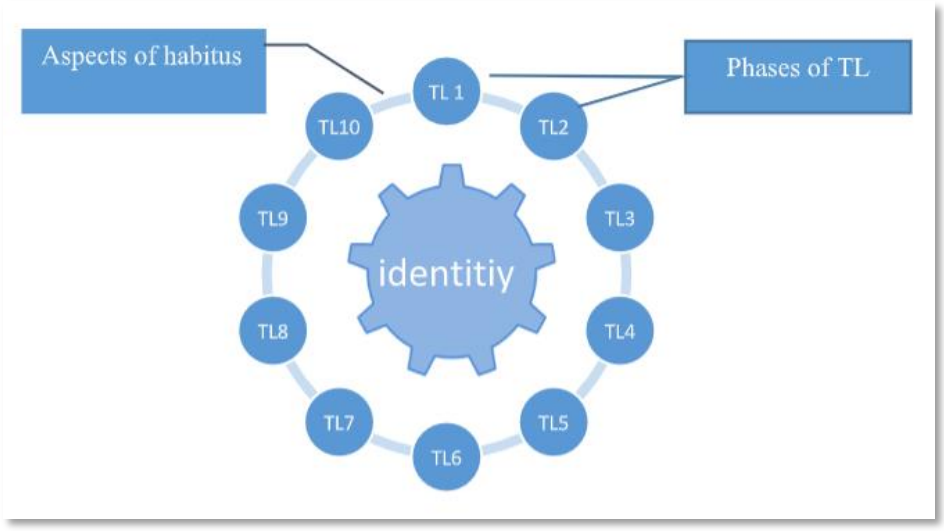

Figure 14: Final framework conceptualisation

To achieve this, we compared and cross-referenced all of the themes identified for each of the co-participants, synthesising and resynthesizing these together in order to make the conceptual framework make sense; this was aided by our open, tolerant, and flexible theorization, helping us to assess what the research could tell us about the real world experiences felt by each of the co-participants (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Through this flexible and 'messy' process, our final conceptualisation of the participants' TL experiences therefore included the "key factors, constructs, or variables, and presumed relationships among them" (Miles and Huberman 1994, p.440) to add to the richness of our findings. Through our exploratory discussions, Serena and I were able to formulate the framework without rigid theoretical variables and causal relations - consistent with the basic premise that social phenomena is an evolutionary process and cannot be formulated through static research means (Stebbins 2001; Clark et al. 2007).

Thematic Analysis Phase 6: Final Analysis

Having synthesised all of these themes, we were able to undertake the final analysis and interpretation of the data, supported by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87), who refer to this phase as:

> "The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis".

This phase was relatively straightforward as Serena and I were able to refer to the conceptual framework throughout the task. Furthermore, in their discussion of interpretive analysis Braun and Clarke (2006, p.97) contend that:

> "thematic analysis has limited interpretative power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework that anchors the analytic claims that are made".

At this point, as we were predicating our analysis on the conceptual framework, we had mapped the themes against key aspects of TL (Mezirow 1978a, b), Habitus (Bourdieu 1977 - 1998) and Identity (Illeris 2014). I sought further advice from supervisors as to how best to continue the analysis to include the co-participants. I suggested that in order to respect their contributions, and to meet ethical considerations, each of the co-participants should be involved in the interpretation and discussion of their own analysis (having done so throughout the data collection phase), whilst Serena should be involved in interpretations of the data in the discussion and analysis write up phases. I offered this understanding of the ethical considerations of my research, and contacted co-participants to explain my reasoning and seek their consent. Kara (2015) offers a helpful discussion on the complexities of ethical standpoints, contending that:

> "transformative methodological frameworks… are creatively designed to be more ethical by addressing and reducing power imbalance researcher and researched".

My ethical position was, and remains, that by returning to my co-participants as the process was developed and seeking their agreement and consent to changes in the methodological approach, I addressed the inherent power imbalances. It is my contention that adopting creative approaches strengthens ethical efforts, and rather than simply agreeing ethical positions potential power imbalances should be reflexively addressed as they present

throughout the research process. In the case of this study, this involved securing informed consent from all participants for not only their own input to the research but also for their agreement with the decision to extend the role of one participant in this way

3.14 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I talk about the complexities and disparate contradictions of doing 'messy' research. The discussion and rationale for the theoretical framework which I have applied to the data collection and analysis reflects the 'messiness' of challenging methodological orthodoxies, albeit within the well-established frameworks for constructive interpretivism. Maintaining reflexivity as a practitioner was not without challenges, in particular, the development of a rapport, and genuine co-constructed, cogenerated knowledge (Fairclough 2008; Rogers et al. 2014). I have followed the advice of scholars, including Holloway and Todres (2003) who urge researchers not to adhere to method for methods sake, and to avoid privileging method over the generation of meaningful research data. I have endeavoured to work in a way that is consistent with the nature of TL, and the principles of the method I was seeking to develop, CCCE, whilst reflecting as closely as possible the voice of my co-participants. The methodology I adopted was for a particular study at a particular period in time, with the aim of exploring and understanding the possibilities of TL, with specific reference to undergraduate creative media students.

As I have discussed previously, by engaging in y research the co-participants offered opportunities to explore their experiences within a conceptual framework that operated identity habitus and TL. This is important, because although studies have been undertaken exploring one or another of these theoretical concepts, I have been unable to locate any studies exploring these aspects of undergraduate student experiences, with a specific focus on critical reflection as posited by Mezirow (1978a, b - 2000). To do TL is also important to gain understandings of students' perceptions of the neoliberal

agenda in the post 92 higher education landscape, which I contend was achieved in my fieldwork.

As I worked through the process of writing this chapter, I reflected on the ways in which, having reviewed once again my interpretations of the data, I pondered the possibilities of future TL experiences for my co-participants as they in turn reflected on their experiences as students. Three co-participants went on to study at master's level, and I recently learned that at least one is registered for a funded PhD. If I were designing a similar research project, I would propose a longitudinal study, revisiting the data collection phase with the same co-participants, building in two further 5-year intervals of data collection. This and other possibilities for future research are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Analysis, Interpretations and Understandings

This chapter details and discusses the interpretations and understandings of the data gathered, together with outcomes from the analysis. I present mine and Serena's interpretations of Maria, Liam, and Peter's data, subdivided into four 'sub-chapters', to ensure that each of the co-participants' voices are represented. Reflecting on the iterative approach that I had taken for the fieldwork phase of the research (Blaxter et al. 2010), I felt that it was important to present the findings in a way, which although challenging methodological orthodoxies, would allow the voices of co-participant who served as co-creators in the Critical Compassionate Communicative Exchange (CCCE) process to be forefronted. My aim was to explore whether transformative learning (TL) is possible within a neoliberal higher education context, as discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.1). However, I was careful when analysing and interpreting the data independently, and with Serena, to ensure that it was not only those sentiments which 'fitted' the narrative, or yielded to a metaphor in this way, that were included.

Whilst it was interpreted from the co-participants' words that they had their own individual perceptions of their TL experiences within a commodified learning environment, I ensured that they drove the CCCEs. I followed where they led, resisting urges to direct the exchanges, or dismiss aspects of their narrative which did not align with my thesis. As previously discussed, I did however maintain conversational norms to build rapport with the co-participants during each of the CCCEs, whilst steering the conversation towards areas that were relevant to my thesis. This approach was taken to avoid causing co-participants to feel 'cornered' into a set of agenda seeking questions (Bernard 2000). It is important to re-iterate that the analysis and interpretation recorded in this chapter was formed from the triangulation of analysis between the co-participants and myself over the course of many CCCEs, where we discussed their TL experiences, and their own interpretations of this - followed by an in-depth analysis achieved by me and

Serena. This is reflected in this chapter with the inclusion of mine and Serena's interpretations, led by the co-participant's interpretations.

In order to gain rich interpretations true to the co-participant's narratives, it was important always to ask follow-up questions to probe for more information, understand their perspectives and also to elicit a rich and well-developed narrative. This approach was also applied to the interpretation and analysis of the narratives between Serena and me. My aim was to present the analysis in alignment with the research objectives, ensuring this was recorded without self-selection bias. In the same vein, turning to the structure of the findings, after reflecting on my original intentions and as recommended by Blaxter et al. (2010), I decided to take a blended, 'messy' approach to undertaking and then presenting the analysis and interpretations (Mellor 2001). In this way, I contend, I maintained fidelity to my original intentions. Furthermore, I argue that by relating Maria, Liam, Peter, and Serena's data to the conceptual framework and discussion of the key themes identified, I am creating a narrative which best articulates the experiences and perceptions of these four undergraduate creative media students.

Here, I offer interpretations and understandings of the data from mine and Serena's independent analyses, which strongly suggest that all four of the co-participants had experienced transformative learning during their undergraduate study. I acknowledge that the co-participants experienced TL to varying degrees of completeness. For the purposes of this chapter's discussion, it is useful to remind the reader of the phases of TL, as proposed by Mezirow (1978a, b) (see table 4) which are, exposure to:

Phase	***Description***
1	A disorienting dilemma.
2	Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame.
3	Critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions.

4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change.
5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.
6	Planning of a course of action.
7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.
8	Provisional trying of new roles.
9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
10	Reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective.

Table 4: Phases of TL (Mezirow 1978a, b)

To aid understanding of my discussion, I will indicate which of the phases of TL I am referring to by the addition of the numerical reference to each phase, e.g. (1) at the conclusion of that point in the analysis. In returning briefly to the previous chapter (section 3.8) it is also useful to remind the reader of who the co-creators of this knowledge are (see table 5).

Cocreator	*Description*
Maria	White female, first generation HE student from an LPN) who until she studied a BSc in business was unaware that she had a specific learning difference, in other words a disability which impacted on her studies. Maria referred to the cultural expectations of her parents who had migrated to the UK. Maria identifies as Anglo-European, with a Greek heritage.
Liam	White male, is a first generation HE student from an LPN) chose to study a Humanities undergraduate media communication degree that he believed would meet his aspiration to study at post graduate level (PG Cert Ed).

Peter	Mature, white male disabled, first generation HE student) chose to study an undergraduate degree in English as a means to "professionalise" his teaching career.
Serena	White female disabled student) who had changed degree programme (and institution) to study at a post 92 University as she felt that this would lead to better support for her mental health condition.

Table 5: Cocreators' Description Overview

4.1 Maria's story

I begin this section of the discussion with Maria, as hers was the briefest contribution. As previously discussed, Maria withdrew from the study, consequently data gained from the CCCE with her did not provide the same depth or richness of understandings as achieved from exchanges with other participants. Because Maria withdrew from the fieldwork, there were no reflective, reiterative discussions between Maria and I of her transcript. Nonetheless, whilst the interpretations of the exchange that I did have with Maria are tentative, reflecting on this exchange, and with Serena and mine's analysis of the data, my interpretation is that some TL occurred.

Maria did offer insights across a number of phases, which strongly suggest transformative experiences. Of note, Mezirow accepts that TL is not a linear process, and similarly Morgan (2015) contends the process may complete at a later phase, as the individual experiencing this life changing transformation reflects on their life beyond graduation. I am intrigued by the possibility of Maria's completion of TL, and this supports my proposal for undertaking longitudinal research, which I recommend in Chapter 5.

4.1.1 Cogenerating Maria's Themes

The overall interpretation of Maria's experience as reflected on by Serena and myself, informed by Maria's own account, is that she had knowingly engaged 'transactionally' in her undergraduate degree regarding

employment opportunities, stating: “you go to uni and this leads you to a great job, 100%”. Serena and I identified the following themes in alignment with Maria’s phases of TL (see table 6), including those phases which were not identifiable.

Phase	***Phases of Transformative Learning***	***Themes Identified through CCCEs***
(1)	Disorienting Dilemma	Dyslexia
(2)	Self-Explanation	Fear/Guilt
(3)	Critical Assessment	Veil
(4)	Recognition Transformation Is Shared	Peers
(5)	Exploration	Lecturer Enthusiasm
(6)	Planning Action	Travel
(7)	Knowledge and Skills	Not Identified
(8)	New Roles	Resilience
(9)	Self – Confidence	Self-Perception
(10)	Reintegration	Not Identified

Table 6: Maria’s 8 Phases of TL (Mezirow (1978a, b)

This is represented visually as Maria’s cog framework conceptualisation (see figure 14) (section 3.13.5), showcasing her 8 Phases of TL, the themes underpinning her habitus (Bourdieu 1998) include: finance, family, and veil, and those embedded within her identity including: employability and family (‘mother’ figure). These are discussed, as they align with each of Maria’s TL phases (see figure 15), as follows.

Figure 15: Maria's 8 Phases of TL: Cog Framework Conceptualisation

Phase (1) Disorienting Dilemma: Dyslexia

According to mine and Serena's critically reflective analyses of Maria's transcripts, I argue that Maria's disorienting dilemma was her diagnosis of a specific learning difference (dyslexia), and her placement struggle. This interpretation is supported by Mälkki (2012) who contended that 'second-wave' experiences could be triggers for reflection. Maria was keen to emphasise her parent's belief that by going to university her opportunities for employment in professional roles would be considerably greater. It is worth noting that her parents own and run a family restaurant, which she describes as being:

> **Maria:** "Really, really, hard work. It's mostly all my Dad does, while my Mum looks after the family and the home. She also helps out to [in the restaurant]".

Interestingly, Maria talked about a point in time when she challenged this thinking, in her own mind:

> **Maria:** "I could've turned around to mum and dad and go well you didn't go to uni so why should I but there was this unspoken kind of "well you should go to uni".

We gained a strong sense from the CCCE with Maria that habitus played a significant role in her parents' expectation that she would undertake a degree. This was evident, for example when speaking about her own dyslexia. Maria highlighted that her father had broken English, and the same specific learning differences as her, with his writing capabilities being "very limited". Maria had talked to her mother about the difficulties she was experiencing, in particular her heavy reading load and assessment schedule, which impacted on her first- and second-year grades:

> **Maria:** "I was like getting 58s or 59s obviously because my grammar and spelling is poor, and once all that sorted out it was like 64s and 65s".

Maria further discussed not enjoying the course and was pessimistic about her ability to gain, in her words, a "good placement". Maria was adamant that gaining a placement required excellent written communication skills, and she was very aware that, as she described it, her "grammar and spelling [had] never been good". In turn, she explained that this would "majorly impact" on her future.

Maria explained that she felt she had worked harder than her housemates, although she had been reluctant to undertake an additional learning needs assessment. Maria overcame this reluctance and was prompted to do so by her disappointment with what she perceived as her "underachievement", and encouragement from her mother to seek support. Maria's interpretation of her mother's response suggests that they both perceived the degree Maria were studying as being a commodified, transactional arrangement.

> **Maria:** "I was really struggling, then I phoned my mum and she's like, 'it's all right everything is going to be okay and there must be people you can talk to'. I think she was like; you pay all this money and have nobody to help you? There must be people who could support you".

Phase (2) Self Examination: Fear of Failing, Guilt and Shame

It was evident that Maria's disorienting dilemma led to self-examination with feelings of fear (Mezirow 1978a, b) that she may not be able to complete the placement, guilt that she was struggling, and shame that she could not complete her academic assignments without seeking support and a diagnosis.

> **MM:** "Can you talk a little more about why you felt this way [about the placement]?"
>
> **Maria:** "It was just the amount of work and I hated saying no and I worked across all categories, so that was running, football, sportswear and women's so that's like four teams, juggling all that work and I was the only intern that did that so I never wanted to say no or oh, like I've got something else on at the moment because you feel like they'll not judge you but me like, oh they can't handle it".
>
> **MM:** "What did you do about this? Did you talk to anyone?"
>
> **Maria:** "At the end of it I spoke to my manager, she knew I was like stressing a lot and when I actually spoke to her, she was like don't worry I'll sort it out for you and it was like such a relief, someone understood, whereas I thought they just expect you to do that because you're an intern".

Whilst Maria was emphatic that she found her placement valuable, and that she was keen not to waste the opportunity, she became visibly affected when she talked about her experience.

> **Maria:** "I thought [of her placement with a company she was keen to working when she graduated] people would kill to be in my position and I didn't want to waste this opportunity but don't get me wrong, I had a couple of breakdowns, like properly where I was like crying, 'I can't do this".

At this point in our CCCE, I became concerned for Maria, and so asked if she wanted to talk about what had happened during her placement. Maria had already alluded to the financial costs, paying more in rent and basic living costs than she was earning as a placement student. Maria, stoically demonstrating resilience, responded in a way that led me to interpret - in the moment - that family habitus played a key part in her continuing with her course (Byrom and Lightfoot 2013).

> **Maria:** "I rang my mum, she was like 'it's fine everyone goes through this. She was adamant that I should stick it out, and I could not let her down, so I carried on with that kind of attitude. I just couldn't fail".

Phase (3) Critical Assessment: Veil

It is unclear from the CCCE, whether at this point Maria undertook a reflexive critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions (Mezirow 1978a, b) as this would most likely have been examined in further CCCEs, which did not occur. However, Maria did provide insights identified in her theme of a 'veil', based upon her own words, regarding the lack of transparency during the university open days, and her own placement experience. Through reflective discussions with Serena, I argue that this led to her perspective transformation, supported by the literature (Kitchenham 2008). This was a recurring theme with the co-participants, especially Serena (discussed later in section 4.4).

The most compelling example of this theme included Maria' feelings that when she came to the open day she had been "pitched to", which she had described as a "sell", she related this to being told at the open day:

> **Maria:** "…you're going to be pitching to agencies you're gonna get to networking events and then when I got here it was kind of the complete opposite of that and everyone agreed. And I don't know if it was because it was the first year of our course so it was a bit like, well you know a lot of our course is not what I expected to be doing".
>
> **MM: "**Ok [pauses] how did that make you feel?"
>
> **Maria: "**It's not what I thought it would be, I started to view the course and the kind of staging of this very differently, like, my eyes were just opening. It transformed the way I felt about the course and other programmes at this level overall".

In line with this, returning to her placement discussion, Maria talked compellingly about the costs, emotionally, physically, and financially of her undertaking a 12-month placement, which was a condition of her graduating. In talking about the challenges, Maria said that:

> **Maria:** "I didn't know anyone in London I was trying to find my feet like get to grips with like what I'm doing for the year and trying to have a

> social life… It was lonely and I did feel a bit isolated… I didn't get paid much; the pay was horrendously bad… It was a struggle, like 15K for the year, my rent was like 900 a month".
>
> **MM:** "That's not very much…"
>
> **Maria:** "No, and they do not tell you any of this as part of the open day or what the tell you about placement. It is all hidden, like again that idea of a veil with everything".

Our interpretation of the data also finds that Maria referred, indirectly, to the commodification of HE, stating explicitly that her family had encouraged her to undertake a degree that would enhance her future employability, instanced in this comment:

> **Maria:** "My parents were always like, uni, uni, uni. It was always on the cards for me I didn't have an option not to go to uni, they were like traditional, it's go to school go to college go to uni get a job".

Supporting the notion of commodification, explained that Maria had never considered studying a degree that would not lead directly to employment:

> **Maria:** "The idea that you would not get a job after studying a degree, was not something I ever considered. Like, you go to uni and this leads you to a great job, 100%. So, when I started to see that this was not the case, it was confusing, and my bad experience on placement did not help".

At this point in our CCCE, Maria asked me whether I thought that students should pay fees. This was a surprising question, as our previous discussion had focused on her family's belief that attaining a university degree would enhance her social and economic habitus (although this notion was not described in those terms):

> **Maria:** "Do you think that students should pay fees?"
>
> **Me:** "My personal view is that education shouldn't cost money at any point".
>
> **Maria:** "Do you think that more people would come to uni then? If there was no fees?"
>
> **MM:** "…well, that's an unknown but it's surely a possibility? So, let me ask, was the debt that you're likely to accrue a consideration for you?

> **Maria:** "I don't think it deterred me at all because my fees went up from like 3 to 9 [thousand per annum]".
>
> **MM:** "…so, you're paying £9000 a year, for your final year?"
>
> **Maria:** "well it didn't deter me at all really, it was like I didn't have an option not to go to uni, because it will help me get a job".

Phase (4) Recognition Transformation Is Shared: Peers

As a first-generation undergraduate student, Maria expressed a disconnect between herself and other students whose families had markedly different expectations of them. Maria spoke positively for example about the encouragement she received from her mother when she was struggling to cope with the demands of her programme, yet also discussed how her difficulties on placement were shared by her student peers. After a moment's reflection, which at the time I sensed was her 'mean-making' (Mezirow 1978a b), during which Maria was clearly trying to give honest account of how she experienced the placement year, she added:

> **Maria:** "…but I feel like although it cost me a lot, I made up for experience… My housemate got paid 20 6K for the year, but he was mostly just doing Excel spreadsheets 9-to-5 every single day and hated it. I'd rather have been paid less and made up for it in experience and learning. Everyone ad their own kind of difficulties on placement, I hear other stories from my classmates".

Maria went on to describe her housemate's experience, and his account of an unhappy placement which had left him to consider giving up his course. This led to the interpretation that here, Maria had perceived that her own experience was shared, although she did not explicitly recognise that this was an aspect of her own TL experience.

Phase (5) Exploration: Lecturer Enthusiasm

Maria discussed many times how she had struggled throughout her undergraduate degree to cope with theoretical aspects of the course; she attributed this in part, to her Specific Learning Difference (SpLD). Although adding that several of the units she was either compelled, or had elected, to take were not what she believed they have been described and "sold" to her

as, once more referring to the "veil", in her critical assessment (Phase 3). Although Maria did not contextualise this within the marketization or commodification of, HE, she made comments which supported the notion of a misalignment between what was "sold to me" and the reality of her experience. This is exampled where Maria explained she had originally expected to be doing "practical, hands-on, industry focused assessments", which did not materialise. She did however speak positively and enthusiastically about one of the lecturers leading these units, which led her to want to explore this aspect of marketing area in academia further:

> **Maria:** "[redacted] was really good. That was my favourite unit surprisingly".
>
> **MM:** "Why surprisingly?"
>
> **Maria:** "Because the way [redacted] did the unit, he changed some from the guide. I suppose he is allowed to do that. Split it into two and the first half was like a role play scenario so we're the client".
>
> **MM:** "Was that more of the hands-on kind of work you are expecting to do?"
>
> **Maria:** "Yeah. It was about selling, and he'd throw a curve ball, so it was like a really like interesting way of doing a unit".
>
> **Maria:** "But it actually like challenged us more than writing an essay".
>
> **MM:** "The whole unit was about a scenario?"
>
> **Maria:** "Yeah and the second half of it we did like a group presentation as well, so it was all quite practical and we did really well and I got one of my highest marks, seventy-six… like I literally loved that unit. It made me want to explore that kind of subject further, which I had not considered before. It made a lasting impression on me".
>
> **MM:** "So why do you think that [redacted] changed the way in-class work was done?"
>
> **Maria:** "Well in the beginning it started like [paused] but he came in one day and said he'd been thinking about better ways for us to get through the unit. And he just gave us so much leeway as well so he, so basically he wanted us to create something tangible that the client and my partner who's actually my housemate, we created this like interactive website for it, that's what I could use for my portfolio".

Maria became visibly animated and seemed happy when she talked about this particular lecturer and his approach to working with the group, concluding this part of the CCCE saying:

> **Maria:** "He made a real difference and he gives you the tools to make you better".

Phase (6) Plans: Travel

In talking about her plans to travel after graduating, I interpret that, albeit in limited ways, Maria had experienced Phase 6 of TL. Revisiting and immersing myself in the transcripts of our CCCE, I returned a number of times to this subject, noting that she had talked about feeling lonely and isolated during her placement in London. Interestingly her immediate future plans were to take a break and travel to China. On this point Maria said:

> **MM:** "So, China is your plan, you want to go there?"
>
> **Maria:** "Not just China but to other places… I really want to go to South America, but my mum is like it's very dangerous… I'll see what happens, but I'm definitely going to travel".

Phase (8) New roles: Resilience

During our CCCE, the role of Maria's placement engendered a plethora of themes which were central to her TL experience. Serena and I interpret Maria's comments about her determination to complete her placement and her mother's support as being indicative of her 'resilience' in response to the demands of the programme and the struggles she experienced. Maria had also talked about the costs, financially and emotionally of her placement, and again demonstrated resilience, citing the support from her mother (Reay et al. 2010). Other examples of Maria's resilience, supported by her family, are interpreted from her comments such as:

> **Maria:** "I feel like at the end it built up my confidence massively because where at university I never got like firsts or anything, my grades don't reflect me like personally, that makes no sense, so finishing my placement was a great achievement for me".

As Byrom and Lightfoot (2013) note, aspiration is an important aspect of students from WP backgrounds ways of coping with academic struggles. Their research highlights that often family habitus was a better source of support than institutional structures. This is borne out by Maria's account of her experience. Furthermore, Byrom and Lightfoot (2013) argue that successful WP students who aspired to shift their habitus demonstrate resilience and determination to succeed. Serena and I found that Maria's identity and the trait of resilience was identified as being more tightly bound to her mother, of whom she spoke throughout the CCCE (Illeris 2014), mentioning her father only in relation to their mutual disability. Turning to my own theoretical concept, I can recognise and locate Maria's habitus and shift in identity within her TL experience (Bourdieu 1977; Mezirow 1978a, b; Illeris 2014).

Maria articulates in our CCCE her and her family's expectation that her habitus would shift. This is explicitly articulated, for example in the following CCCE:

> **MM:** "So, your mum is quite a big feature in all of this isn't she?"
>
> **Maria:** "Yeah, dad's not really at all [pauses]. I don't really know like it sounds really bad doesn't it but mum's the one who always picks me up from school, cooks us dinner, I think it's because my dad worked so much, really long hours like ten till like twelve at night".
>
> **MM:** "What kind of restaurant is it?"
>
> **Maria:** "A Greek restaurant. Yeah, so I think with his long hours and he's quite strict in a sense. So, he was always like uni, uni, uni, so even like I don't, with my dad, when he says something, that's it...it's the law. But they both want me to do better than them".

Phase (9) Self Confidence: Self- Perception

Later during the CCCE, Maria once more returned to her thoughts about her placement, at this point conceptualising the relationship with her manager as one which changed her perceptions of herself. Maria explained that her manager, who helped her during her work schedule challenges enabled her to grow and "feel more confident, in herself":

> **MM:** "So, do you think you would in the end, attribute your confidence to that difficult experience you have described…"
>
> **Maria:** "[interrupts] Yes, definitely. Even like the basics like when you're balancing a good workload, actually knowing how to balance it, time management of your work, I feel like everyone puts it on their CV but I feel like I can actually do that now. My manager really helped me to go through that and gave me the confidence to feel like, yes, I can do this".

This comment led me to ask Maria if she could expand the little more about what that meant to her, and whether she felt differently when she was studying in her first year.

> **Maria:** "Yeah so, I feel like before, say like at uni, like little things when someone asks a question or a lecture and you just sat there nervously, like please don't pick me".
>
> **MM:** "So, are you saying that there has been some sort of shift, um, in your confidence… the way you feel about yourself?"
>
> **Maria:** "Yeah I'm kind of, yeah I have my manager to thank for this as well, because we left at the same time because she went on maternity leave and she sat down with me and was like "I know you're going to go far like and let me like flesh out your plan with you".
>
> **MM:** "Why do you think she did that?"
>
> **Maria:** "I don't know, she was kind of like a mother figure as well. And she saw something of me in her. She definitely understood me. She went out of her way, when I first started placement, she was like it's as much as you put in, you get out. She thought I really tried my hardest and worked to improve my skills and the useful on my placement".

Maria had also talked about returning from her placement as:

> **Maria:** "A completely new person and a lot more confident in the sense that I went to my unit leader and said I didn't really enjoy the course. Whereas as before I'd have done it without saying anything, now I'd rather say like how I actually feel and make something happen for maybe the future students".

Serena and I interpreted these comments by Maria as meaning that she had begun to work through, in phases, perceptions of herself. Maria's mean-making of the new environment which she was navigating had led to a reconceptualisation of her competencies and abilities. Supported by our reflection on Mezirow's (2000) theory, we also interpreted this point as being

for the beginnings of Maria's development of a different understanding of her own identity, and a shift in her sense of self (Illeris 2014, 2015). If, as we interpret, Maria's TL experience was ultimately positive and constructive, research into this aspect of students' transformative experiences could have significant implications for research into learning as discussed in Chapter 2 (2.15.1).

4.2 Liam's Story

Liam and I met for three CCCEs over a 3-week period, each for just over an hour's duration. In the original proposal, which I made to each of the participants, I asked that time allowing, they would review the recordings and make notes to compare at subsequent CCCEs. Liam was the most thorough in doing this. It is useful to explain here how the process of sense checking my interpretations of the CCCEs were confirmed or affirmed by Peter, Liam, and Serena, as they would typically follow the process I described here with Liam. At the beginning of our second CCCE, observing that Liam had bought several of pages of notes of analysis our CCCE transcripts, I began by saying:

> **MM:** "I can see that you've very kindly gone through the recording and made some notes… so I'm not sure how we would do this, whether should we go through yours and see whether they align with mine, see where the gaps are, should we do it that way? Would that be Ok with you? Do you have any thoughts on how we could do this?"
>
> **Liam:** "I mean mine are very brief, but I've got quite a lot here, so I didn't pick out specific like put it into like four themes or something, but I just kind of picked out the four things that stood out to me I suppose".

It is important to note that Liam was the keenest of all the co-participants to meet for the CCCEs in my office. It was not until I analysed the data that I understood Liam's reluctance to meet elsewhere. He articulated this as him "feeling less exposed" and "more comfortable speaking in an academic environment than say a student building". By mine and Serena's interpretation of the data, Liam's habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and identity (Illeris

2014) had shifted significantly, notably he was also the only co-participant to experience all 10 Phases of TL (Mezirow 1978a, b).

4.2.1 Cogenerating Liam's Themes

As the CCCE proceeded, I avoided interrupting Liam as he described the 'themes' he had identified (as I was keen that he should have ownership of the CCCE). Rather I paid constant attention to the themes in relation to his TL experience phases, as he outlined them.

> **Liam:** "Yeah, shall I go? Well, I got uh, reflection, passionate about learning, a kind of bridge, and finding out more, [my] plan my semi-plan, changing, teachers, I want to travel, TEFL, my potential, fear and teaching, to name a few".
>
> **MM:** "[smiling] Yes, I had something similar. I had, that you're a reflective thinker, that you enjoy learning, for its own sake, but also that it instrumental for you because you have these ambitions to teach, I noted the word bridge, to talk about your life at home in Plymouth and your life here at university. It's a word you used, erm I noted your work ethic because you talked a lot about challenging yourself. Reaching your potential, challenging yourself. I noticed you used the word bubble quite a bit, you talked about living in a bubble. Also, I got that sense of self-doubt, but also that you've changed you talked about how you've changed, throughout our CCCEs. I also noted your plans to travel, and that being part of your semi-plan".
>
> **Liam:** "…yes, well, all of that is true, so you've got, reflective thinker, enjoying learning, er teaching, bridge, plan, and changing, potential and challenging myself. Some of that's the same but I think you've got more themes than me. But I can see where the other things come in".

Liam and I identified and agreed the following themes. These align with his 10 Phases of TL, displayed (see table 7).

Phase	***Phases of Transformative Learning***	***Theme Identified through CCCEs***
(1)	Disorienting Dilemma	Disappointment
(2)	Self-Explanation	Potential
(3)	Critical Assessment	Bubble/Bridge
(4)	Recognition Transformation Is Shared	Peers

(5)	Exploration	Educator
(6)	Planning Action	TEFL/Travel
(7)	Knowledge and Skills	Self-Reflective
(8)	New Roles	Assertive
(9)	Self – Confidence	Comfortable
(10)	Reintegration	Independence

Table 7: Liam's 10 Phases of TL (Mezirow (1978a, b)

This is shown pictorially with Liam's cog framework conceptualisation (Figure 16), showcasing Liam's 10 Phases of TL. Themes underpinning his habitus (Bourdieu 1977) include: high expectations, work ethic, financial, and transition. Those identified as embedded within his identity include: distance, bridge, peer effect and confidence. These are discussed in accordance with each of Liam's TL phases, as follows.

Figure 16: Liam's 10 Phases of TL: Framework Conceptualization

Phase (1) Disorienting Dilemma: Disappointment

In our first CCCE, Liam talked about his very earliest experience on arriving at university. He described these as being disorienting for him for several reasons, although significantly, largely due to his disappointment with the university's handling of his accommodation:

> **Liam:** "I got a place in one of the halls of residence and when I was away travelling, I went away to a very remote island in Thailand and there was no Wi-Fi there so when I finally got on to my emails - I found out that my place in halls of residence had been taken".
>
> **MM:** "So, what happened?"
>
> **Liam:** "Yeah so that was very disappointing seeing as I had already kind of booked, I had already booked my room, kind of, without paying. I was gutted really, but I still knew that I wanted to come to University. They did not handle it very well at all. So, I came to one of the 'home finders' days at [redacted], which was a terrible experience".
>
> **MM:** "Why?"
>
> **Liam:** "Because you had to just go in a room with all these other people who had nobody to live with and basically go up to somebody and say do you want to live with me, yeah that's how they do it…"
>
> **MM:** "You make that very split-second decision based on what somebody looks like?"
>
> **Liam:** "Yeah, and whilst you, because obviously it's a very odd experience, and people are like going off with groups and you're just there like who do I pick? It's such an odd experience. It wasn't very nice. And then [redacted] University actually didn't have enough houses for the amount of people that were there, so we didn't actually get a house, so it was five days before I was meant to start my course and I still didn't have anywhere to live so in the end, the people I had like matched with, we got a, we went through a private landlord in the end so literally moved in like three days before we started, so yeah".

It is interesting that even though Liam described this as being a "terrible experience" he worked through that early disorientation (1) via a process of mean-making and critical reflection (3), which relied on his determination to undertake a degree. I interpret this as being part of a reiterative critical reflection on his perceptions and planning actions (6) demonstrating his TL.

During the second CCCE Liam returned to his experience of living with people with whom he did not 'gel', explaining that they were not really his 'type'. According to Liam, they came from backgrounds which differed from his "very working-class background". Whilst his housemates bonded with each other, he felt very alone. He attributed some of this to his subsequent illness:

> **Liam:** "It was horrible and I hated it but with my illness I kind of suffered bit with mental health problems because of this ongoing illness I had, basically they didn't know what kind of illness I had at first and I was just constantly being put into hospital and no one had a treatment and no one knew why so I was, kind of I didn't know when it was going to happen, when I was going to be ill so it was kind of like… kind of messed with me psychologically a bit I suppose, But I think if I didn't have that, I don't think I would have the determination I've got now at university, I suppose".

Building on this, Liam also attributed this disorienting experience to creating the fear that he may not "have any friends":

> **MM:** "So how did that feel?"
>
> **Liam:** "It was like, I suppose like I felt I bit lost because everyone else was like bonding with other residents and there was just four of us in this house so there was just kind of like us four and it seemed like everyone was making like loads and loads and friends and like. So, it first it was a bit like, and plus I didn't, I got on ok with my house mates, but I didn't really gel with them. They wanted to party a lot; well, they did. I've never really done that much. And I didn't think I could afford to, not the money and deftly not the time. So, I had this fear I would not meet anyone I liked, that I wouldn't have any friends".

As Liam and I delved deeper into his experiences during our CCCEs, it transpired that over the course of the following academic year this was partly resolved as he worked through Phases 2 (section 4.3.3), Phase 3 (section 4.3.4), and Phase 4 (section 4.3.5) as follows.

Phase (2) Self Explanation: Potential

As part of Liam's self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame (Mezirow 1978a) he discussed the idea of his own discomposure, in

accordance with his first term at university and his "fear of not succeeding" or not reaching his "potential":

> **Liam:** "The first term I hated, I hated it. I went back at Christmas and thought I don't want to come back. Came back and then four weeks later I got really ill and was hospitalised for like two weeks, so I literally missed the second term of uni and really didn't want to stay on, I just hated it. But at the same time, it's weird but there was something inside me that just wanted to succeed at the same time".
>
> **MM:** "I would've asked you, had you not said that I would like to get a bit more sense of what you mean. So, at the end of semester 1, at Christmas, you didn't want to come back, what prompted you to come back, what made you decide to come back?"
>
> **Liam:** "Just because I hate quitting, I have a fear of not succeeding, I suppose…"
>
> **MM:** "So, you're determined? Oh so, it's succeeding or its determination?"
>
> **Liam:** "I'd say not succeeding; I'd say it's a fear of not succeeding, not reaching my potential [laughs] whatever is. And you know, I wasn't the only person that had a horrible first year. Lots of people did for different reasons. Some people never came back after the first year. I think the first thing was that I have a passion for learning and finding out more I think that kind of came through in the aspect of not kind of knowing what I wanted to do but then taking some time out and then coming back to it because I kind of felt like there was more to me than what I was doing from when I was working".
>
> **MM:** "Ahh, I see, yes…"
>
> **Liam:** And yeah, I think it was kind of killing me inside a bit that I wasn't reaching my potential I suppose as such. I don't know I suppose maybe part of its worry that I'm not going to reach the potential I want to reach if you know what I mean
>
> **MM:** "Well what's the potential you want to reach?"
>
> **Liam:** "I just want to feel in myself that I've somehow in my own like personal mind that I've somehow been successful in some sort of way. I mean quite a lot of people have said why don't you become an electrician like your dad, but I just feel like I want to do more and maybe give back more. I would love to look back and know I've made an influence on somebody or something rather than just to have lived and worked to my means. Does that make sense?"

Phase (3) Critical Assessment: Bubble/Bridge

Liam and I had both independently identified a metaphor he used to explain how he coped, with what we both agreed upon through reflective discussion and follow-up discussions, was his transformative experience as an undergraduate student under the theme of 'bridge'. It was important here that I was not only actively listening to Liam's own interpretation, but also that I was emotionally attentive to how he felt when describing his experience. For both of us, this represented the sociocultural contrast between whom the person he identified himself with in his hometown, where people lived in a 'bubble', and the person he felt he had transitioned into at university. In this sense, Liam talked about a 'bridge' acting as both a deterrent and a 'merging means' to allow him to bring his two worlds, and subsequently his identities, together, explained in this exchange:

> **Liam:** "I suppose what I thought came up quite a lot was maybe was how my mind-set has probably changed since university and how I kind of question things more than I ever would have before I kind of just took things as truth for, I didn't have really have my sort of own opinions, I didn't want to have my own opinions because I wasn't sure if they were right or not. Whereas now I feel like I've kind of gone forward in my horizons by coming to university".
>
> **MM:** "Now that's, that was something I picked up, can we explore a bit how, or why, you feel that process that happened?"
>
> **Liam:** "I suppose it was quite interesting to me anyway, I was thinking about like maybe the, the bridge between like home and here. Home was like living in a bubble. Of how like I kind of think my friends and family kind of haven't changed as much as me maybe and I find that a little bit hard sometimes. I think we talked; I remember us talking about that".

Reflecting together on our first CCCE, Liam developed his notion of the bridge further, describing his feelings about the insularity of his hometown. Liam talked about his parents having met in school, marrying at an early age, and still living very close to where their friends from school also live. In response to my probing him about his explanation of the ways in which his views have changed, our exchange unfolded as follows:

> **MM:** "And you made this comment about the bridge. You said just now that you'd highlighted, the bridge between, I'm trying to remember exactly what you said, something about the bridge between your family and here [redacted],]".
>
> **Liam:** "Yeah, I suppose so, like I said, we're a very close family but maybe sometimes that, I find their views, it's hard to explain [long pause]".
>
> **MM:** "And that's okay because we can't always articulate what we are thinking, feelings don't always translate into words. And it sounds as if you are still working through these feelings?"
>
> **Liam:** "Yeah and because I've come away from it, it's hard to go back to sometimes, I guess. I don't want to be like them; I am like them if you know what I mean? My views though have changed".
>
> **MM:** "Can I ask about what you mean when you say your views have changed?"
>
> **Liam:** "I mean, it sounds bad, but I even get quite frustrated with my parents' views, it's just frustration, I kind of sweep it under the carpet and don't challenge it as such because I accept that's the people they are, but [pauses] I mean they're just not very well-thought-out views. They're not well thought out at all, I think that's just how I think now, like where did [they] get that from? How do you know that? That's the way I think now".
>
> **MM:** "So, can you give me an example of something that?"
>
> **Liam:** "Well my dad for example can be quite racist or quite homophobic - which I really don't agree with, it's just, I don't know. Since I came to [redacted], I have thought a lot about these things, and you know, met people, I feel I need to challenge him".
>
> **MM:** "Where do his views come from do you think?"
>
> **Liam:** "I think it's come from his parents views I suppose and because he's not moved away or had any other experience of, he's mixed with people that have always stayed, like my parents like grew up in the suburb we live in now, went to the same school, met when they were seventeen and got married at twenty one and just never moved out of that area so they people they mixed with at school, they still mix with now. They all have very similar views".

Serena and I both came to the similar conclusion, independently, and through our reflective discussions and reference to Mezirow's (2000) TL theory, that Liam's perceptions of his own experiences of education had shifted, as he appeared to be examining and reflecting on his "critical

assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions" (Mezirow 1978a, b).

Phase (4) Recognition Transformation is Shared: Peers

I return here to Liam's discussion of his experience of finding and then sharing accommodation throughout his first and second year. Liam recognised that his discontent and process of transformation was shared, and that his university peers had negotiated a similar change, which he touched upon briefly:

> **MM: "**Were you the only one who felt like this [disappointed with accommodation] do you think or…"
>
> **Liam: "**No, loads of people I spoke to were having issues with their accommodation not like in the same way with being told they had lost the room, but issues with fees, or not being able to move if they were unhappy and stuff".

Phase (5) Exploration: Educator

In all 3 CCCEs, Liam talked about his enjoyment of, and passion for, learning, which he developed quite late in his school years. Liam spoke compellingly one of his A level teachers who had instilled confidence in him, leading him to want to achieve academically. Liam stated that previously he had not felt especially competent in his schoolwork. As I explored this recurring theme, Liam explained this as the origins of his passion for learning, and how it had led him to explore the possibility of becoming an educator himself:

> **Liam:** "I had a very supportive A Level English teacher who I still speak to now actually and she was the first teacher who told me that I could actually do something with English, she said that I had a talent for writing so… Yeah because I suppose like you always remember that good teacher. I don't think I'll ever forget her just for, like a small thing she did for me but actually quite big thing that she probably would never actually know, if you know what I mean? So, I'd love to have that impact on someone, the way she did. That's why I'm keen to eventually teach, became an educator in something, I think English".

Liam built on this further, explaining that his strong sense of purpose was intrinsically linked to this underlying passion for learning, in particular his reading habits since starting his studies:

> **MM:** "You talk a lot about your passion for learning how to manifest what does it mean to you?"
>
> **Liam:** "I suppose, um, like, it might sound ridiculous, but like, literature, just like reading like, for one, I've read so much since being at uni and I still do read a lot now, but not just for the course. I think there's a lot that I can learn, I think I'll always want to learn".

This exchange led to Liam reflecting on his plans to study a master's degree to fulfil his passion, before he embarks on a PG Cert Ed, as being a trajectory to shift his habitus. Liam went on to explain that he had begun to understand how his experiences of education could be "life changing" for him. He talked about a more recent experience of a supportive teacher which had an influential impact on him.

> **Liam:** "I mean I suppose like, obviously [deleted] is a big influence because the confidence she gave me to write my dissertation and stuff and like it kind of made me kind of want to do a good job, not just for me but kind of for her as well because you could, she gave me that confidence".
>
> **MM:** "Did you tell me we met last you had got some sort of award for a research project?"
>
> **Liam:** "Yeah, it was a £500 cheque. Yeah, she told me to put my abstract forward for that. It's meant to be kind of like a co- creation, say with your tutor".
>
> **MM:** "So how does that work?"
>
> **Liam:** "I think she was going to use parts of my dissertation research to then put in as a co creation project and that's what the funding was for. For transcriptions, or you could spend it on a laptop, or you could even just use it yourself or anything really. I would never have done that without her encouraging me, I wouldn't have thought my work was good enough for that".
>
> **MM:** "Why is that?"
>
> **Liam:** "It was for seventeen or eighteen thousand students, well they're not all third-year students are they so, it didn't have to be a dissertation project, it could be any project really, but we just decided

to feed in my dissertation. And then I thought, well I can do a masters".

Phase (6) Planning Action: TEFL/Travel

At various points in our CCCE, Liam talked about plans that he had begun recently to make - as a final year student - reflecting that this was a new experience for him:

> **Liam:** "Yeah, I've never really had like as much of a life plan as like a semi sort of plan not like a 'this is exactly what I'm going to do and these are the steps I'm going to take, like I kind of know where I want to go with my future'. I put like I've put a theme as like a semi plan semi life plan".
>
> **MM:** "What do you mean by that?"
>
> **Liam:** "I started off thinking that I want to teach when I graduate. I still do want to teach but I want to like to teach abroad first to see how if that's what I want to do because I'm not that certain if you know what I mean? Like my semi plan is to get my teaching TEFL qualification teach for like three months and then possibly come back January and do that January to January".
>
> **MM:** "That's a flexible plan. That's a flexible plan with lots of back stops isn't it? Because if you've got TEFL, there's many language schools in [redacted],**".**
>
> **Liam:** "Exactly, I'll start like September time- in Plymouth?"
>
> **MM:** "Is this your flexible plan?"
>
> **Liam:** "Flexible plan, yeah. I think it will give me a nice break from the intense year I've had, my final year of my undergraduate. Give me a bit of time to kind of break away from academic stuff and then come back to it".
>
> **MM:** "Can I just clarify something with you Liam. You said that you never really had plans, that you came to [BU]study English because you enjoyed the subject, you felt you were good at it? [Liam nods]".

Phase (7) Knowledge and Skills: Self Reflective

Liam had spoken himself about his reflexivity throughout the CCCE, as part of his acquirement of knowledge and skills, therefore it felt authentic to me to go through these aspects of his TL in the order that he discussed them.

Once more, the exchange returned to the subject of Ms. Smith as an influential factor:

> **Liam:** "She was the first person who made me think that I was good at anything. Good English. And that's always kind of stuck with me. And so sometimes when I'm feeling doubtful no one I doubt myself and I think I can't do something at uni, I do think of that time at school. And so that's sort of reflection, isn't it? I feel like I kind of a reflective thinker and may be can I do dwell on the past quite a lot".
>
> **MM:** "Ahh ok well…"
>
> **Liam:** "[interrupting] It's not just the past, think about say when I handed in an assignment straight away. I think what I could have done better with that why didn't I include this. I have a passion for learning, I'm finding out more I think that kind of came through in the aspect can know what I wanted to do but then taking some time out then come back to it because I felt there was more to me than what I was doing you know when I was working".
>
> **MM:** "Oh well that's interesting, why do you think that might be?"
>
> **Liam:** "I don't know I suppose maybe part of its worry that I'm not going to reach the potential I want to reach if you know what I mean?"
>
> **MM:** "And what's the potential you want to reach; do you mean by that?"
>
> **Liam:** "I just want to feel that I've somehow on my own, in my own personal mind feel like somehow I've been successful in some sort of way so I'm in a job that I like or a job I'm happy to talk about [pause] because I wasn't happy in the job and I didn't like that job title if you know what I mean, it was called events management but really it was like literally delivering equipment and setting up and stuff, we weren't actually involved in actually creating the event and we were just kind of the middle man".
>
> **MM:** "Can you tell me a bit more, what was it about the job you didn't enjoy?"
>
> **Liam:** "It's not what I want to achieve I always knew that I should be doing more. I don't feel I need to reach unbelievable heights, but I also want to make an impression on others I suppose as well as myself that's my idea of being successful. I guess this idea and how I am reflecting on this has changed, I had not thought about these things before".

Phase (8) New Roles: Assertiveness

Liam talked about how his newly found "assertive self" had been a natural self-development for him as a result of being in an environment which enabled him to explore his passion for learning, and the new skills he was gaining. Again, in relation to this aspect of himself, Liam compared his "new self", to that of his "previous self", as explored in his conceptualisation of the 'bridge' (Phase 3).

> **Liam:** "Like, I feel like as I said before there were things people would say and I would not agree with, and I did not say anything, I just would think to myself oh that's wrong I don't believe that, but I wasn't as confident in myself to kind of be assertive enough about what I think".
>
> **MM:** "And you believe that undertaking a university degree has helped you to become more assertive in yourself?"
>
> **Liam:** "Yeah, like now I know like who I am and feel like I have more control about what I want to do, with teaching and exploring that passion for learning whether as before I don't know, I wouldn't have that same feeling. And it is the mixing of different people here, again too that has contributed to this. You know".

Serena and I interpreted this as Liam finding and building his self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and to an extent, reintegrating a sense of self efficacy into his life on the basis of conditions dictated by a 'new perspective' (Mezirow 2000). This is discussed in the following phase, supported by Liam's own interpretations of our initial CCCEs.

Phase (9) Self Confidence: Comfortable

As part of the increase in his self-confidence, Liam had also talked about finding flatmates for his second year of study, explaining that this was something he "could not have done" previously. Liam stated that he had gained confidence, and a sense of feeling more comfortable with himself. Beginning with the former, Liam highlighted:

> **Liam:** "I think with my seminar group, I live with quite a few of them now actually, they were all very hard working people, so I think I kind of wanted to, you know I didn't want to be turning up to seminars with absolutely nothing, I suppose they kind of rubbed off on me in that sort

> of sense. Anna didn't feel uncomfortable saying no about going out because I wanted to work".

Talking about his growing confidence in his academic abilities Liam said:

> **Liam:** "I will always remember one assignment […] where I was literally doing twelve-hour days for about four to five weeks and it paid off because I got one of the highest marks I got at university. So, I think that was kind of the change for me, like the work I put in was because I enjoyed, whereas before I was putting in quite hard work and getting mediocre results".

This was interesting because previously Liam had talked about 'just getting by':

> **Liam:** "I think I, it was just a realisation, changing the way I was working. I think I went through life thinking that things would just fall in my lap, if I wasn't trying to achieve a lot, and I suppose I got through school, I got through A Levels, I did the bare minimum but I had a slight level of intelligence so I could get by".

While we were discussing whether Liam's approach to academic work had changed since his first year, Liam reflected on what he referred to his work ethic, which I and Serena interpret as his mean-making of his experience as an undergraduate student.

> **Liam:** "Yeah I suppose so actually because when it was in my first year of uni and I felt like I slipped quite far behind, so I think yeah, it did change my work ethic, or why I was working, I was trying to do, and I started feeling more comfortable overall with stuff".

I was curious to explore Liam's line of thinking and reflection, in relation to his notion of feeling more "comfortable":

> **MM:** "It sounds like you are reflecting on things that have happened in the past, can you tell more about how you perceive those experiences now?"
>
> **Liam:** "Just, I 'spose kind of before not knowing who I was and not even being aware of who I was and not even thinking about it before I come to university but now it's opened my mind to what I believe and, and it's ok to believe that and I don't have to agree with what everyone else kind of thinks or what my family thinks or what my work peers thought or, yeah".
>
> **MM:** "And it sounds as if you're comfortable with that change in yourself. How would you describe the changes?"

> **Liam:** "I suppose more just I mean I just feel very more like self-aware and that I'm still learning about myself but like I've started that process and I'm beginning to feel more confident and comfortable about what I think and kind of who I am I suppose".
>
> **MM:** "I was going to ask you if you felt comfortable. Has any of that process at any point felt uncomfortable?"
>
> **Liam:** "Like yeah, I suppose loads of the university processes have felt uncomfortable. I hated giving presentations, I hated speaking up, I hated putting my hand up in lessons or having an opinion, I suppose I struggled myself in certain social situations, but now I feel like kind of, I mean there's still, I still get nervous before a presentation then I realised everyone did, and, but I kind of like, instead of running away from my fear, I kind of like try and like combat that fear now because from learning through university, if I don't combat that fear, I feel worse for not trying it at least".

Phase (10) Reintegration: Independence

As a result of identifying phases (7), (8), and (9), Serena and I interpreted that Liam had reintegrated a sense of self efficacy into his life on the basis of conditions dictated by a new perspective (10) thereby completing the final phase of TL (Mezirow 1978a, b). As part of his reintegration, a new-found independence, Liam reiterated that his university experience and the friendships he had made away from his 'bubble', were the reasons he attributed to these changes in his perceptions of himself:

> **MM:** "And you say HE, or being here at [redacted] university has created that [independence]?"
>
> **Liam:** "Absolutely. You know, it's everything, from the studying and my writing, being more confident with that and feeling more independent about my own thoughts and how I see the world. I also think from meeting those new people away from my hometown instead from different backgrounds and different beliefs, that is has given me more independence about who I am and what I want to do".

4.3 Serena's Story

Serena and I met for three CCCEs over a 3-week period, each for just over an hour's duration. It became clear in our initial independent analysis and exchanges that Serena's transformative experience, during her studies, had

compelled her to reframe her own mean-making of what HE education and broadly the sector now meant to her (i.e., see p.162). The foundation for this began for Serena at a Russell Group institution she had previously attended, and her subsequent transition to a post 92 university. These experiences, according to Serena, shaped her frame of reference about HE and her own critical examination, through which she was able to filter her new impressions of the world around her (Mezirow 2000). Further applying her own critical self-reflection to her beliefs and opinions (Arends 2014), Serena and I both agreed that her habitus throughout TL had not shifted, yet her sociocultural understanding of her surroundings had transformed.

This led her to question distortions in her identity and the increasingly transactional, market-like ideology of HE, which unraveled her 'romanticist' view of learning and knowledge enrichment, as the interpretations and analysis will demonstrate. Interestingly, in our first exchange Serena discussed her own interpretation of TL:

> **MM:** "Ok, and so my first - my starting point, then would be, do you have any preconceptions about what it is you think we will be talking about today? Or any preferred areas of discussion you would like to focus on?"
>
> **Serena:** "Um, well I have my own interpretation of transformative learning".
>
> **MM:** "Oh ok".
>
> **Serena:** "I know the literature talks about previous interpretations making meaning of future interpretations but for me I always think it's very behavioural, your sense of self, the emotional chord, your belief system under that umbrella- in the transformative process – that's my interpretation anyway".

The premise for Serena's transformative experience included dimensions of morality, cognition, and her behavioural perspectives, as a fundamental underpinning of empathy which she expressed for her fellow peers and, towards her former self at the start of her HE journey (Rogers 1961; Kunyk and Olseon 2001). Serena felt she had undergone a transformative process,

becoming “a completely different person”, with a reintegration based on conditions dictated by her new perspectives (Taylor 2001):

> **Serena:** “Yes- I do not recognise that person who started here, at all. I feel like I came in, as someone who had all sorts of ideas and assumptions more about who I was, what Higher Education is overall, and I look back on myself and I want to give myself a hug because of how stupid and uninformed I was. I’ve gone through a really big change, from this romanticized view of HE, to a completely different picture - and that is something that has been carved out from my time here”.

During our CCCEs, Serena placed much emphasis on her own critical reflection, as she recognised that the themes emerging from our collaborative exchanges were a signal to the new meanings she had developed through her 9 Phases of TL. This caused her to completely deconstruct, reexamine, and ultimately change her own beliefs (Taylor 2015). We agreed that Serena had not, like Peter, experienced Phase 4 - a recognition that transformation is shared - as she was not especially close to her peers, and did not feel that they viewed the course she was studying in the same way.

> **Serena:** “I could not really relate to my peers, on the learning front, most just wanted their 2:1 and to fulfill the coursework or exam brief. And they seemed to become quite obsessed and incredibly stressed about placements as opposed to…their skills in critical something or other. So, I do not know if they would have had the same experience”.

4.3.1 Cogenerating Serena’s Themes

Serena and I came to the same understanding of the themes to emerge, which were, according to her, stark ‘ah-ha’ moments, as she understood her own transformation initially, to have been epochal, occurring rapidly after a small number of experiences (Nohl 2014). However, upon reflection, Serena and I recognised that her transformation had been incremental throughout her journey in HE, as a gradual recognition of a disconnect between her meaning structure and environment, with her beliefs having shifted considerably (Mezirow 1991). Serena understood that her transformation began with her disorienting dilemma which according to her, “planted the

seeds" as the catalyst for her TL experience. This continued to shape her mean-making as the constellation of her concepts, judgements, and feelings (Mezirow 1995), and as a manifestation of her perspective throughout her own TL.

Serena and I identified the following themes in alignment with her 9 Phases, below (see table 8).

Phase	***Phases of Transformative Learning***	***Theme Identified through CCCEs***
(1)	Disorienting Dilemma	Privilege
(2)	Self-Explanation	Romance
(3)	Critical Assessment	Moral
(4)	Recognition Transformation Is Shared	Not Identified
(5)	Exploration	Rebel
(6)	Planning Action	Campaigner
(7)	Knowledge and Skills	Intellectual
(8)	New Roles	Leader
(9)	Self – Confidence	Independence
(10)	Reintegration	Academic/ Campaigner

Table 8: Serena's 9 Phases of Transformative Learning

As with each co-participant, this is presented visually with Serena's cog framework conceptualisation (section 3.13.5), showcasing Serena's 9 Phases of TL. Themes underpinning her habitus (Bourdieu 1977) include: privilege, academic, class, and emotional. Those underpinning her identity include: family, PAL, moral and intellectual. These are discussed in accordance with each of Serena's TL Phases, as follows.

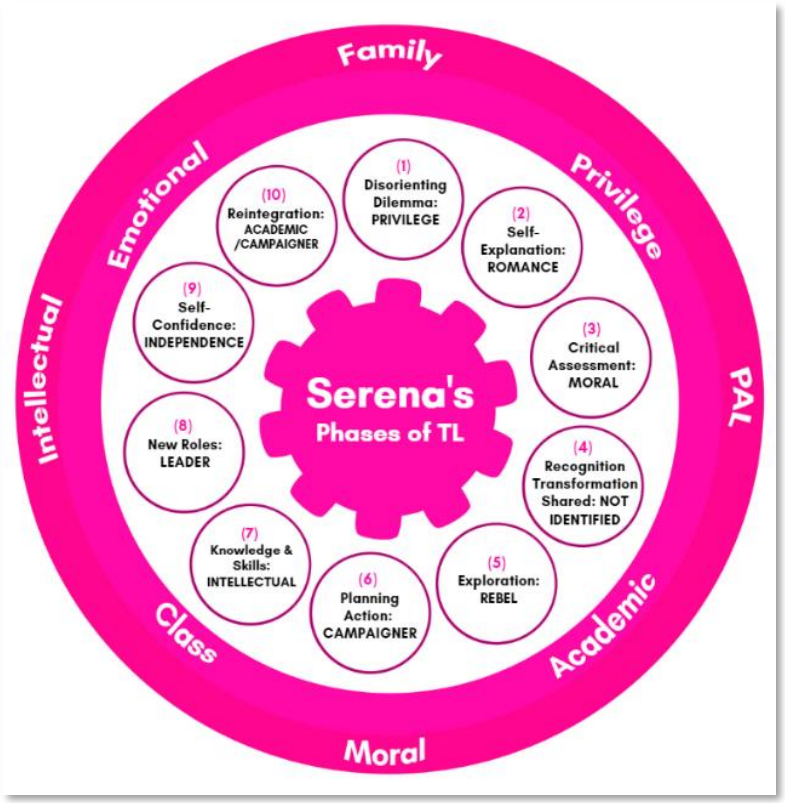

Figure 17: Serena's 9 Phases of TL: Framework Conceptualisation

Phase (1) Disorienting Dilemma: Privilege

Serena described herself, in alignment with her 'privileged' background, as a 'traditional' student with an extended family who had all attended Russell group universities. This was the start of Serena's disorienting dilemma, the point where she begun to recognise that her initial university experience (an elite Russell group institution) did not fit with her expectations or make sense to her (Taylor 2000a).

> **Serena:** "[Russell group institution] was highly, extremely transactional. There was nobody there who represented students…if you were having issues with your accommodation, they just had one main reception and it was a corporate reception, they would do everything by your ID number, last name date of birth- that's all they knew about you and that's all the staff knew about you - there were no relationships between staff and students at all".
>
> **MM:** That sounds like an extension of public school in a way, but can I just do some double checking? Your sense of - what do you mean by transactional?

> **Serena:** "It's very…it's a product and we are customers, that's it".
>
> **MM:** "And why do you think that was?"
>
> **Serena:** "Money. But that is not how a learning environment should be. I mean, sure it was all very informed, our lecturers were experts in their fields, but it was more like a commercial operation in its entirety".

Turning to her experience at a post 92 university, Serena's observations were that the institution was a stark contrast to the HE environment she was used to. She referred to this specifically in terms of her privileged background, together with her prior attendance at a Russell Group institution, which caused her to feel uncomfortable among her peers.

> **Serena: "**Yes, and I feel like I was really privileged. I came here and saw how hard other students have got it and thought If I'm struggling to navigate through certain things, how on earth are they coping to navigate?"
>
> **MM: "**Yes, there's an assumption that if you're a student from a fairly privileged background and you did private school then public school and then a Russell group, then that's a route you would typically take and, there's an assumption that students who struggle come from very different backgrounds, and it sounds like you're saying you feel a bit topsy turvey to that you've come to a university, but it's not a Russell group, its post 92, so you're almost the reverse of a non-traditional student who goes to a Russell group".
>
> **Serena:** "I began thinking I've made a big mistake here I should have gone back to Exeter maybe it felt like play school or something. I didn't know if I belonged here and I felt really uncomfortable because the lecturer would ask a question, and I started to feel really uncomfortable it was so blaringly obvious my educational background was very different to other peoples".
>
> **MM:** "How did you feel about this?"
>
> **Serena:** "Well, over time I thought – wow, why was I so set on Russell Group institutions only? Because the socio-cultural dynamic of students was eye-opening, and I had liked this mix of students from different backgrounds. I also preferred the learning style, which seemed to be more nurturing, more interpersonal between academics and students".

Serena explained how this had led her to question her own beliefs and the "wisdom" of her current educational perceptions, with her outlook now changing, and – in her words – the "collapse" of formed ideals. This is

supported by the notion that through her disorienting dilemma, Serena had effectively, purposefully engineered the collapse of her existing paradigms (Robertson 1996).

I wanted to explore why Serena felt this way, and so encouraged her in our CCCEs to dig deeper:

> **MM:** "But it's still different to urban areas and I think what you're saying is you hadn't had the experiences of other students and their backgrounds and where they have come from?"
>
> **Serena:** "Yes".
>
> **MM:** "If you hadn't, then why would you think that rendered you stupid?"
>
> **Serena:** "Well if you aren't aware of those things- there are levels are intellect- if you are intellectual but not socially aware, all the cogs behind that. It was all a new experience for me, being around students with those different backgrounds".

This triggered a questioning of assumptions, which would eventually lead to - as Serena described - a "total transformation of [her] beliefs". And yet, this was not the only element to Serena's disorientation. Serina began to explain the similarities between the two institutions (Russell Group and post 92), conceptualising this as a "veil" at the latter, which was in her eyes, covering a growing sense of a market-oriented agenda:

> **MM:** "Ok, right. So, what is that - so many questions. It sounds as if you are talking about a highly commercialised sort of operation at [Russell group university]".
>
> **Serena:** "Very much".
>
> **MM:** "And are you saying you don't see that here?**"**
>
> **Serena:** "It IS here, it may even be worse, it's covered up to the student eye, and we don't see it – so of course it's all still transactional, but then again, there is a genuine interest in student wellbeing here, although it seems to be dependent on your faculty, it seems to function as a veil, and behind it, it's all about that transactional relationship, the university serving its own interest which does not align with the needs or welfare of students, it's overall, a very market-like picture I am witnessing, from the on-campus operations, and bureaucratic nature of what's going on".

Interestingly, Serena discussed how this development in her thinking was an incremental process - which was a “long time coming” (Daloz 2000, p.106), with her experiences at both institutions serving as a readiness for change, as she began to question the motives of the institutions and the complexities involved. Whilst this was not a detrimental ‘life crisis’ moment for Serena in the traditional sense of a TL experience (Mezirow 2000; Cranton 2006), during our CCCE where we analysed the initial transcripts, Serena highlighted that it had engendered a love-hate relationship with HE. This had caused her a great deal of tension in her own mind and the transgression of these thoughts (Taylor 2000a) from “[her] initial romanticised view of HE”, discussed further in Phase 2.

Phase (2) Self Examination: Romance

Serena explained that she had always wanted to study at university, whilst at the same time, it was also “not an option” not to do so, strongly cemented in her habitus and the values of her parents. Serena also noted that her motivation for studying in HE rested in her affection for learning and academia, tied to her social reinforcement of those incentives (Glynn et al. 2005). According to Wolters (1998, p.224), motivational factors serve as a determinant in:

> “…student’s choice to engage in a particular activity and the intensity of his or her effort and persistence for that activity.”

Serena shared with me the ways in which she found the “reality” as opposed to her preconceptions which had informed her motivations to be “totally shattering”:

> **Serena: “**I had always had this romantic idea of what higher education would be like, I thought it would be an academic dream, being encouraged to challenge current ideas, yourself, grow, learn, be critical about the world around you (which yes, I achieved but not in the way maybe they had hoped!) – yes ok, there is focus on building a career for yourself, but that should be a positive stem from the HE experience – not the whole focus to the point where learning enrichment is discarded. It was quite shattering”.
>
> **MM:** “I see, so in a sense this was taking a backseat to…”

> **Serena:** "I thought I would be in an environment that was completely about student educational development. My experience at Exeter proved that to be in-correct, as it emerged as a highly transactional environment geared towards a kind of human capital. Then I came to BU, and again, the same picture was emerging".

Through our CCCEs, we identified that the theme of the 'transactional environment', largely through Serena's own self-examination, appeared regularly in the tension between her idealised view of HE and her experiences. Serena explained this left her feeling unsettled, and initially led to an intense self-questioning, changing her belief system from the "inside out".

> **Serena:** "I didn't know what to believe anymore, I felt confused about the world I had envisioned in my mind. Everything I was experiencing was not even in line with my traditional perspectives on learning, on education, my own positioning with my background, its social functioning - it was mind blowing".

Through our CCCEs, Serena and I began to explore, through in-depth discussion, how her experience, showcased an ideal in her belief system that learning should be both active and social. Serena's experience is also supported by constructivist assumptions, whereby meaning is seen to exist within one's self and not always in external forms (Cranton 2006). Serena was particularly vocal in her view that her own dissonance in this experience led to her critical assessment and feelings of unsettlement in her prior prejudices, and new emerging fears (Taylor 2007).

Phase (3) Critical Assessment: Moral

Through her own critical assessment, or as 'premise reflections' concerned with underlying beliefs and assumptions (Mezirow 1991, 2000), Serena explained how her experiences in HE had led to a "total examination" and critical scrutiny of her own beliefs, which construed new meanings for her. Serena discussed her experience of struggling with her own morality, in this evolving conflict in her new realities of HE, class, and socioeconomic status:

> **MM:** "I've also, I think I've noticed, in the years I have taught here, those demographics tend of kind of come together, so that…"

> **Serena:** "There are tribes".
>
> **MM:** "So, what makes you feel uncomfortable about that?"
>
> **Serena:** "Well If I've been able to afford to spend, in our unit guides we get mandatory books, these cost £60.00 each, so if you're a super keen engaged learner of course you are going to want to buy all three, so you are kind of saying, well it's a statement - then you have people with scrap photocopies of book pages from the library, and the crazy thing is, is that student who don't have the books will actually say well I can't afford that. They are immediately at a disadvantage. If your parents don't have £400.00 to spend on core books, how are you going to refer to those pages in the selected reading? That's another thing about this veil - they don't tell you - not once did I hear them discuss all those hidden costs".

It is our interpretation that this formed a large part of Serena's critical assessment of her beliefs, which at times, led to the internalisation of criticism, in what she described as her "naivety", serving as a key part of her own development (Cranton and Taylor 2012). Interestingly, this led Serena to begin to question alternative realities in HE, which she said she had not considered previously:

> **MM:** "Do you think that's about whether they should have to anyway, or is it about being told, being transparent, or are there more flexible ways what is it about?"
>
> **Serena**: "It's the first time I felt really compromised when I was giving a talk, I had never felt like that before - I had a horrible feeling inside me, standing there and they put a huge screen behind me of placement companies and I felt like I had to sell them a dream. It really bothered me. It was so contractual like I was endorsing some other company someone had done a placement on…I don't know it was all very pressured. The focus of what the purpose of placement was, was wrong. I'm looking for more transparency".
>
> **MM:** "Transparency that's it. Good way to describe that".
>
> **Serena:** "And you see it on the open day, they sort of sell it as a package, but no one tells you about the squalid accommodation if you can't afford, if you don't have the finances, no one talks about this, or the role of debt in HE".

In our interpretation, this formed a stronger foundation for Serena's own reassessment, supported by the contention that this occurs in "our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling and acting" (Mezirow

1990, p.13). Once more, Serena was also experiencing less autonomy from external influences, rather she was evolving through her own critical reflectivity (Argyris and Schön 1996).

Phase (5) Exploration: Rebel

During the exploration phase of TL, Serena's moral compass compelled her to search for a new meaning, leading her to critically explore different beliefs and logically [for her] enter into a different course of action (Taylor 2007). Serena felt this new exploration of planning and action was underpinned by one theme, that of 'rebel', in her response to her new realities of HE. This was emphasized in our CCCEs, in which we talked about the role of her course's placement opportunities for students. Serena had asked whether I understood her feelings about the "so-called" placement opportunities:

> **MM:** "I think I do, that potential students are being sold an idea that they can have really good opportunities at blue chip global companies?".
>
> **Serena:** "And the other thing is we are reassured that any placement on the university job page have been screened…"
>
> **MM:** "Vetted?"
>
> **Serena:** "Yes, vetted. Some people have great placement experiences, but a large number don't and are terrified to say something in case life is made difficult for them as they are terrified, they won't meet the 43-week requirement or something. It's not everybody but a scarily large percentage who say it's not for us, it's for them - so they can get speakers in, that sort of thing. It's again that very transactional, market-orientated agenda, feeding into the reputation of the university, not for the benefit of students. It makes me want to rebel".

Phase (6) Planning Action: Campaigner

Leading on from her newly identified role as a 'rebel', Serena stated that this had led to her planning a new course of action, acquisition of knowledge, and the acquirement of new skills, with a will to learn more. As Serena explained:

> **Serena:** "And I feel sorry for students and even here, we are sold this dream that doesn't exist, because they don't talk about- students aren't really educated on the idea of debt, when we leave here and go into our career, that debt is hidden- student finance support no its cold hard debt. It's a transaction, it's not about personal growth, the costs are astronomical now. It furthered my understanding, and I want to learn more".
>
> **MM:** "That's interesting you use the term cold hard debt, that's what it is. Are you saying you don't think many of your peers are aware?"
>
> **Serena:** "They really don't see the bigger picture. I would rebel against…there are many things I would rebel against...I would rebel against, the ideology of the system which is so brutally part of this learning landscape. Something I never thought I would say in a million years".

Serena's mean-making of HE had formed from her in-class experiences, Open Day talks, and her role as a student mentor, which, according to her own interpretation, seemed to support an economic and political inequity that she had not previously encountered.

> **MM:** "What was it about these experiences that had…quite an impact on you?"
>
> **Serena:** "[pauses] I had never seen anything like this before Marian. It was just so crass almost, and I just thought for goodness sake, can we just stop all this and do what is advertised across all BU promotional materials – put the students at the center! This is putting them at the center in a different context, as products? As cogs in this huge mechanical operation to make money. Yes, ok, that is important but not like this. Only a few lecturers have really encouraged my intellectual growth because that isn't what they are really interested in, is it".

Serena was enacting what she was learning in a social context, through the implications of her transformed thinking, in order to confidently present her new meaning, and the acquisition of new skills (Apple 2004). Serena was also furthering her interpretation of HE as being politically charged at the expense of intellectual growth.

Phase (7) Knowledge and Skills: Intellectual

Building on this further, Serena identified a large part of her TL experience as coming from her confidence in being an 'intellectual'. Serena said she had

always felt passionate about education, but that this was again not always "encouraged" at the post 92 institution, and it was "up to her" to take control of her own acquirement of knowledge and skills:

> **Serena: "**I had recognized quite early on that this motivation to become more knowledgeable and extend my skillset in academia – was not going to be handed to me, encouraged, or seen as a worthwhile investment of my time".
>
> **MM:** "Really? I…"
>
> **Serena:** "[interjecting] on multiple occasions I would ask the lecturers at the end, what other articles could I read, or are there scholars which oppose these theories, because I want to gain some more contextual insights? I was just given totally blank stares and a sort of – just stick to the unit guide. That sounds very negative doesn't it? Not all lecturers were like that, but most were".

Phase (8) New Roles: Leader

In her next phases of exploring new roles, Serena reflected upon her previous self. She had also reached a form of self-realisation where she felt a moral duty to try and protect and advise the student group she was mentoring in her new role:

> **MM: "**I mean, in a very short space of time you've mentioned that quite a few times, it strikes me that is a seam that runs through your experience here. How, if we could go back to your comment you would give a hug to yourself - how would you characterise the change in you?"
>
> **Serena:** "Mentally - stronger? That's not because of just depression or going through that, so for me, each year- it's almost like a boot camp here, every year you go through this boot camp and some years, its more centered on being challenged intellectually- but, there is a lot more going on beneath the surface, emotionally, socially- that's how I feel. Others feel it to, people want to help each other. Also, through academic researcher opportunities, other roles and my experiences. I am more centered, confident, I understand the world around me in terms of what education means to me".

Serena explained she witnessed this empathy in many other students who were concerned about the welfare of their peers or wanted to support one another. Accordingly, this formulates a reciprocation of a mutual

acknowledgement of each other's contribution to the community in HE environments, which is an important part of the transformative process (Honneth 1995).

Phase (9) Self-Confidence: Independence

Serena and I agreed during our CCCEs that her new role as a leader enabled her to transition into a phase of self-confidence, which we conceptualised as 'independence':

> **Serena:** "I think I had gained this new kind of confidence from having more independent thought".
>
> **MM:** "Independent thoughts about…"
>
> **Serena: "**What my position is in relation to how HE should be in an ideal world, what I can do to help my PAL group, and how I can seek out the opportunities I need, to grow, regardless of whether or not the environment supports it. I think it was feeling more independent, away from everything mentally and sort of being outside looking internally at the system here, and how I feel".

Serena suggested that this stemmed from the opportunities that had been given to her, those which she had sought out, such as her role as an academic researcher, and her new self-identified roles and mean-making of the world around her (Daloz 2000).

Phase (10) Reintegration: Academic/Campaigner

Regarding her reintegration, Serena and I discussed in depth what this meant for her, supported by beliefs evident in her new disciplinary or professional habits (Mezirow 1998). These included both her role as an 'academic', and as a 'campaigner', generating beliefs and opinions that justified her new planned actions. Consequently, Serena's transformative experience had reframed her own mean-making on HE as she explained:

> **MM:** "So, what did this mean for you, did you…"
>
> **Serena:** "I felt confident in being able to see the bigger picture and chose to leverage what I could around me. I finally reached a place whereby I knew my passion was with academia, this is the role I identified myself with now, as a rebel, knowing what, what's going on

> behind the veil. I started to question why my peers were choosing to go into HE, the model of it – what it all means - it is so complex, the motivations. It was, indeed, transformative!"

Serina's role as a campaigner had emerged from her critical understanding of the emotional gains she had experienced, her new mean-making of HE, and her emerging compulsion towards 'campaigning' against it:

> **MM:** "Ah, so it's not a very personal approach to some very personal circumstances, and do you know what I can hear through what we are talking about is, [the institution] has the appearance of being very student focused, very friendly, supportive, what are you are saying the reality is?"
>
> **Serena:** "If you're struggling, they aren't interested, and I feel like- my experiences here I will always feel so positive about this place not because of the institution but because of individual members of staff who seem to do the opposite of how this place is run and they do care".
>
> **MM:** "Can I just ask, and I should never talk whilst I am thinking of something because I lose my train of thought, ok so is it the individual people who have allowed you, enabled you to think differently?"
>
> **Serena:** "Yes, it's the individual people who have allowed me to grow emotionally".
>
> **MM:** "So, that emotional growth, the bit I'm interested in, which you've touched on, is how you had a view of the world, and now you've seen some quite different situations for other people, and you've seen the way the university manages the placement process, so do you make room for the possibility that because of the perceptions around- I must report this as being a good experience, do you make room for the possibility that if the organisation knew different, they would respond?"
>
> **Serena:** "No, I don't think they would. That's why I would feel the need to rebel, to campaign against it, what I am seeing".

Serena demonstrates here that she was aware of her transformation and ready to apply her new ways of logic to new challenges, referred to by some as the phase where the student has 'become' (Wilcock 1998; Mälkki 2010, 2012). Serena and I discussed her new interpretations of HE, revolving around her own questions regarding the entry points into the impact of neoliberalism on HE and the model itself. Serena's ways of making-meaning, previously grounded upon unquestioned assumptions and through her own transformative process, had become clarified, as a result of her new

integrative sets of assumptions becoming integrated into her new self – and acted upon (Mezirow 1991). Furthermore, Serena's TL experience also encompassed distortions in her identity, as she tried to navigate through what she had been raised to believe, her romantic view of HE, and the reality of her socio-economic positioning. This aligns with TL, which involves an evolution of a learner's perspective, where he or she will self-examine and reflect to influence their learning (Mezirow 1978).

4.4 Peter's Story

It is important for me to acknowledge that Peter engaged enthusiastically in the CCCEs and gave generously of his time. As a mature student, studying an undergraduate degree in order to obtain a qualification to develop his TESOL (Teaching English as a Second or Other Language) career, my anticipation was that his motivation for undertaking the degree would be both transactional and instrumental. In this sense, his was probably the most unexpected data. I recognise here that I was operating an unconscious bias, which, on reflection surprised me. It is this cycle of reflection that informs the interpretation of Peter's CCCEs. Serena and I agreed that Peter had not experienced Phase 9 of the TL phases, in the 'recognition that transformation is shared' (Mezirow 2000). This is possibly due to, as Peter highlighted, his feeling of being an 'outsider' attributable to his mature student status:

> **Peter:** "And you know, at the start, when I was sitting there in classes with these 19-year olds as my peers, I felt very ostracised and it made me very, angry. I felt like, you haven't been through anything, anything at all".

As a result, Peter was unable to determine whether his peers, who he did not interact with, had also had a transformative experience. It is important to note that in relation to identity (Illeris 2014), Peter and I talked about, and he confirmed this, his gaining a strong sense of his identity from his father. Peter talked often about his father having been an engineer and that perhaps that was why he articulated his thoughts within that field, for example conceptualising the university as a factory, as part of his critical assessment

(section 4.5.3). We also discussed habitus (Bourdieu 1977 - 1998), as it transpired that Peter had explored Bourdieu's theories of Cultural Capital and Habitus. Peter felt that his own habitus had shifted, adding that in his early adult life he had studied for engineering qualifications, expecting to work as a skilled engineer, although he was not able to expand any further on what that might mean, or why he gave up those studies.

4.4.1 Cogenerating Peter's Themes

We started the CCCEs by agreeing the ways in which we would work through interpretations of the data (Mason 1996, 2014; Ekman 2015). Peter was keen to do this at the beginning of subsequent meetings. We also discussed our agreed definition of interpretation, and settled on my understanding of the CCCEs, which were that they were to give voice to his co-participation in the fieldwork. I outlined the principles of participatory action research, and my ethical approach with which he confirmed he was comfortable (Rogers et al. 2014). Serina and I identified and agreed the following themes in alignment with Peter's 9 Phases of TL (see table 9).

Phase	***Phases of Transformative Learning***	***Theme Identified through CCCEs***
(1)	Disorienting Dilemma	Dyslexic
(2)	Self-Explanation	Accepting
(3)	Critical Assessment	Industrialisation
(4)	Recognition Transformation Is Shared	Not Experienced
(5)	Exploration	Lightbulb
(6)	Planning Action	Postgraduate Study
(7)	Knowledge and Skills	Self-Efficacy
(8)	New Roles	Writer/ Academic
(9)	Self – Confidence	Assessment
(10)	Reintegration	Change of Attitude

Table 9: Peter's 9 Phases of Transformative Learning

These are displayed pictorially (see figure 18).

Figure 18: Peter's 9 Phases of TL: Cog Framework Conceptualisation

Phase (1) Disorienting Dilemma: Dyslexic

Peter stated early on in our first CCCE that he had hated his first year at university and realised very soon that he needed to find a way to cope with the learning. This is identified as Peter's disorienting phase (Mezirow 1978a, b). Peter talked about failing English O-level in school as a source of shame, adding that it was not until the third year of his undergraduate degree studies that he learned he was dyslexic (Mezirow 1978a, b).

> **Peter:** "It really was not until I recognised that I was dyslexic and everything kind of changed for me. I felt defeated at the time, it has taken me so long to get here. And remember what I was saying, I hit a brick wall with previous studies in my home country, I could not study these subjects in engineering, I gave up".

Peter talked compellingly about developing strategies so that he was now enjoying reading. Peter added that "[reading was] was no longer a mountain to climb". This he identified as "coming out of the tunnel from the dark to the light" (in a later exchange he described this as his lightbulb moment) (section 4.5.5). Peter also talked about being "taught" to understand how to read critically, and that this had come from a relationship with a lecturer with whom he had particularly connected. This lecturer had shared their own experiences of being neurodiverse, and the challenges, including "shaming" by others that they had encountered. Peter also articulated his perceptions of the approach this lecturer took to their teaching.

> **MM: "**That sense of belonging that you've come to from being here, your perception of Transformative Learning, you have experienced this, generated through relationships with teachers?"
>
> **Peter:** "Yes, ever since I have started teaching it has been my philosophy that if you come across as someone who is passionate and enjoying what you're doing – students will pick up on that. And they will advance themselves through that".

I turn now to Peter's experiences as a mature student, and how this also served as a disorienting issue for him, which greatly impacted his first few years of study. This is perhaps one of the most disappointing interpretations for me, as an academic, working within the field of widening participation and inclusivity, and gives me pause for a great deal of personal reflection. It is here that I reflected on the need for academics to be open to their own TLs. This had been a recurring thought throughout the CCCEs and this analysis. While we were exploring Peter's early feelings of being ostracised, and not belonging, I tried to probe where that sense came from:

> **Peter:** "(long pause) It is so difficult for me to discuss because of the age difference?"
>
> **MM:** "Yes, so is that a major reason" [Peter interjects]
>
> **Peter:** "Yes, definitely -"
>
> **MM:** "My sense is that this doesn't speak very well about inclusivity in education".

> **Peter:** "I felt although the university takes on a lot of mature students - there is nothing here for them outside degree course. Because they have posters, Tuesday 12 o'clock at the bar for a coffee – I would go, and I was there only one there. Mature people have other lives, children. Men would have other responsibilities – then there's me thinking there is A LOT for normal 19-year olds. Incredible how much. Not for us".
>
> **MM:** "Have you asked them?"
>
> **Peter:** "No, I haven't. But if there was more association same age group - we would learn and develop more. The children 19-year olds don't want me around - I know it. My sense of belonging comes from the staff as they are my age group".
>
> **MM:** "So perhaps we need to do more research into the needs and expectations of students from more diverse backgrounds?"
>
> **Peter:** "Absolutely".

Phase (2) Self Examination: Determination

Regarding his second phase of TL, Peter began by the CCCE explaining that although he found the topics he studied enjoyable, he had underestimated the degree of determination he would need to complete the course. Peter also talked about the way in which his father had seeded in him his sense that he lacked commitment, referring to the way his father would often speak to him during his GCSE studies:

> **Peter:** "And then there is my father and the joke he made of me giving up - it has stayed with me, the idea of being like the wind, I am blowing away but not getting there".

Peter's father's negative influence on his sense of identity was a recurring theme throughout the CCCEs, contributing to what we both understood to be a barrier that he had struggled to overcome (Illeris 2014). Interestingly, Peter also stated that he had modelled a lot of his own behaviour on that of his father, including his passion for walking, a fundamental part of his identity. Through our CCCEs, Peter identified through his own self-examination that his determination served as a further catalyst for his TL journey:

> **Peter:** "I was determined I am going to overcome everything I have been through…"

> **MM:** "There's that determination again…"
>
> **Peter:** "Yes, it is. You know, I've been doing a lot of examining of myself - when I came here, I was also learning about my kind of aggressiveness, and realised ok, I have to stop being Russian…"
>
> **MM:** "That was part of your transformative experience?"
>
> **Peter:** "Yes of course! I have really had to look inwards, and I have come a long way through this kind of transformation. I had to learn not going into the fight as such, the way I was. This was a big part of my transformative experience".

Phase (3) Critical Assessment: Industrialisation

In one CCCE, Peter described HE as the "industrialisation of education" (Coffield and Williamson 2012). He went on to describe lecturers as being the 'workers', and there being strata of middle and senior management, as he conceives factories. Peter said that out of curiosity he had "checked out the cars in the car park" and noticed that "expensive cars appear to belong to senior managers such as the Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor", and that the lectures he knew tended to drive low value cars. I asked him how he could discern this, and he said that he looked on the website and identified who the senior managers were, explaining that it was all part of his theory that "higher education is about the money".

> **MM:** "[discussing Peter's theory of the industrialisation of higher education] So you are saying they are all intricately linked. And of course, then there is the other thing, those thoughts you had around after your Masters, a PhD, the two strands – creative writing and that other the idea that on your epic walk you thought about - the industrialisation of education – can I ask your thoughts about that?"
>
> **Peter:** "Oh yes, so the industrialisation of education - there are workers, middle managers, senior managers, and - I am walking around the car park, you see all the different types of cars - you see wealthy, very wealthy cars, poorer ones but you do not see any lecturers with expensive cars".

Peter also talked about the 'assembly line', postulating that knowledge is the "raw material, the commodity", according to him lecturers were "puppets" who laboured on the "product": the graduate student.

> **MM:** "Can we talk about your factory analogy?"
>
> **Peter:** "Ok yes, knowledge is being assembled through the factory line. Lesson number 1 is that knowledge is power and every single time I hear this everywhere - well…"
>
> **MM:** "Who holds that power?"
>
> **Peter:** "If knowledge is power, then it must be a commodity and then you give it to somebody and get them to pay for it".
>
> **MM:** "So, knowledge is being created on the assembly line?"
>
> **Peter:** "No, it is being transferred not created. Knowledge is the raw material; the end product is the graduate student?"
>
> **MM:** "So, the graduate student is the product?"
>
> **Peter:** "Now, all these students are on a palette together looking for a job, because I worked in a glass factory around 3 years ago, that's where I got that scenario from. It is the same. Total industrialisation of this system and the students in it".
>
> **MM:** "So, students are put in this pallet of the wider world, world of work…this all comes back to a very..."
>
> **Peter:** "This is all to do with the industrialisation, students have to go to secondary schools and all the possibility of new products being produced - these are the future and so forth. We are all on a factory line".

In his factory metaphor, at the end of the assembly line, these graduate students were placed, 20 at a time, into pallets to be sent off to work. Expanding on his theory, Peter said that Open Days "sold" degrees, and that lecturers were the factory workers who "got the job done". This very much aligns with Coffield and Williamson (2012).

> **MM:** "So, there are the workers, managers, academics, senior with grander…"
>
> **Peter:** "And the students, that is where the money comes from. Students in this scenario, if we put it into beehive you've got the queen B – all the worker bees and then giving it to building up the honeycomb – students".

Asking Peter to clarify this point he again returned to his assembly-line metaphor. He also talked about the British degree as being "a brand", a "commodity" … "graduate students 'Made in Britain'". Continuing his

"industrialisation of higher education" theme, Peter likened British degrees to being the "Rolls-Royce of degrees".

> **Peter:** "Do you know, people are being sent from around the world to British universities, because the British education is very, very good in comparison to other countries? I have seen it from both sides from a student and an academic. There are many wealthy people sending their children here to get a British degree, it is globally recognised and holds a great deal of value".
>
> **MM:** "Ahh, yes international students. Ok, can you tell me more about this?"
>
> **Peter:** "Well, you see here, I worry about industrialisation. The British brand on this product, is what sells it, 'the made in Britain' stamp. What could be happening therefore, more people study here from around the world in future, and they go through this industrialised process, and then they go back to their native countries or just work and feel like – was this British stamp on HE as good as the institutions led us to believe? This is devaluing it because you are overselling the product".
>
> **MM:** "Ahh, ok so the brand is devalued…"
>
> **Peter:** "Millions of people will be buying that product. If you look at the grading, you will see 10% of the whole year will get a 2:2, 88% will get a 2:1, and 2% will get a First. And let's take a look at the numbers overall across the university - that tells me something. They are all fitting in the 2:1's - everyone is being produced the same. Back to the factory! All the same".

In this CCCE, Peter also talked about "grade inflation'". He articulated that students were achieving high awards and that this was to make the 'product' more attractive, returning to his metaphor of the student as product shipped off the assembly line with a 2.1 degree. In addition, he claimed this was why international students are attracted to studying in the UK. In later exchanges Peter returned to this theme, during a discussion about his experience of open days.

> **Peter:** "Yes of course, then for the open days they come to them and see ahhhh, this is the factory to produce students - I can see a book coming here!!! The knowledge is the commodity, and if you can give it to somebody then you are selling it. And then there is the financial gain - a factory where we produce graduates".

> **MM:** "Ok, I am just trying to think this through - where is the financial gain coming from?"
>
> **Peter:** "The financial gain is the thousands of pounds we have to pay to come to university. The university gets 9,000 per year per student. Multiply that by 18,000 and that is a lot of money. You could build a fusion building every year - which they are funnily enough".

During our CCCEs Peter returned often to his metaphors of the industrialisation of higher education and the factory line. He claimed that students were functioning as robots, who had to be processed, adding that universities:

> **Peter:** "Get them in and get them out".

Peter articulated his concept of the industrialised university as being one where student fees paid for large 'shiny' buildings to fit more students in, to increase revenue."

> **MM:** "Where did the idea of an industrial university come from?"
>
> **Peter:** "5000 more Chinese students from Beijing they want the money. Cambridge has 5000 [Chinese] compared this with BU's statements, often seen in marketing material around the University, especially virtual noticeboards, as being a global institution".

Phase (5) Critical Assessment: Lightbulb

In our CCCEs, Peter was keen to talk about the 'light bulb' moment he had experienced in his third year of study, forging a large part of his own critical assessment. He was eager for me to understand that it was not a gradual process, adding that he had "hated" his first year and had hid behind a veneer, talking often about his sense of being an impostor, citing 'impostor syndrome', exampled in this exchange:

> **Peter:** "I didn't feel that I fitted in when I first came here. And I felt angry".
>
> **MM:** "You mention that was that was part of your transformative experience?"
>
> **Peter:** "Yes of course! I had to learn not going into the fight as such, [pause] the way I was. This was a big part of my transformative

> experience. Then I had a lightbulb moment; it went on around the third year. Second year was better in the second semester, quite late. I felt a reinvention of who I was, I felt accepted, and this allowed me to build on this".

Returning to his claim, in our first CCCE, that he had enjoyed the topics he studied, but not his experience of being a mature undergraduate student, Peter talked about a particular unit where he had learned from the "reading activities" how to situate himself in the context of higher education:

> **Peter:** "This gave me a sense of freedom and confidence and was another of one those 'lightbulb' moments for me".

In line with this, Peter would regularly return to his theory of 'industry', stating that as his time at the university progressed, he begun to have a greater understanding and further "lightbulb moments". These related to his sense of the overall HE landscape as being a marketisation that did not support lecturers, describing them as "marionettes", with the "puppet masters being senior managers". Peter also expressed, in a somewhat angry tone, his observation that lecturers were under enormous pressure. He believed that they taught for 40 hours per week and speculated that might be why they appeared so often to be tired. On several occasions, Peter made a link between his "disconnection" of enjoying studying whilst "knowing that academia is an 'industry'", which formed a greater 'lightbulb' awareness of his own experience.

Phase (6) Planning Action: Postgraduate Study

When I asked Peter about his original intention to gain a BA in order to enhance his employability, he responded emphatically that his plans had significantly changed, and he had no wish to return to the "negative environment of TESOL", articulated as follows:

> **Peter:** "My goal is to become a university lecturer, I do my 7- week teaching English as a foreign language job again short-term, then I can put away that money towards my masters, that is much more important to me. To reach that goal, I know what I want to achieve, and this environment has helped me to reach that conclusion of a new role I want to take on. This is my plan".

> **MM:** "Well of course, I should have guessed that".
>
> **Peter: "**You know, I really want to do my master's degree, and then after that I want to take the next steppingstone and do my doctorate. I am pushing in the right direction. If I go along the creative writing side…I am thinking about this and planning".
>
> **MM:** "Yes, and you have that determination…"
>
> **Peter:** "And you know what, that is the power of transformative learning, I have gone through this process, that transformation which has enabled me to really see an end plan, a goal and who I can now be, who I am now from who I was when I arrived here".

Peter also talked about wanting to "make [his] father proud" and was eager to impress a particular lecturer. He prompted a return to our previous CCCE about his father being a keen walker and swimmer, saying that just a year earlier he had realised that he had become like his father. He also spoke with some pride about one of his lecturers who had seemed to be interested in him as individual:

> **Peter:** "My lecturer has said to me many times - you're a person who reinvents himself every few years".

In Peter's meaning-making he had come to understand that:

> **Peter:** "I am doing these actions, which my father wanted me to do, so in a way I have my own new plans of wanting to become an HE teacher, but at the heart of this, both memories of my father and my lecturer have encouraged me to want to further my education career".

It was during tutorials and seminars with this particular academic that Peter says he began to feel comfortable and enjoy his studies, adding that this was what inspired him to apply to study a master's degree.

Phase (7) Knowledge and Skills: Self-worth

Building on this further, regarding Phase 7 of his transformative experience, Peter often spoke about the personal relationships and connections that he had made, albeit with just two or three academics, rather than others who he had encountered. At one point, when discussing the academics who he related to most closely Peter, talking about "humanity" articulating in a way

that sounded deeply meaningful to him, about the importance of these relationships, and the way these contributed to his own feelings of self-worth:

> **MM:** "And you feel that lecturers care - it seems to be about not only a relationship between your lecturers, but the fact that they demonstrate this, they care about the people… [Peter interjects forcefully]".
>
> **Peter:** "It's a humanity thing, if people care about other people, they realise they are caring about you, and you internally learn from them easier, and it increased my feelings of self-worth".
>
> **MM:** "Can you tell me more about that?"
>
> **Peter:** "Ok, if a teacher relays some empathy towards you, it will help you become closer to the subject - you're invested in me, so I am invested in you and the subject you are teaching, which is what I am learning. It is also something you begin to digest internally, I felt that I feel accepted here now, so I accept who I am more and that change, and it makes me for receptive to learning, growing and improving on my skills".

Although Peter claimed that being ostracised gave him determination, he attributed his shift in perceptions of belonging to his relationships with two academics from whom he had gained the feeling that he was "wanted and cared about" (Dirkx 1997, 2011; Mälkki 2010, 2012). This gave him the sense that he was worthy of acquiring new skills and empowered by the "knowledge [he] was gaining".

Peter added emphatically that these were the only academics who had created a learning environment where ideas could be challenged, and he could develop critical thinking - skills which Peter stated he did not previously have. Peter also talked about the meaning of 'challenge' changing for him, from his understanding that it was an adversarial position, to that of gaining critical thinking skills, contending that he no longer "took challenges personally".

Phase (8) New Roles: Writer/Academic

Through his transformative experience, Peter felt that he now "identified as an academic", as well as a professional creative writer. Returning to his

relationship with his father, Peter reflected that his father had always wanted this, stating that:

> **Peter:** "I am now doing what my father really wanted for me".

Peter also referred frequently to his experience as a TESOL practitioner, explaining that his plans (6) had changed since he began his undergraduate degree. He now believed that the course he would take was to graduate, study at master's level, and then go on to read a PhD.

In addition, whilst Peter's life plans had changed - in a further reinvention of his self, his identity, and his skills and new roles - he said that in order to fund a master's degree he would work as a proof-reader to "make enough money to write and live" (Illeris 2014). This is especially interesting in view of his learning in the 3rd year of his undergraduate degree that he is dyslexic.

Phase (9) Self – Confidence: Assessment

Peter talked at length about the notion of his "assessment" of his "journey" and seemed to enjoy reflecting upon what led him to his increased self-confidence. One of the ways he described this was through his experience as a TESOL working in a Kazakhstan University where he was "accused of being a fraud" and was summarily dismissed from his post. He had originally described this post as a "high point" in his career, prior obviously to his dismissal. This is the first point when Peter began to develop his sense of being "an impostor", which he says led him to seek a UK undergraduate degree qualification; adding that this was his way of "proving" that he was "qualified and competent" to teach:

> **MM:** "How do you feel now about what happened in Kazakhstan?"
>
> **Peter:** "That was hard to deal with and accept. I decided, I am going to do my university degree, but I need a qualification; so I did a teacher training for one month with Cambridge university and I got my certificate - and then, I had my qualifications - NVQ5… and I am a non-traditional student and all of that which helped me get into this university. Now I have this confidence I didn't have before".

Most interestingly, Peter appeared to separate himself from his 'conveyor belt' metaphor, saying that he no longer intended to use the English degree as a vehicle to teach English overseas. Interpreting these comments, it appears that Peter had progressed through the 10 Phases of TL, although not in a linear fashion, as recognised is possible by Mezirow (2012).

> **MM:** "In terms of the past 3 years, what are your highlights?"
>
> **Peter:** "My change in myself, this is the reward I got. I did not go through that conveyer-belt process, you know. I was observing it, I am the one who is looking at it from a different narrative – I am the outsider looking in. I feel so much more confident now though, and I belong, my self - confidence has shot up. I used to have that thing we were talking about, imposter [pauses]…"
>
> **MM:** "Imposter syndrome?"
>
> **Peter:** "Yes that. Now I do not have that I have my own self-confidence and I have only gained that by being here, and I only realise it when I do that assessment of how I was before, and now".

Phase (10) Reintegration: Change of Attitude

Peter's reintegration was largely formed by his change of attitude. Peter repeatedly stated that he no longer felt adversarial, or that he needed always to challenge and "to fight". This was interpreted as a one of the major differences in his perceptions of self through his TL experience. Peter stated early on in our CCCEs, that:

> **Peter:** "I don't have to walk around with 10-foot wide shoulders anymore, as a superhero or a rugby player. I was examining who I was, it has been a slow growth. Now I do not have to do that".

Peter had also talked about his experience growing up in apartheid South Africa, from which he had originally gained his sense that he needed always to be fighting, emphasising that he had lived in a "world of hatred". Peter expressed that he had needed to "unlearn apartheid", because he was still "fighting" as if he remained living in that world. Discussing the ways in which his perceptions and mean-making changed, specifically in relation to his sense of self and his change of attitudes, I sought to understand what he meant by his frequent references to being adversarial and having to "fight".

> **MM:** "So, can you explain this a little bit more?"
>
> **Peter:** "I am an example of transformation… If I had stayed as I was before I came to university… I would still be an angry man". You know, when I came here, I was also learning about my kind of aggressiveness.
>
> **MM:** That was part of your transformative experience?
>
> **Peter:** "Oh definitely, my life events and my story, I have had a lot of adversary to deal with, so a lot preconditioned me to the other. I used to deal with things on an attacking kind of front, as I said I always took an adversarial position to everything. That has all changed, now I feel like I belong here, and I also accept myself for who I am. My change of attitude is huge".
>
> **MM:** "Yes, you talk about that a lot, how you have gained your strong sense of belonging here".
>
> **Peter:** "Absolutely, third year I felt wow this is where my place is, what I want to do. Especially once I understood I was dyslexic, and I got all the support I needed here, after it all being so muddled for me".

This, despite his contention that he had not felt welcome by his peers and that he had been ostracised, was interesting to me as I interpret this to be Peter very clearly articulating one of the ways in which he worked through and understood his own TL (Mezirow 1978a, b).

4.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which Serena and I undertook the analysis and interpretations of the data cogenerated by the co-participants in my fieldwork. My ethical position throughout my research project has been that my intention was to give voice to my co-participants, and to recognise the role of my co-researcher. This has been a difficult ethical challenge to navigate, however I believe that in order to achieve my aim of understanding whether transformative learning is possible within a post 92 neoliberal context, this was the most honest and truthful approach I could take.

It is my contention that, to varying degrees, each of the co-participants experienced transformative learning. I have also identified that in three of the

co-participants' experiences, Maria, Liam and Peter, their lecturers were important in some aspects of their TL. This is a key point regarding my reconceptualising of TL as a model for Transformative Education. Turning to the "completion of the TL phases" as proposed by Mezirow (1978a, b), Snyder (2008) posited that perceiving TL as an "end state" limits understandings of its possible longer-term transformational possibility. That which is assumed to be the completion of the education process, where the student is engaging during their TL experience denies the likelihood. I argue that the "end state" of TL is experienced beyond the education milieu, as students continually and retrospectively reflect on their experiences, beyond graduation.

I also reflected on my own experiences during the CCCEs, and interpret that during some of those exchanges, I also had transformative experiences. This is exampled in my recognition that I had operated unconscious bias, in my assumptions about Peter's experience. I also reflected on my recognition of the need for academics to be open to their own TL experiences and incorporate these into their pedagogy and praxis. This had been a recurring thought throughout the CCCEs and this analysis.

In the following and concluding chapter I discuss the ways in which the literature review, my methodological approach, and theoretical framework have informed my understanding of the possibilities of transformative learning within the neoliberal higher education context. I briefly return to the interpretations and understandings of my research and propose further research, which could be undertaken to develop the interpretations of the data I set out in this chapter. I discuss my conceptualisation of the DNA of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle public sector education, in particular Higher Education, and propose ways in which that concept, on both a theoretical and practical level, could be developed.

I will contend that the development of Mezirow's (1978a, b – 2000) transformative learning theory by him and others, supports my proposed further development of the theory of TL, positing a theory of transformative

education based on the work of Mezirow (1978a, b – 2012), Bourdieu (1997,1983, 1984, 1985, 1998) and Illeris (2014, 2015, 2018).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction to this concluding chapter

The aim of my thesis was to explore the possibilities of transformative learning within the context of neoliberal post 92 Higher Education in England in order to answer the research question:

> Is transformative learning possible for students of media studies in a post 92 neoliberal university media faculty?

I have sought to examine the extent to which Mezirow's (1978a, b) Transformative Learning theory *is* possible in neoliberal post 92 Higher Education in England**,** and whether transformational learning theory is a fundamental element of the learning journey of undergraduate students. In section 5.2, I answer the research question with supporting evidence; section 5.3 discusses my proposal to model the neoliberal agenda via a visual representation employing, an interactive 'DNA double helix', this is followed by a return to the discussion of the conceptualisation and development of my methodological approach in section 5.4 , and my proposal for Critical Compassionate Communicative Exchanges (CCCE), based on Mason (2014) and Ekman (2015) . This is followed by a discussion of the co-researcher's role in the analysis interpretations and understandings chapter (section 5.5). In section 5.6, I return to a brief discussion of the impact of UCU Industrial Disputes and the Covid 19 pandemic on the HE sector**.** Section 5.8 details and supports my proposal to develop Transformative Learning theory as a Transformative Education theory.

In section 5.9 I outline the implications of my research, followed by recommendations for further research in section. Finally, in section 5.10 I discuss my concluding thoughts and reflect on my experience of undertaking doctoral research.

5.2 Answering the research question: Interpretations and understandings.

The findings of this study suggest that transformative learning is possible within the context of neoliberal post 92 education in England. In different ways, each of the co-participants progressed through phases of transformative learning:

Phase	Theme Identified through CCCEs	Theme Identified through CCCEs	Theme Identified through CCCEs	Theme Identified through CCCEs
Coparticipant/co-researcher	**Maria**	**Peter**	**Liam**	**Serena**
(1) Disorienting dilemma	√ Dyslexia diagnosis	√ Dyslexia	√ Disappointment	√ Privilege
(2) Self Examination	√ Fear of failing, guilt, and shame	√ Determination	√ Potential	√ Romance
(3) Critical Assessment	√ The 'veil' (experience not as described in open days)	√ Industrialisation of higher education	√ Bubble/Bridge between home and University habitus	√ Moral
(4) Recognition Transformation is Shared	√ Peer's experience of placement year	X	√ Peer's experience of accommodation issues	X
(5) Exploration of options for new roles relationships and actions	√ Lecturer enthusiasm/positive relationship	√ Lightbulb moments	√ Educator (exploring role)	√ Rebel
(6) Planning Action	√ Travel	√ Postgraduate Study leading to career in HE	√ plan to achieve TEFL and use to travel	√ Campaigner
(7) Knowledge and Skills	X	√ Developed self-Efficacy	√ Becoming self-reflective/reflexive	√ Intellectualism
(8) Provisional trying on of new Roles	√ Resilience (in undertaking new roles	√ Becoming a writer/ academic	√ became assertive in relationships (student/lecturer co-researcher)	√ Leader
(9) building of competence and self confidence in new roles and relationships	√ Developed greater self-perception	√ Assessment (of situations)	√ Comfortable [and confident in his sense of self]	√ Sense of independence
(10) Reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective	X	√ Change of attitudes and perceptions	√ Developed strong sense of independence	√ Academic/ campaigner

Table 10 Co-participant's experiences of transformative learning.

This table offers a visual presentation of the transformative experiences of Maria, Liam, Peter and Serena, as articulated during this research. There are similarities in their experiences that are worthy of note, for example Maria and Peter were both diagnosed with a specific learning difference (dyslexia)

during their undergraduate experience, which was their most discussed disorienting dilemma. Maria and Liam both asserted that they planned to travel, which had not featured in their postgraduate plans before their TL. Peter and Serena arguably were the most radicalised in terms of consciousness-raising and emancipatory TL, and as noted below, and discussed in section, 5.8., lecturers played significant roles in Maria, Liam, and Peter's experiences. Notions of habitus and identity featured strongly for all four co-participants, as did the commodification of higher education. My interpretations and understandings of the data suggest that a longitudinal study could include a focus on the commonality of experiences of undergraduate students in post 92 neoliberal HE, as this could potentially inform policy regarding widening participation and access (discussed in section 5.9) .

Turning to the "completion of the TL phases" as proposed by Mezirow (1978a, b), Snyder (2008) posited that perceiving TL as an "end state" limits understandings of its possible longer-term transformational possibility. That which is 'assumed' to be the completion of the education process, where the student is engaging during their TL experience denies this likelihood. I argue that the "end state" of TL is experienced beyond the education milieu, as students continually and retrospectively reflect on their experiences, beyond graduation. As noted throughout my thesis, scholars including Mesirow have acknowledged that TL is not a linear process. Morgan (2015) for example, specifically argues that TL may be 'completed' at points beyond graduation, notwithstanding my contention that TL has been experienced by all four co-participants, it is possible that the skills gained through TL will continue reiteratively as disorienting dilemmas are inevitably experienced.

I have continued to reflect on my own experiences of the CCCEs, and interpreted that during some of those exchanges, I also had transformative experiences. This is exampled in my recognition that I had operated unconscious bias, in my assumptions about Peter's experience. I also reflected on my recognition of the need for academics to be open to their own TL experiences and incorporate these into their pedagogy and praxis.

This had been a recurring thought throughout the CCCEs and this analysis. In addition, a key point regarding my reconceptualising of TL as a model for Transformative Education is that I identified that Maria, Liam, and Peter's lecturers were important in significant aspects of their TL experiences. This is discussed in section 5.8.

5.3 The Neoliberal Agenda: Dismantling Public Sector Education in England

In Chapter 2 (section 2.16.2), I introduced a metaphorical model of the neoliberal agenda, which I argue is analogous with the DNA double helix. The double helix is recognised as a signifier of the foundation and 'building blocks' of phenomena, which I conceptualise as the 'DNA' of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle public sector education in England. In this section, I return to the 3-dimensional model of the neoliberal agenda I have proposed and discuss the ways in which it could be utilisable and relevant for researchers of HE.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the commodification of HE, noting the Competition and Market Authority's (2015) consumer advice to students regarding UK legal frameworks protecting consumers' rights. As previously discussed, the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) (2017) drove further forward the privatisation and deregulation HE, firmly placing the student as consumer (Morgan 2017). This was reinforced by the Office for Students (OfS 2019), which aims to ensure that students receive the "value for money" and "services and opportunities offered…by providers", serving as the arbiter of the HE 'marketplace' (Boyd 2018). Recent developments in the neoliberal HE landscape have wrought forth the realisation of these 'consumer rights' as students have taken action against the institutions in which they are studying, seeking 'refunds' of their fees as a result of the purported loss of those 'services' due for example to UCU's industrial action and the global Covid 19 pandemic (Busby 2019; Mathews 2020).

Gillard's (2011, 2018) historical charting of the history of education is a chronological list of events, reports, education acts, official papers, and other

publications which he first published in June 1998. Gillard's (2011, 2018) detailing an extensive and exhaustive account of the past 40 years of more than 145 reports, legislative acts etc., which allowed me to understand and identify an agenda to dismantle publicly funded education, whilst at the same time diverting public funds to private providers. It is this neoliberal project that I identify as a purposeful agenda to redefine publicly funded education as a 'for profit provider', and as an overarching ideological move to shift publicly funded universal networks to become profitable enterprises (Hall 1978, 2011; Harvey 2007; Hall and Massey 2010 and Meek 2015)). Again, as I discussed in Chapter 1, successive Conservative, New Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democratic alliance governments have avidly pursued this ideological agenda. I argue that for researchers of HE, a thorough understanding of this neoliberal agenda is critical, as no area of the HE landscape has escaped the attentions of those seeking to commodify and marketise higher education for profit.

I initially created a two-dimensional image to test my proposition that a three-dimensional model could be created to aid understandings of the neoliberal agenda in HE (see figure 20).

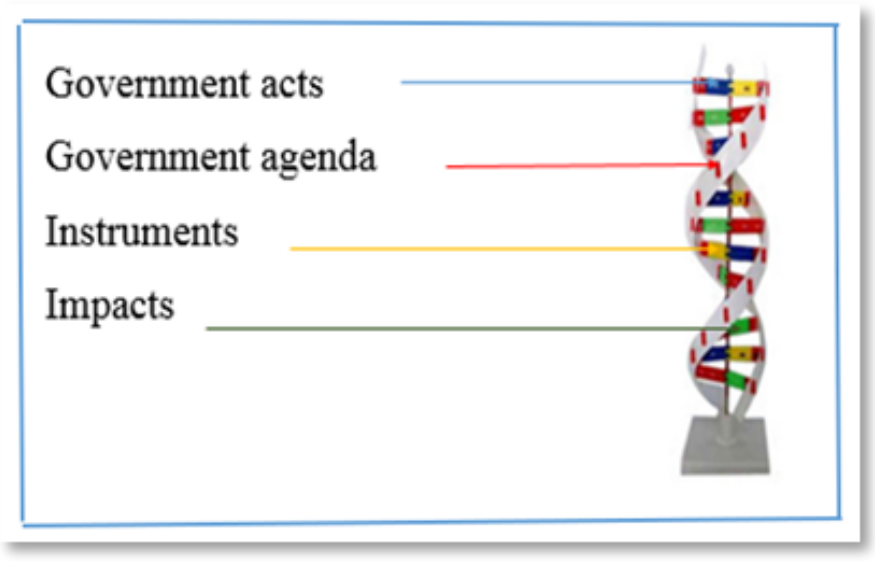

Figure 19: Conceptualisation of the DNA of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle sector education in England.

I first presented this model at a conference in 2017 (Mayer and Eccles 2019). Discussing the concept with attendees from countries including South Africa, Italy, France, and Australia, as well as England, the feedback I received was that this would be an invaluable model through which they could readily understand the historical pursuance of the neoliberal agenda in the English HE sector. Creating a 3D model, is I recognise, a significant undertaking, which would require collaboration with colleagues teaching 3D Animation with whom I work. It would also require updating to include events, reports, education acts, official papers and so on, since Gillard (2018) last published.

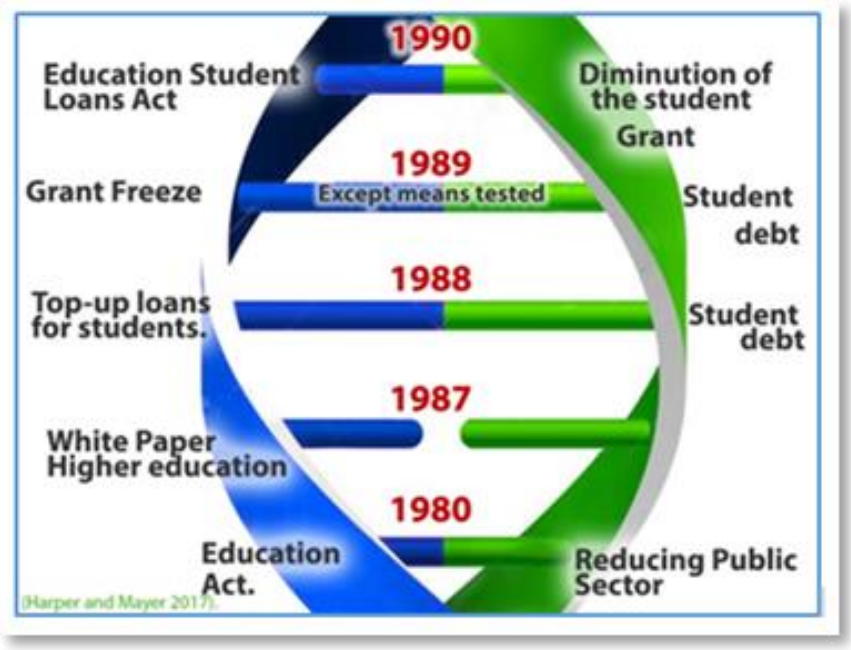

Figure 20: The representation of a potential 3D interactive model: the DNA of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle sector education in England

My intention is that the interactive model will vividly represent the ways in which publicly funded education in England, has been dismantled, and facilitate ready access to data in order to contribute to the ongoing debate around neoliberalism in HE. The model will allow users to select text which would then link to an original source, with corresponding links to publications, explanations, and discussions of the effect of the particular report, act, or government policy.

I argue that the development of this model would add significantly to the literature and understandings of the neoliberal agenda in HE, in particular those who are interested in researching the ways in which HE has been positioned as a trainer of workforces, rather than, as proposed by Coffield and Williamson (2012), communities of discovery. Bowen et al. (2014) contend that the neo-liberalisation of higher education must be challenged and resisted. McGettigan (2013, 2015) argues that it is possible to challenge the neoliberal agenda and ideology, as do Freedman and Bailey (2011), Morley (2016), and Holmwood et al. (2016). This is an important issue for HE, which academics could challenge through TE praxis.

It is widely claimed that academics and students are able to, and indeed should, challenge and resist the neoliberal agenda in education, and expose increasing socio-economic inequalities (Nind 2014). Mayo (2003), Hughes (2017) and others argue that post 16 education must be a transformative endeavour to challenge the neoliberal agenda, and through social and political transformation, embed emancipatory education in curriculum through TE in HE. Against the backdrop of the neoliberal agenda, I argue that the interactive model I proposed, predicated on the DNA double helix, illustrating links between government acts and regulations and concomitant dismantling public sector education, can support efforts to reclaim higher education in England.

5.4 Methodology discussion

My approach to data collection and analysis, centred around cogenerative learning and creative interviewing (Mason 1996; Levin 2012; Ekman 2015), enhanced the research question, inquiry, and challenged current methodological orthodoxies, in a number of important ways. Firstly, within an interactive context, the co-participants became narrators of their own stories during our CCCEs (Reason 1994), through collaboration to cocreate knowledge, learning, access, taking responsibility for their narrative. In part this is achieved through my asking follow-up questions “asking until it makes sense” (Ekman 2015) probing deeper for clarification and information, to

better understand their perspectives and also to elicit a rich and well-developed narrative, true to their stories. I offer here as an example my interpretation of understandings of Peter's experiences as a mature student, and how this was in itself a significant disorienting experience for him. As I discuss in section 4.4.2. (p. 169 I found this to be a profoundly affecting interpretation and understanding of our CCCEs.

While we were exploring Peter's early feelings of being ostracised, and "not belonging", whilst probing Peter, after a long pause, he initially posited that it was his age difference had caused such a troubling and upsetting disconnect between himself and his peers. Peter reflected that this was a difficult discussion for him, however as I rephrased the question he responded that whereas he felt a sense of belonging with staff (albeit attributing this to page and maturity), my interpretation was, the university offered little in the way of support or recognition, ignoring the needs and expectations of mature students (pp. 171 – 172). Peter stated that:

> "…there is nothing here for [mature students] outside degree course. Because they have posters, Tuesday 12 o'clock at the bar for a coffee – I would go, and I was there only one there. Mature people have other lives, children. Men would have other responsibilities – then there's me thinking there is A LOT for normal 19-year olds. Incredible how much. Not for us".

I have over 17 years' experience of working within the field of widening participation and inclusivity. This understanding of Peter's experience speaks lamentably of the much and often purported aims of widening participation. It is here that I reflected on the need for academics to be open to their own TLs, a recurring thought throughout the CCCEs and this analysis. Nevertheless, and importantly, my approach generated interpretations and understandings that may typically be inaccessible to researchers of students' experiences.

This also validated the experiences of the co-participants, making them experts and collaborators in the process of gathering and interpreting data. Maria, Peter, Liam and Serena's own 'realities' of HE consisted of subjective experiences of the external world. As discussed (pp. 84 – 87) my aim was to

'give voice' to Maria, Peter, Liam, and Serena and generate understanding through our initial interpretations of their critical reflections on their undergraduate experience. I recorded their reflections and accounts of meaningful events or developments during their undergraduate endeavours through reiterative and reciprocal CCCEs, returning in successive meetings to their own reflections on my initial interpretations. As a result, my cocreators and I were able to adopt an inter-subjective epistemology, with the ontological belief that their external realities, and my understandings of these, could be socially constructed together as one. Supported by the research's interpretivist vein, which enhanced and addressed essential features of our shared meanings and understandings (Bryman 2012), the co-participants were also able to construct their own knowledge within the social-cultural context. This is exampled in section 4.2.1 pp. 145 - 146, where Liam is reflecting on what he described as a "terrible experience" which I interpreted as disorientation (TL phase 1) leading to a process of mean-making and critical reflection (TL phase 3). At the beginning of our second CCCE, Liam produced several of pages of notes of analysis our first CCCE transcript, describing the 'themes' he had identified whilst reflecting on the earlier CCCE.

Liam and identified, and we agreed the following themes, which align with his 10 Phases of TL, displayed (see table below). This I argue, supports my contention that together we co-constructed and created this knowledge.

Phase	***Phases of Transformative Learning***	***Theme Identified through CCCEs***
(1)	Disorienting Dilemma	Disappointment
(2)	Self-Explanation	Potential
(3)	Critical Assessment	Bubble/Bridge
(4)	Recognition Transformation Is Shared	Peers
(5)	Exploration	Educator
(6)	Planning Action	TEFL/Travel
(7)	Knowledge and Skills	Self-Reflective
(8)	New Roles	Assertive
(9)	Self – Confidence	Comfortable
(10)	Reintegration	Independence

Table 10: Liam's 10 Phases of TL (Mezirow (1978a, b)

I was therefore able to position myself as a researcher within the parameters of a constructivist, epistemological discourse, generating a result which is:

> "…an interpretation by the researcher of others' views filtered through his or her own" (Merriam 1998, p.23).

Supporting this further, my creative approach, the research's CCCEs, built upon fluid discussion structures around topics or starting points of Mezirow's (2000) TL, allowed unexpected insights to emerge for each co-participant's experiences. This also included, going deeper to discover the 'what', with 'real life' resonance for each shared narrative (Kegan 2000). The creative interviewing method I have developed informed my understanding of how knowledge produced is situated within, and founded upon, the understandings that are constructed within the dynamic exchanges between us (Kvale and Brinkmann 2015).

It was important, in terms of meeting the aim of my methodological approach, that I moved beyond traditionalist techniques of qualitative interviewing to be authentically 'creative', so as to enhance the research outcome. This included my willingness to engage in self-disclosure and extensive efforts to form authentic relationships with the co-participants, which in turn yielded multifaceted and complex accounts of their HE experiences, and their understanding regarding the political economy of the marketisation of knowledge (Inglis 1998). Adopting this approach led to my own TL and formed part of my reconceptualising of TL as transformative education (TE).

My creative and humanistic approach also gave primacy to engagement over structure, in order to understand the co-participants' perspectives in a social context, as is fundamental to all interpretive work (Rogers et al. 2014). By adopting cogenerative learning as part of this approach, I was able to reach their 'true stories' about their world 'as it is' (Alvesson 2013), in a way that represented their authentic voices as cogenerators of knowledge. This was further supported by my interpretivist approach to the research, through which I was seeking to understand the 'how and why' and offer insights into social processes (Kegan 2000; Denscombe 2009).

Rejecting a linear method of research, also enabled Serena and I to not only study complex, contextually challenging topics surrounding student experiences in post 92 neoliberal HE, but also to challenge current orthodoxies, offering what I believe are new ways to gain insights through the views of the cogenerators - and their contributions (Creswell 2013). Following this approach, Serena and I were able to generate large quantities of detailed material about the co-participants' worlds and life experiences, I argue, generating truthful and genuine accounts. I was careful to balance the tension between understanding the co-participants' 'truths' and critically analysing these with my co-researcher Serena, which rendered our research process a learning event for both of us. Again, for me, this was a TE experience.

To further enhance this, the creative style of interviewing also required that as an interviewer, I was listening with empathy, and showing respect for the participants' emotionality (Dirkx 1997; Taylor 2000a; Mälkki 2010, 2012). I was able to unearth narratives which may have been personally discrediting, or usually concealed when, for example, the co-participants were applying critical reflection to their personal and part identities (Illeris 2014), and their described 'reintegration' (Mezirow 2000) based on conditions dictated by their own unique perspectives. It is through this form of participatory and compassionate listening that the integration between my understanding of their experiences, and critique of their TL journey, could be achieved.

It is my contention that this approach further facilitated my ability to establish and provide honest interpretations, by arriving at a free and trusted agreement in the subjectivities of myself, Serena (as co-researcher) and the co-participants. The dynamic exchanges between us relied on our shared interactions to achieve a sense of collective responsibility. As a result, I was particularly conscious of the challenge of positioning Serena as being active and reflexive in the creative interviewing and qualitative data collection process (Mason 1996). Although challenging, my intention here was to be true to my own stated ethical position, as discussed in Chapter 3 (see section 3.5, p.79).

It was important that I avoided ethical issues of privacy, bias, and confidentiality, by listening 'around' and 'beyond' each student's narrative, exploring, and making careful judgements about the 'unsaid' as much as the 'said' (DeVault 1990). I argue that this was further supported by my role as a 'compassionate interviewer' which actively combined types of questions associated with both naturalism and emotionalism (Ekman 2015). This not only helped Serena and I to uncover the co-participant's experiences and views of HE in the marketisation context, it also facilitated my ability to make sense of each co-participant, while remaining alert to their potential discomfort around sensitive topics. I was keen to be actively involved in the CCCEs, which I believe helped to allow the co-participants to feel more comfortable sharing information, closing the hierarchical gap between us,

which traditional interviewing encourages (Edwards and Holland 2013). Prior to the CCCE process, I had formed an idea about the certain kind of listening and engaging I would employ with each participant. My aim was to move away from a purely cognitive to a more compassionate mode of exchange, and I contend that 'validation' played a large role in this aspect of the method I employed.

In other words, in order to gather as true as possible and understanding of the co-participants narratives, I endeavoured to align the CCCEs with Hendrix's (1996) contention that:

> "validation requires one to look through the eyes of the other, to see the world as it appears to him or her, and to understand the logic of the other's point of view… I am seeing the world through your eyes; I understand how you must experience it like that".

Included in this endeavour was my use of active empathy by responding to each co-participants disclosures of sensitive experiences with statements such as "that sounds like a difficult experience for you", when co-participants were discussing their disorienting dilemmas or difficult family relationships. Validity was also important to shape the credibility of mine and Serena's interpretations, with the co-participants proactively acting as cogenerators of knowledge - encouraging them to learn about and discuss the research. In doing so the co-participants were positioned as contributors to the research, offering credibility to the interpretations and understandings. It was important to understand the phenomena through the meanings that the co-participants assigned to them. As a result, I achieved the ideal of capturing the rich details of each co-participants' social realities without distorting them through interference or bias. Thereby providing a credible grounding for my proposed model of TL into TE.

The CCCE method I propose further enhanced the richness of the research, with the inclusion of mine and Serena's critical awareness, which helped to shape our own subjectivity as researchers. This was primarily achieved by applying investigative epistemology into the processes, nuances, and complexity of the CCCEs, always asking 'why' and 'how' questions

throughout our interpretations and understandings of the data (Kegan 2000). Extending this to considering the 'real life' resonance surrounding the co-participants' TL experiences, allowed them to unfold naturally without predetermined conditions that typically control the research and outcomes (O'Neil and Marsick 2007).

As discussed at length in Chapter 2 (section 2.1.2) supported by scholars including Moss et al. (2009) and Arends (2014), I fundamentally reject the scientification of qualitative research, instead employing humanistic, explorative, and creative approaches, embedded in the theoretical framework I developed (section 1.1.1). As part of this endeavour, I also employed what is referred to as an 'emotionalist' approach to interviewing, supported by a unique epistemologically which according to Silverman (2006) provides, and I contend is an objectivity and truth to my research interpretations. With my focus as a researcher placed on the full complexity of human 'sense-making' (Mezirow 1978a, b) as the situation emerges throughout an exchange, and not on independent variables, this also helped Serena and I to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind each of the co-participants' experiences. Ultimately, where we evaluated the data from varying points of view, supported by the CCCEs and reflections with my co-participants, the understandings both uphold the claims made in this research, and support my contention that it is intersubjectively verified. T As a result, my study and proposed model is significantly more authoritative in this unexplored research domain (Lincoln and Guba 2013), with co-participants as cogenerators of knowledge (Mellor 2001; Cook 2009).

It was equally important for Serena and me, through listening to the CCCE audios, to hear and better understand the social realities of the co-participants, and also the discourses embedded in them. As such, my methodological approach to the CCCEs highlighted the fine-grained qualities of each co-participant's transformative experience. This led to a high degree of complexity, which reinforced the development of my model of TL into TE, with the aim of emancipatory consciousness-raising education, for both the 'learner' and 'educator', which I argue is symbiotic state. I argue that this was

further facilitated by mine and Serena's rejection of a clear or linear research approach, with our analysis being largely accommodated by the 'messiness' of the investigative process (Mellor 2001). My interpretivist position was underpinned by both observation and interpretation, the nature of 'observing' the student narratives allowed the collection and interpretation of the data by drawing inferences between the information and the abstract patterns within the 'mess' (Mellor 2001). To ensure the research was reflective in nature, Serena and I reiteratively explored the complex and 'messy' problems involved in analysing the co-participants' narratives and in our development of the conceptual framework.

The interplay between our understandings of the data and emerging theory, empowered us to live in the 'middle of things', as our way of both 'making do with the messiness' (St Pierre 1997, p.176) – offering a method of challenging methodological orthodoxies (Mason 2014). Throughout our thematic analysis, Serena and I made several adaptations to our approach, whilst carefully navigating my epistemological stance, the methodological framework, and ethical considerations involved (Blaxter et al. 2010; Bryman 2012; Creswell 2013). Ultimately, this encouraged our free flow of thought, with the analysis helping us to see the co-participants' stories in an original way, especially around their critical assessment of pedagogical, epistemic, sociocultural, and psychic assumptions in relation to HE.

Serena and I worked within a continuous two-way exchange to develop our knowledge and understanding of the CCCEs, and their outcomes. In line with the research's interpretivist stance, it was also important for Serena and me to see the differences between the narratives and their layers, facilitated by our 'messy' approach. The method, collaboratively developed by me and the co-participants, was also subject to continued critical reflection and 'messy' redesign, as we sought to capture the experiences of each individual, adding to the complexities of the research outcome. Serena and I viewed this as our own 'knowledge accrual', to enhance the research process and challenge linear approaches, which also included speaking to colleagues, reading

outside of traditional qualitative research approaches, and persistently reanalysing the recorded CCCEs and our understanding of them.

Serena and I were able to work towards my proposed model to develop TL into TE, by producing new meanings to original phenomenon regarding the student experience. I argue here that our collaborative approach to the writing up of this section formed a research process itself, as we re-configured our views on what we came to regard as 'making sense' of the 'messiness' of the data (Sullivan et al. 2016). Marshall and Rossman (1995, p.111) emphasise that data analysis is a "messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process". It is important to note that the purposeful 'messiness' shifted throughout our interpretations and critical reflection, whereby the writing up involved not the recording of a 'creative outcome' as such (Minkin 1997), but rather participation in a further creative process in understanding the world through the co-participants' own unique lenses.

This is instanced, for example, in our discussions of sentences we originally interpreted: via continuous re-reflection, Serena and I found sentiments and responses could take on entirely new meanings and unplanned directions through Mezirow's 10 phases of TL. In this sense, it could be said that the act of analysing and writing itself became part of the creative and 'messy' process, with our understandings generated, forming a collection of ideas from an overall view of the messy method. Thus, further supporting our understanding of how the insights could become steppingstones to formulate the model to develop TL into TE, with the aim of emancipatory consciousness-raising education.

5.5 Co-researcher discussion

In this section, I argue strongly for the value of coresearch, and the necessity to include my co-researcher in the analysis and interpretations of the data as discussed in Chapter 3. The constructivist, ontological position I adopted for this research offered a framework through which to create knowledge, based

on my interpretations and understandings of the CCCEs with co-participants, to encourage a cocreation of knowledge, and to enrich the research outcomes through collaborative efforts with my co-researcher, Serena. Scholars have argued that working collaboratively can produce knowledge outputs which are better developed than those which have been produced through singular, conventional academic processes (Katsouyanni 2008). It has also been contended that most often breakthrough research comes through collaborative research rather than by adhering to 'tried and true' methods (Riazi 2017). I maintain my position that by working actively together, sharing power and responsibility throughout the data analysis, Serena's contribution to the writing up of our interpretations, understandings, enhanced and enriched my research. We met our commitment to the shared responsibility of exchanging ideas, and a mutual accountability for the success of the research outcome (Mattessich et al. 2001).

As previously discussed, I also drew upon Habermas's (1991) theory of communicative action, as part of the interactional processes and understandings between my co-researcher and I, and the positive impact this had on our knowledge exchanges in the process. Encouraging Serena to contribute her own thoughts throughout these stages contributed to the research outcomes in powerful ways (Kirsch 1999). The central tenet of our communicative action was based on our agreed responsibilities to achieve mutual understandings (Fultner 2014). I define 'co-researcher' in this sense, to include a set of processes whereby researchers work together throughout a large part of the duration of a project (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). This is intrinsically linked with the most complex form of interaction in qualitative research, referred to as 'collaboration' and according to feminist perspectives understood as:

> "a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards" (Mattessich et al. 2001, p.59).

I employed four of Kirsch's (1999) seven principles to guide my interactions with the co-participants and my co-researcher Serena, collaborating and cogenerated knowledge as closely as possible with them. Utilising and adapting methods around our co-creation of knowledge as and when they were required, within the context of the research question, also enriched the process (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Adopting this form of collaboration encouraged the use of effective communication, engendering trust between us, whilst also presenting equal opportunities to voice the experiences of the co-participants, Serena, and myself (in terms of my reflections on my own TL and TE experience). Collaboration also increased the ethical aims of the research, by promoting and maintaining honesty, integrity, transparency, and confidentiality throughout. Thus, supporting mine and Serena's endeavours to acknowledge and validate each other's understandings of the research, from the methodology through to the analysis and concluding thoughts, in an impartial and balanced way (Rawson and Schell 2010). As previously discussed, my ethical position throughout this research has been to give voice to my co-participants, and to recognise the integral value they brought to my research challenge. Whilst I argue that I achieved this goal, it was at times nevertheless ethically challenging to navigate, for example in respect of the division of power. My approach is however supported by the scholarship of feminist researchers who have widened research ethics by including issues of a power balance between researchers including Kirsch (1999), Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004) and Harding and Norberg (2005).

I contend that my methodological approach, supporting the collaborative relationship with my co-participants, enabled my aim of understanding whether transformative learning is possible within a post 92 neoliberal context. In addition, I argue that the participation of my co-researcher and co-participants from the student group affected, added to the authenticity of the research, lending itself to the direct involvement and collaboration of those whom it is designed to benefit (Blaxter et al. 2010). My approach seeks to address the lack of agency students and researchers have within the context of meaningful cogenerated knowledge. This contention is supported by the

notion that 'participatory' research should be undertaken not by 'experts' or research leaders alone, but in a true collaboration with those - in this instance WP students studying in a Post 92 HE - involved or affected by the issues that the research is addressing (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). I strongly advocated for Serena to contribute to key research decisions, in order to pool together our collective knowledge, enabling her voice to create a building block from which to progress the research.

It is my belief that my aim to uncover the impacts of the neoliberal agenda and commodification of HE on students' 'mean-making' (Mezirow 1978a, b) and perceptions of HE, informing challenges to the neoliberal agenda in HE, was accomplished. Turning to the matter of 'co-authorship' as part of my ethical challenge, I argue that Serena and the research co-participants understood that whilst in some cases, scholars attribute collaborative research as co-authorship (Violanti 1999), this 'sharing of power' did not translate to my, Serena or the co-participants being involved in every decision across the project or being afforded with co-authorship status. Whilst I highlighted this at the research's commencement, I was nonetheless, aiming for a discourse between us to create and build an equal exchange of ideas. However, I was also vigilant to ensure the ethical challenge of power dynamics was addressed and worked through rather than overlooked. Here, I was careful to ensure each co-participant accepted their contributions as we worked towards a shared understanding, as part of a consensual research agreement.

Remaining mindful throughout the research process, of the complexities involved in these 'power differentials' particularly between Serena and myself, I returned to my reiterative reflections as recommended by Baxter (2004). Reaching a consensus on the values and principles Serena and I would share was important from the start of the collaborative venture in which we engaged. It was also essential to reflect reiteratively on how I could address any power imbalance between us, whilst ensuring knowledge creation was shared. I was also mindful to engender greater flexibility in the working methods of Serena and I as co-researchers, and sense check with

her how we could assess and evaluate the progress of our efforts as co-researchers. I also recognised that it was important that we collectively ensured that through the messy method, the research was articulated with credibility.

I acknowledge that the ethical position I sought to adhere to, could at times, conflict with the reality of the research process, as the power balance between particularly myself and Serena, on occasion shifted slightly throughout each stage of the research. For example, our roles during the analysis stages became blurred as part of our reciprocal exchange of ideas and interpretations of the co-participants' narratives. It is nevertheless my contention that our research design remained sensitive and committed to the ways in which the research values and power balance contributed to the research outcome or "truths" (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Whilst my approach empowered the experiences of Serena and the co-participants - recognising and acknowledging that they were 'experts' and collaborators in the process of gathering and interpreting data - this relationship did not supersede my role as the researcher, or author of the research. To ensure this I established that in the beginning stages, I led the research, whilst considering and taking into account the viewpoints of Serena and the co-participants' perspectives, encouraging them to add insights where relevant. This was especially important where our perspectives of the research were clearly seen through different lenses (Fairclough 2008).

Retaining reflexivity therefore became an important act in preserving the ethics of the research practice. I was careful to ensure each co-participant accepted their contributions to the cogeneration of new knowledge as we worked towards a shared understanding as part of a consensual research agreement. My co-participants and I embraced a reflexive approach to mean-making, mutually recognising and accepting that decision-making 'power' shifted throughout our collaboration. In addition, whilst I remained in control of the direction of the research, my co-researcher Serena was not passive in the process or decision-making. As Olsen (2005) maintains, those involved in the research process contribute to the meanings of data and

transitioning them into valuable findings. It is important to acknowledge that the balance of power between Serena and I was also relevant during fieldwork, in the process of the data analysis and reaching interpretations and understandings. On this point feminists have been particularly concerned with issues of voice and representation (Kirsch 1999; Lather 2001; Olesen 2005). Notably, the desire of early feminist researchers to "find and express women's voices" (Olesen 2005, p.252) has also been highlighted; this voice can be extended to shaping the research design before the study is conducted, shaping the analysis, and involvement in how analyses are undertaken (Denzin and Lincoln 1994).

To meet this ethical consideration, Serena, and I, in accordance with Kirsch (1999) employed continuous 'sense checking' at each stage of the data collection, interpretations and understandings of the data, and our concluding thoughts on the research project. Therefore, it was important for the research outcomes to ensure Serena maintained a strong voice in the research process itself. Turning to the ways in which the research was enriched, employing a transparent and expressive partnership with my co-researcher generated a wealth of knowledge, and was also key to establishing a dialectical process of enquiry by drawing on our own unique complementary perspectives, skills, and different knowledge bases (Tanner 2019). Furthermore, according to Mattessich et al. (2001), the two elements which stand as the most important for all forms of collaboration to ensure a project's success are mutual understanding, and trust between researchers. It was therefore essential that Serena was involved in the interpretation of our data to enhance our learning in practice and ensure personal biases did not influence the analysis in any way.

I maintain that employing processes such as continued reflection and 'sense checking' served as the pillar for the success of our research in this respect (Kirsch 1999). Our continuous reflection aided the research process, whereby Serena and I could take the opportunity to look at, and reflect on, how we were working together, how our perspectives differed, and the way our methodological approach would impact the research outcomes. Whilst

the research project was based loosely on a pre-determined project plan, greater authority was given to ensuring the process provided opportunities for the involvement of the co-participants to be an iterative, fluid, messy, experimental, and interactive process. As a result, our communicative action was ultimately adapted towards achieving mutual respect and research enlightenment (Mason 2014). Doing this empowered us to stay collectively aware of the strengths of working together, and where necessary to revisit and adapt our approach, particularly through the 'messiness' of our cogenerated research method (Mellor 2001).

In order to maintain and progress the linear direction of the research objectives, throughout the research process, Serena and I discussed and agreed the ways in which we would both approach each stage, where and when we would do the work, and subsequently devised a protocol that best fitted our own approaches to analysing data.

Here, Serena and I positioned ourselves as not just 'doing' research, but being proactive and encouraging toward one another, in order to strengthen the interactive exchange of learning, sense making and collaborative thinking between us (Reason 1994). A process which remains a fundamental part of challenging methodological orthodoxies (Fairclough 2008). This was also applied to the in-depth exchanges between me and the research co-participants, in which articulations were challenged, voiced, and explored, as they became aware of their own idea ideas. I argue that this approach also enriched the research outcomes in powerful ways (Kirsch 1999).

It was equally ethically important for me to embrace the diversity of my co-researcher and co-participants, which required the research to be accessible according to their needs and methods of communicating. Similarly, throughout the fieldwork and analysis process it was important to respect and value the knowledge of Serena's and my co-participants involvement in the research, with everyone being treated as equally important, recognised as contingent to the development of my thesis. The relationship between

Serena and I was ultimately built upon trust in our exchange of knowledge, assumptions, interpretations of the data, and framework development.

As previously noted, our on-going sense checking contributed to this process, beginning before the start of the project, with the aim of helping to identify our different areas of knowledge and understandings of research processes, our expectations and to firmly establish our researchers/co-researcher relationship. Furthermore, strongly embedding the reiterative CCCE (Mason 2014; Ekman 2015) into the principles of the research project, allowed us to continue this approach throughout each phase, influenced and shaped by our unique views.

Finally, I argue that in order to better understand the learning experiences of WP undergraduate HE students studying in a post 92 institution, and whether, and if so how, their experiences have been transformative (Mezirow 1978a, b, 1991; Newman 2012; Taylor and Cranton 2012), the method co-created by my co-participants and me, has both challenged current orthodoxies, and presented original ways of gaining insights through our knowledge exchange and diverse contributions to the research (Blaxter et al. 2010; Bryman 2012; Creswell 2013).

My contention is supported by the notion that through ongoing discourse and CCCEs, research conducted adopting such an approach can constructively and positively challenge those practices being studied (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In this sense, messy methods, combined with CCCEs, undertaken in collaboration with co-participants and co-researchers, can both enlighten the research findings and make robust contributions to gaps in literature. My research approach, with the inclusion of Serena and the co-participants, therefore enabled us to collaboratively cogenerate novel knowledge and rich outputs, whilst at the same time challenging the borders of qualitative research. It is also my belief that employing an approach such as the one I developed for my research can be adopted and adapted for creative qualitative research investigating and exploring the experiences of others.

5.6 The impact of UCU Industrial Disputes and the Covid 19 pandemic on the HE sector.

In this section, I briefly discuss the current landscape of HE, in particular the relationship between the 2019/20 industrial disputes and the global Covid 19 pandemic. In many ways, student engagement in the UCU Four fights industrial dispute (UCU 2019; Weale 2019) and shifts in the way in which education was rapidly 'redesigned' for online teaching as undertaken during this final writing up phase of my doctorate have been TL experiences for students who I teach and with whom I work. My reflections here on the failure of the marketisation and commodification of HE relate directly to these events as they play out at the time of writing.

As noted in Chapter 1, Boliver (2015) predicted that the combination of the funding model and ever-increasing marketisation of higher education was a failing project, due to financial mismanagement and lack of governance, as noted also by Bryant (2019). The much-mooted crisis in Higher Education, as a public sector service, has exposed the combined weaknesses of marketisation education. HE institutions and the employers' representatives, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) have seized on the purported impacts of the pandemic to radically attack the jobs and working conditions of HE workers. Networks and grassroots organisations within UCU have challenged individual institutions' contentions that the global pandemic is the cause of their proclaimed financial threats. The Convention for Higher Education (2020), The Branch Solidarity Network (2020), and branches of UCU in England, where the impacts are claimed to be most pronounced (UCU Solidarity Movement 2020), have campaigned to resist what I have conceptualised as the neoliberal agenda to dismantle public sector Higher Education.

The current landscape is relevant to my research as it opens up the possibilities for TL and TE, as seen during the UCU 4 Fights industrial dispute, as well as the move to online teaching, which have engaged students, in what I would argue, are TL experiences, and for educators, TE

experiences. Concomitantly, the move to online teaching has exacerbated the perceptions amongst some students that they are 'paying' for a commodity which they are not receiving, which will be an area worthy of research as long as students are charged fees for higher education. In various instances during these campaigns, I have observed calls to decommodify HE, and conversely calls to fulfil the commodification of higher education by re-funding customers for 'services' which they believe they have not received (Mathews 2020). Busby (2019), reporting on the first wave of the UCU four fights strikes, quoted the following comment:

> "Elaena Shipp, another student at Bangor University behind the petition, tweeted: "If universities want to run themselves like businesses and treat students like customers, that cuts both ways – customers who don't get what they pay for are entitled to a refund".

During the Four Fights dispute the National Union of Students (NUS 2019) endorsed UCU's claims which led to the dispute, calling on students to support university workers. Striking UCU branches led 'Learning Festivals', 'Teach Outs' and 'Teach Ins', whereby students and university workers explored the marketisation and commodification of higher education. Many of the students who attended these events, I argue, experienced TL as they worked through their:

1. *Disorienting dilemma* - disruption to their 'university experience', for example cancelled classes and delayed assessment, which led to their own.

2. *Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame* – arguably, all, and any of these feelings could have been experienced.

3. *Critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions* - in events I attended many of the discussions centred around these critical assessments.

4. *Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change* - again in events I attended the commonality of feelings and expressions of confusion and perceptions and sense making were discussed in these terms.

5. *Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions* - students talked about ways in which they could support striking university workers and contribute to the decommodification of education.

6. *Planning of a course of action* - students joined the picket lines, organised student-led events and encouraged others to support and join them.

7. *Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans* - this was a reiterative process in my experience.

8. *Provisional trying of new roles* - student as social/ political activists.

9*. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships* - students organising together through their emancipatory, consciousness-raising experiences.

10. *Reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective* - students engaging in a variety of civic actions including the climate crisis (UCU 2019a) (Appendix 7) and Black Lives Matter rallies and protests (Appendix 8).

Of course, these are my own lived experiences, anecdotal and bound up in the bias of my own perceptions and mean-making. However, I argue this autobiographical narrative account is supported by West (2014), as I reflected on what is the 'form' in transformative learning (Kegan 2000), what it is, and how it can be that TL transforms and changes perceptions and mean-making.

Nevertheless, it is my position that as I was closely involved in many of the collective events which led to what I contend are TL experiences, it is my judgement that this is a truthful and valid account of the TL I am contending occurred. I provide this as a TL example of students I met during the UCU Four Fights dispute who joined striking workers on the picket line. These were a self-organising group, who I met again during a learning festival 'In support of BU UCU's 'Four Fights: Decommodify Education Festival' (see appendix 9) organised in collaboration with striking workers and students. I met these students again at subsequent Black Lives Matter rallies, they are now actively involved in a range of social justice and civic movements. These students number between 15 and 20, only two of whom had previously been

involved in social justice and civic actions. As an 'insider' in these movements, with my own prior knowledge and experience of social activism, I was struck by the ways, in which in a very short period of time, this group of students became politically organised and active (Atkins and Wallace 2012).

The UCU Four Fights industrial dispute, together with activism arising from the climate crisis and the Black Lives Matters movement have allowed for TL and TE to arise in ways that resonate with, and similar to the civil rights and social movements in America which were, Mezirow contended, the catalysts for the radical emancipatory learning experiences of the mature students grappling with feminism in his original publication of the theory of TL (Mezirow 1978a, b; West 2014). Whether or not anticipatory consciousness-raising radicalising TL experiences will endure is as yet unknown and is subject worthy of further research.

5.7 Implications for Policy

From the early part of this decade government policy has signalled Higher Education's role in social mobility (Department for Education and Skills 2004; David et al. 2008; Cabinet Office 2010; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2014; OFFA and HEFCE 2014; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2015). In this respect my research does have applications for policy, not only in the sense of social mobility, as espoused by my co-participants, it is also relevant in terms of funding models for higher education. I contend that this is where my research is highly relevant. It is important to acknowledge that Saunders (2012) questions the contention that education is intrinsically linked with social mobility, arguing that ability and inherited intelligence are the major determinants (a eugenicist, neoliberal trope espoused for example by Toby Young et al., passim). Saunders (2012) does however argue that the most 'deprived' children are seriously educationally disadvantaged, included in definitions of WP students.

The notion that upward social mobility is a positive outcome of HE education - as explicitly noted in government policy - suggests that widening access

and greater inclusivity is of societal and economic benefit (Cabinet Office 2010; OFFA and HEFCE 2014; Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2015). Therefore, in terms of policy, the embedding of Transformative Learning and Transformative Education within post-16 education curriculum would provide opportunities for WP students, when purposefully designed for that effect. My research may therefore have wider implications for policy and practice in HE, and implications for the development of learning and teaching within institutions.

I acknowledge that the stated claim of successive governments that higher education is implicated in social mobility is of course questionable. Moreover, as Alvesson (2013) notes, successive efforts including policies to effect social mobility and societal equality have persistently failed. As discussed by each of the co-participants in my study, the fees and associated costs of undergraduate study in England militate against access to HE, for a variety of reasons, including aversion to indebtedness. It was also noted in a number of the CCCEs that the true cost of studying an undergraduate level is often hidden. WP students rely on their families for support, including financial support, and even though, in many cases, paying for higher education is seen as an investment in career trajectory and social mobility, these costs are a barrier. The hidden costs more so, as these can significantly disadvantage students whilst studying.

I cite scholarship which supports my contention that the current neoliberal funding model for higher education is failing. Boliver (2015) argued that a number of elite universities were at risk of financial ruin, and although it is contended by a number of Vice Chancellors to have been a consequence of the Covid 19 pandemic, the failed of marketisation of higher education has been predicted since at least the early 2000's and has now come to pass as predicted also by Bryant (2019).

I therefore propose two potential impacts on policy, both nationally and institutionally. Nationally, government policy should respond to the failing HE funding model, and fully fund higher education for all UK students. The

abolishing of fees, and the necessary funding for education and research should be a government priority. Successive governments have entrenched fee-based student-financed higher education. Yet my research data, supported by the literature review (1.3.2), suggests that funding HE through the current fee regime has, and continues to fail. All of the co-participants referenced fees, to varying degrees noting the lack of transparency in the marketing of the courses they studied. Interestingly, whilst expressing dissatisfaction with the level of fees she was being charged, compared to cohorts in previous years, Maria stated that she accepted the unexpected costs of undertaking a placement in London, qualifying this with the belief that she was 'investing' in her future career. If, as successive governments have espoused, notably since the introduction of fees, the upward mobility of HE students is truly an aim the commodification of undergraduate degrees seeks to accomplish this is yet to be achieved.

Boliver (2015) identified a number of universities at risk of failing, arguably due to financial mismanagement, although I argue also because a sector reliant on research income and fees is devastatingly underfunded sector. The HE sector is not a marketplace and as Bryant (2019) and others have argued, is not close to becoming a "functioning market".

The global Covid 19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of this so-called market and the funding model. A minority of students will pay off their student loans (slightly more than 1/3) (Gunn 2017). It is likely that many billions of unpaid debt will be transferred to the Treasury, in which case the student fee regime will have failed graduates permanently indebted.

This level of indebtedness is a significant barrier for students from lower socio-economic group backgrounds whose habitus rejects debt at this scale and is therefore antithetical to notions of widening participation, inclusivity, and greater access to a HE.

At national and HEI level, a full-scale review of the ways in which universities are managed should be undertaken, in order to remove the commodification of education, and reposition institutions as communities of learning (Coffield

and Williamson 2012; The Convention for Higher Education 2020; The Branch Solidarity Network 2020; UCU Solidarity Movement 2020). The commodification of has led to a crisis of financial mismanagement and governance irregularities and failings (discussed in section 1.1.4).

Mismanagement and financial failure, if not checked, will lead to the failure of the sector. Giving rise to the question: is this an unintended but welcome consequence of the neoliberalisation of the sector in order to prosecute the agenda to dismantle public sector education? In recent years, Vice Chancellors have resigned in highly controversial circumstances, others have retired with generous additional remuneration, and student unions and others have questioned university expenditure that leads to detrimental impacts on the financial health and reputation of their institution and the sector (Adams 2019).

University Vice Chancellors' arguably excessive pay is an unavoidable consequence of the lack of governance is done for, by, and on behalf of the senior managers whom governors reward. Under the cloak of restructuring, responding to the non-existent 'market' and unevidenced demand university senior managers are implementing aggressive cuts in workforces and pay, their own positions are under increasing scrutiny. Unless the abject failure of management and governance is addressed through scrutiny, where these dual responsibilities are not met the sector and those who work and study within it will be irreversibly damaged. For these reasons I recommend national, and HEI level full-scale reviews of university governance earned management with the aim of repositioning institutions as communities of learning, places of societal benefit.

Secondly, HEI curriculum, the Post Graduate Certificate in Education and concomitant 'qualifications' to teach in HE should be redesigned to take account of TE. I include here Advance HE's (2020) UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) Dimensions of Professional Practice, which employs language throughout redolent of the neoliberal agenda, exampled here in the dimensions of core knowledge required for Fellowship:

> "K6. The implications of quality assurance and quality enhancement for academic and professional practice with a particular focus on teaching".

The UKPSF core dimensions refer throughout to 'quality' and yet, what is meant by quality assurance or enhancement is not defined. Furthermore, the framework assumes that the educator's responsibilities lie with the neoliberal concepts of 'quality assurance' and 'enhancement' rather than focusing on the humanist and enlightenment principles and commitments of HE that education and education research requires. Here I am not proposing a radical change in HE policy, rather a return to a 'pre-neoliberal' approach to participation in HE. The policies adopted since the Dearing (1996) report, and the introduction of Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2009), intended to embed and subsequently capture data to measure 'quality' in teaching in HE are failing as discussed in section 1.1.8 – 1.4.2. Students are alert to the concomitant commodification and marketisation of HE, the exploitation and casualisation of staff and have resisted the neoliberal agenda since the introduction fees (see section 1.3. 2.1).

I acknowledge that there are students, and to an extent academics, who pragmatically, and or tacitly accept neoliberalism in HE as discussed in section 1.3, and the drive to embed 'employability' in HE, as instanced in Maria and Peter's CCCEs. Boliver's (2015) prescient analysis of the financial failure of HEIs, including those within the so-called 'elite' Russel Group (see section 1.1.4) together with student support for UCU's industrial disputes discussed in section 5.6 highlight the urgent need to revisit policy and I argue, as my research indicates, embed TL in HE in England.

Throughout sections (1.1.8., 1.2,1.2.3, 1.3.2.1, and 1.4.2) I instance neoliberal language used in policy and frameworks that directs educators to focus on 'employability', ' employment destinations' 'value for money', 'service excellence', 'the marketplace', 'competition', 'benchmarking' and so on. Reference to pedagogy, let alone transformative education experiences, are for the most part absent. This I argue is a significant barrier and inhibits truly transformative learning and transformative education. Hence my

recommendation, based on this study, that TE is embedded at policy level in order to truly provide access for WP and non-traditional students, as the stated aim of successive governments.

Educators can better know and understand WP access if it were explored through the lens of transformative education, where perceptions and mean making could be reflected upon both by the educator and the learner throughout the 12 phases of transformation. In this way, qualitative data can be generated for analysis to inform institutional and national policy, where focus can be redirected to the embedding of critical reflection, analysis, emancipatory consciousness-raising, and challenge, in order to return universities to their core purpose of pursuing education and research applying humanist and enlightenment principles.

As discussed in greater detail in chapter 1, (1.1.8., 1.2,1.2.3, 1.3.2.1, and 1.4.2) neoliberal language permeates HE policy, with institutions and national. Leyva (2018, p.84) identified that Russell Group universities employ neoliberal language that speaks to 'employability', 'value for money', abandoning humanist and enlightenment principles and commitments, rather focusing on the exploitation and commodification of "applied" research in order to generate income from "private, governmental, or third-sector organisation" (Leyva 2018, p.84).

The co-participants in my research expressed little to no interest in doing research in order to gain income for the University which they were studying, rather they were very much focused on education and academic aspects of their degrees. More interestingly for policy, the co-participants expressed the preconceived expectation that their HE experience would lead to a shift in habitus through access to professions previously less open to inclusivity and widening participation. If, as successive governments have argued, participation in higher education leads to upward social mobility for WP non-traditional students and is a positive outcome in terms of societal and economic benefits these are the efforts on which HEIs should focus.

There is also the vexed question of collaboration between staff and students and the cogeneration of knowledge. As noted in chapter 3, HEI ethics policies tend to limit the possibilities for research undertaken with the explicit aim of close, intimate collaboration. I argue that ethics polices must be redesigned to take account of these relationships which are an important aspect of cogenerated knowledge (Reason 1994). As importantly, the time required to do collaborative research with students must be explicitly acknowledged and accounted for in institutional research codes of practice and in work loading the labour done by researchers working as academics. Hayes (2018) supports this contention, noting the need for an "honest approach" to the recognition of time spent to develop working relationships with students. This is an important point because as Hayes (2018), discusses, the TEF requires measurements of, for example, 'contact' time with students. Unless these measurements are truthful, the TEF and its reliance on contact time as a means to quantify undefined, yet all important 'engagement' is corrupted. My point here is that unreliable 'measurements' of time needed to be spent doing research undermines all TEF measurements.

While I place little weight on the contention that my policy proposals would be adopted by a Conservative government, through my work on the UCU Commission for Effective Industrial Action (UCU 2018), I contributed to the Labour Party Manifesto (2019, p.41): specifically, the commitment to creating a National Education Service which states that a Labour Government would:

> "…end the failed free-market experiment in higher education, abolish tuition fees and bring back maintenance grants…develop a new funding formula for higher education that:
>
> • Ensures all public HE institutions have adequate funding for teaching and research.
>
> • Widens access to higher education and reverses the decline of part-time learning.
>
> • Ends the casualisation of staff.
>
> We will transform the Office for Students from a market regulator to a body of the National Education Service, acting in the public interest."

I argue that with the advent of Labour government, it is possible that my proposals could form part of a revised National Education Service policy, as I have discussed with Angela Rayner MP, current deputy leader of the Labour Party and Rebecca Long Bailey MP, (previously Shadow Minister for education) (personal communications). The embedding of TE alone could not meet this aim, the abolition of fees is an essential cornerstone of truly widening access for WP and non-traditional students.

5.8 The development of Transformative Learning theory as a Transformative Education theory

My thesis sought to explore the 'completeness' of TL and consider the potential for Mezirow's TL theory to be further developed as a model of Transformative Education (TE), which I had anticipated would be challenging in a neoliberal educational context. Of course, I am not the first to question TL as an applied theory. Scholars including Newman (2008, 2012) have challenged TL, although it is acknowledged that their proposition was not widely accepted. There does however exist a body of scholarship which to varying degrees is critical of the perceived limitations of TL.

As discussed in the concluding section of Chapter four, the development of Mezirow's (1978a, b - 2012) transformative learning theory has been posited by scholars who are exponents of its endearing status as a key signature theory. It is widely argued that these limitations should be addressed in order for this key theory to continue to endure. Here I turn to a brief summary of these limitations as identified in the literature review:

- According to Dirkx (1997, 2011), Taylor (2000a, b 2007) and Inglis (1998) TL's lack attention to 'holistic' aspects of learning. A critique accepted by Mezirow (1996). Mälkki (2010, 2014) and others discuss the recurring theme of Mezirow's lack of attention to the non-rational.
- Boyd and Myer (1988) argue that whilst Mezirow's (1981) positioning of perspective transformation within psychoanalytic theory - situating transformative education within analytical psychology, is relevant - TL is overly reliant on notions of rational problem solving with limited attention to the early phases of TL.

- Dirkx (1997), Taylor (2000a) and Mälkki (2010) questioned Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b, 1990, 1991) reliance on cognitive learning, rational discourse, and his lack of attention to the social and emotional contexts of learning. Mälkki (2010) highlights a problematic dissonance between reflection and TL's meaning perspective" (the recurring theme of 'Mezirow's lack of attention to the non-rational' amongst critics of TL).
- Inglis (1998) questions TL's reliance on perceptions derived from the ideas and thoughts of others -in relation to emancipatory learning, arguing that for TL to be an agent of change it is essential that learners understand political, economic, and institutional structures, so as to effect emancipation.
- Taylor (2000b) highlights the importance of the 'educator' in the transformative experience of the student. Taylor (2000a) advocates further research be undertaken, specifically in relation to the teacher - student relationship, notions of authenticity and trust and the dynamics of relationships in the learning context.

Scholars of TL including Dirkx (1997), Inglis (1998), Taylor (2000a, b), Mälkki (2010, 2012), Morgan (2015), Taylor and Cranton (2012), Arends (2014) and Christie et al. (2015), support the further development of the theory of TL. Based on my research I am therefore positing a theory of Transformative Education (TE) based on Mezirow (1978a, b – 2000), Bourdieu (1977 - 1998) and Illeris (2014, 2015, 2018), seeking to address the many calls for the development of TL. I believe that my research meets these limitations, as discussed in Chapter 4, not only did my co-participants reflect on their understandings of the political, economic, and institutional structures in the university which they were studying, my understanding was that the CCCEs allowed this critical reflection to come to the forefront of their mean-making, whereby I argue strongly, Serena and Peter recognised their emancipatory experiences TL (Inglis 1998). It is also my contention that through the compassionate approach I adopted, the limitations Dirkx (1997), Taylor (2000a, b) and Mälkki (2010) identified were met. This is because, as Taylor (2000b) so significantly emphasises, my own TL experience, which I position as TE, met the limitations of TL's failure to fully consider the educator student relationship.

At various points during the fieldwork, and whilst undertaking the analysis and interpretations and understandings of the data, I experienced my own disorienting dilemmas (Phase 1). The first of which I identify as being my reaction to Maria's disorienting dilemma (see section 4.3.3, p.112) which led to my own self-examination, with a small degree of anger and some shame (Phase 2). I felt that I should have anticipated Maria's emotional state during our CCCE. Through reiterative critical assessments of my pedagogical epistemic stance and prior assumptions of my own praxis and professional practice, I gained a sense of the ways in which, in order to actualise TL, TE is required (Phase 3). My 4th Phase was one of recognising that the co-participants in my study had negotiated a similar change. Whilst I acknowledge that this is not directly related to my peers, and my proposition that TE should be undertaken by educators, I argue it is closely aligned to Taylor's (2000a, b) contention regarding the relationship between teacher and student in the TL environment.

During the fieldwork and throughout Chapter 4 I explored my praxis in TE (Phase 5). My planned course of action was to propose this model, which I recognise is a serious undertaking, given the body of work that supports TL, Including Mezirow's life work (Phase 6). I argue that I completed Phase 7 through the acquisition of knowledge I have gained during my research, in particular the fieldwork, analysis and interpretation and understanding phases. My provisional trying on of new roles (Phase 8) occurred as I worked through Chapter 4 with Serena. I shifted from doctoral researcher to co-researcher, working with co-participants in order to cogenerate new understandings of the possibilities and potentials of TL. I have written elsewhere, including Chapter 4, about my own experiences of Phase 8. Phase 9, I argue was experienced as I became confident of the methodology, and in particular the 'messy' method I developed and employed, especially as my reflections on my method aligned with the fieldwork and analysis, interpretations, and subsequent understandings of the possibilities of TL and TE.

Further on in this section I expand on the ways in which I propose that TE can be embedded in my own professional practice and praxis, as well as the possibilities of its usefulness as a theoretically informed model for TE (Phase 10). I will also discuss the ways in which reiterative reflection on critical assessments may be undertaken, as exampled by my own throughout this research. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which I have already begun to reintegrate into praxis my own TE, based on my new perspectives, the possibilities of transformative consciousness-raising education in a neoliberal post 92 HE context (see table 10).

Phase	**Proposed development of TL into TE**
1	A disorienting dilemma.
2	Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame.
3	Critical assessment of pedagogical, epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions.
4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change.
5	Exploration of praxis in TE.
6	Planning of a course of action.
7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.
8	Provisional trying of new roles.
9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
10	Embedding TE into curriculum, pedagogy, and practice.
11	Reiterative reflection on Critical assessment of pedagogical, epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions.
12	Reintegration into praxis on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective.

Table 11: Proposed development of TL into HE

It was Mezirow (1978a, b - 2000) who argued that the 10 Phases are not necessarily experienced in linear terms, which was my own experience. The mean-making from me was reiterative, and at times the catalyst for this was most certainly the CCCEs with my co-participants and Serena. Essential to the process of transformative education is the willingness to be open to transformative learning experiences. I do not propose this further development of Mezirow's theory lightly - in some ways it was deeply challenging and required a good deal of time to reflect on the emotional impacts of working through the phases of TL (Dirkx 1997; Mälkki 2010, 2012). As an educator in HE, working as practitioner in learning development, I had developed a strong sense of my own identity as an academic (Illeris 2014). To find myself in a space where my own identity was shifting, together with a recognition that I myself had gone through a process of identity shift was an unexpected outcome, which caused me several incidents of disorienting dilemmas as noted previously.

An enduring reflection for me is that I often returned to Mezirow's (2012) contention that it was important for an individual undergoing transformative learning to avoid distorting self-deception. In my own case I hung on to my strong sense of identity, which required a great deal of critical reflection, as it had been my belief that I was especially attuned to the learning needs of WP students. Not least because I have dedicated my professional practice and praxis to the discipline of learning development. I was however open to alternative points of view, and understandings of how my co-participants were feeling. The openness of discourse which I engaged in with my co-participants and co-researcher were critical in my reaching new perspectives, based on those discourses. Slightly less discomforting were the critical reflections I was required to work through on each of the occasions when I became aware of erroneous assumptions that I had made. In this sense I believe that I have met Mezirow's (2012) most recent reconceptualisation of TL, in which he adds further clarity to the theory, as discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.4, p.41).

It is important for me to outline the ways in which I have embedded TE in my own professional practice and praxis, as I am proposing both a theoretical and practice-based model. Since developing Mezirow's (1978a, b – 2000) TL theory as TE, I have begun to utilise my reconceptualisation of TL in my day-to-day work. This is exampled in the ways in which I work with master's students as a Senior Lecturer in Learning Development. In 2010, I developed a series of Continuing Academic Development lectures to support academic aspects of a practice-based animation course. In early 2019, I reflected on the format and design of the lectures and invited a colleague with whom I work closely to collaboratively redesign these as sessions, in accordance with TE, so as to purposefully discomfit students and move them out of their perceived comfort zones. We did this by building in a formatively assessed presentation with a brief to apply theoretical concepts to a clip of an animation of their choice, to be presented in groups. We were specific in the brief in our expectation that these presentations would challenge the orthodoxies of principles of animation, understood typically as a form of entertainment. We asked that the discussion and critique of the animation clip identify political and/or socio-economic issues.

I was aware that I would be met with resistance as the animation students attracted to this course are predominantly international, and typically averse to this form of collaboration and group work: having in the past been resistant to the point of dropping out of sessions. My colleague and I worked through a series of strongly expressed challenges from the group and negotiated with them ways that they could take ownership of the process: from simple decision-making about composition of the groups, to revising the assessment process to include peer-to-peer assessment, 'in the moment' during the sessions.

This was a 12 week-long process, and during that period we both reflected, at the end of each session, on the ways in which we could adapt the brief to meet the challenges of the students, whilst maintaining its intended learning outcomes. My colleague and I had numerous discussions, in effect our own CCCEs, during which we reflected on the personal challenges to our

pedagogical approaches. mindful of my understanding of TE, in questioning my colleague it is my belief that they had a similar experience, which could be considered as TL. As a positive outcome of this embedding of TE, the presentations were remarkable, and we gave indicative marks equivalent to distinction and merits, with the exception of one group who struggled as English was not their first language. Of note was the feedback we received from colleagues teaching on this master's programme, who noted the improvement in individual presentations that students have to give as part of a summative assessment.

At the concluding point of this section, it is worth noting that the discussions in Chapter 4 regarding TL and identity, relates to my own experiences of shift in identity (Illeris 2014). These understandings, I argue, could only have been interpreted through my conceptual framework (see figure 19), the exploration of the possibilities of Mezirow's theory through the prism of TL, habitus, and identity. My redevelopment of Mezirow's theory to incorporate emotional aspects of TL, and importantly as highlighted by Taylor (2000b) does, I believe support my proposed TE model.

Figure 21: Theory of Transformative Education (based on Mezirow 1978a)

5.9 Recommendations for further research

My research, conceptualisation of the theoretical framework, and methodological approach, together with the fieldwork, have led me to propose the following areas for further research:

1. A longitudinal study of TL, as re-envisaged through the lens of my proposed transformative education model.
2. The development of a 3D interactive model to illustrate the neoliberal agenda to dismantle public sector higher education.
3. A model to represent the possibilities of Conceptual Frameworks.
4. Messy Methods and CCCE.
5. Further research into habitus, identity, and transformative learning re-envisaged as transformative education.

5.9.1. The longitudinal study

I propose a longitudinal research project to study the development of TL as a theory of transformative education, to explore the possibilities of this praxis post the global Covid 19 pandemic and to understand its medium and long-term impacts on HE. This longitudinal study could explore the commonality of experiences of undergraduate students in post 92 neoliberal HE, with the aim of informing policy regarding widening participation and access.

Arguably, HE will inevitably change as a consequence of student engagement in political and social activism as students experiencing TL begin to challenge the neoliberal agenda (Mayer and Eccles 2019). I envisage such a study as collaborative, cogenerative learning, taking place pre and post-graduation over a 5 to 7-year period, in order to co-create knowledge and learning (Eldin and Levin 1991; Reason 1994; Bradbury and Reason 2003; O'Neil and Marsick 2007; Costello 2011 and Levin 2012).

5.9.2. The development of an interactive 3D model of the DNA of the neoliberal agenda to dismantle public sector education

As I proposed and articulated in Chapter 2 (section 2.16.2) also discussed section 5.7 of this chapter, this interactive model could be cocreated with animators interested in the topic, as a collaborative project. The value of such a study and creation of the 3D model is that it would be a tool through which researchers could readily understand the historical pursuance of the neoliberal agenda in the English sector. The creation of a 3D model with the capability to edit and update impacts on HE is including events, reports, education acts, official papers and so on, building on Gillard (2018), would enable researchers to contribute to understandings, and access data in order to contribute to the ongoing debate around neoliberalism in HE.

5.9.3. Model representing the possibilities for Conceptual Frameworks

In order to carry out my study it was necessary to research key theoretical theories underpinning my thesis to create a conceptual framework, incorporating TL (Mezirow 1978a, b - 2012), habitus (Bourdieu 1983, 1984, 1985, 1998) and identity (Illeris 2014, 2015, 2018). When I configured the conceptual framework, I was able to apply all three key theories in the analysis and interpretations of the data in order to understand the possibilities of TL in the neoliberal HE landscape. Synthesising what I contend are incomplete theories, I was able to work within what Abes (2009) described as 'theoretical borderlands'. In doing so, I argue I was able to gain understandings of TL, identity habitus and the interplay between their effects on the co-participants in my study (Bourdieu 1977; Reay 2004; Reed-Danahay 2005; Hurst 2013).

During what I have described as the 'messy methods' process (Mellor 2001; Cook 2009) my co-researcher and I created thematic maps for each of the co-participants, which aligned with the conceptual framework incorporating TL (Mezirow 1978a, b), Habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and Identity (Illeris 2014) (see figure 22). I am proposing that further research be undertaken to explore the possibilities for conceptual frameworks incorporating signature theories, in order to complete and develop those theories, and additionally to support methodological approaches.

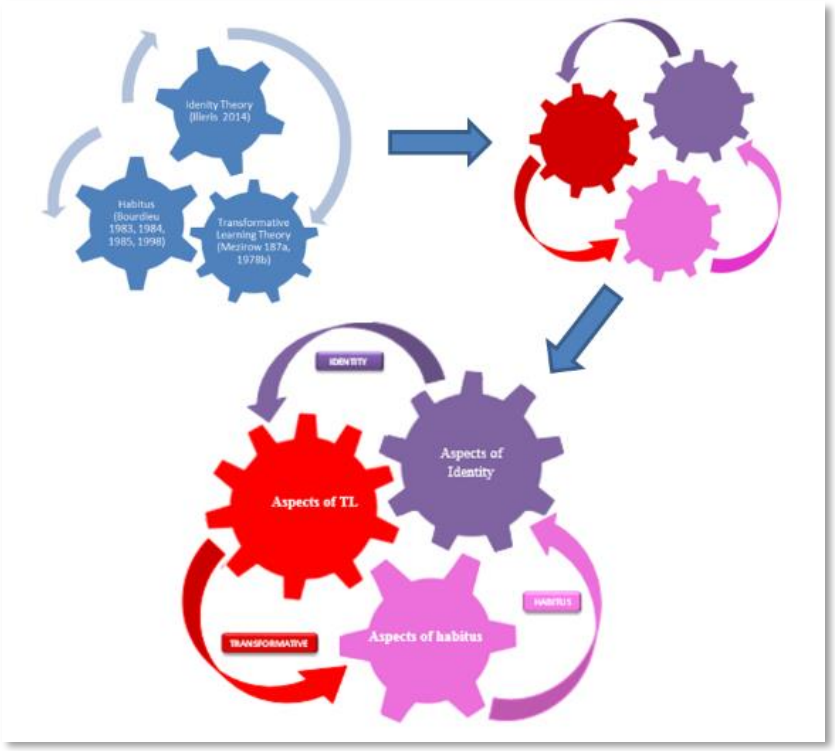

Figure 22: Conceptual framework development

5.9.4. Messy Methods and Critical Compassionate Communicative Exchanges (CCCE)

The utilisation and development of a messy method to generate knowledge and enrich and add to understandings in my own study, could be further developed to support its utilisation as an applied, acknowledged method. This would be especially applicable in areas of research where the well-trodden paths of prescribed data collection analysis in qualitative research cannot meet the needs of creative researchers who are investigating sensitive, complex, messy concepts (Cook 2009; Mason 2014; Ekman 2015; Kara 2015).

I have proposed a data collection method which I term Critical Compassionate Communicative Exchanges (CCCE) discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.6.5), whereby these exchanges are undertaken with a specific purpose. CCCE is a combination of Mason (2014) and Ekman's (2015) concepts, predicated on the principles of feminist and person-centred ethical

approaches (Rogers et al. 2014). It is my contention that adopting this approach meets both Mason (2014) and Ekman's (2015) theoretical and praxis-based practice, and my own feminist ethical approaches. It also resolves the problem of power dynamics and inherent power-based tensions of qualitative research (Chapter 3, section 3.6).

5.9.5 Further research habitus, identity, and transformative learning re-envisaged as transformative education

This is probably the research project most closely aligned to my interests as a researcher. I propose here an autoethnographic research project investigating the possibilities of the application of TE in HE. This project would entail collaboration with education practitioners with a particular interest in TL and consciousness-raising, emancipatory transformative education. My intention is to continue to employ the theories of habitus, identity, and transformative learning in a study of the experiences of academics in pre and post 92 HE institutions.

5.10 Concluding thoughts and reflections

When I began this doctoral research in 2015, I had proposed exploring the embedding of the principles of learning development and academic skills within undergraduate HE curriculum. I was inspired by the absence, in many unit guides I encountered as a learning development academic, of the principles of academic research and writing, research strategies, information and advice on the presentation of assignments and assessments and so on. I was exploring ways in which to support colleagues in incorporating these aspects into undergraduate and postgraduate student learning endeavours. During the taught face of the doctorate, I became interested in the theories of Bourdieu (1983, 1984, 1985, 1998) and Illeris (2014, 2015, 2018). Five years later, I cannot recall how I encountered Mezirow's (1978a, b) theory of transformative learning. I do however recognise that it was a transformative experience for me. I believe also that my doctoral research has been a transformative experience for my co-participants.

As is typical of post graduate research, I have revisited and reconceptualised my thesis, from my original proposal to its final iteration. I have presented papers at conferences and published two articles in journals: directly based on my doctoral research. In this sense, as what is interestingly termed an 'early career researcher', and certainly at the beginning of this process a novice researcher (as the first 10 years my career in HE were primarily focused on pedagogical education research and practice), my understandings of the purpose of my research endeavours have significantly changed. I had set out to do something fairly instrumental, although from my perspective and practice, intrinsically and inherently essential for my praxis. Yet the course of my research led me to undertake, I argue, a bolder and more expansive research project. I have proposed a "messy within methods method", posited a model for working in between, and within the borders of what I argue are incomplete theories, as exampled in my own conceptual framework. I have posited the redevelopment of a key signature theory (Mezirow 1978a, b - 2012), and proposed an interactive 3D resource for researchers of post 16 education in England.

Most importantly for me, as I reflect on the fieldwork phase of my research, I believe that the act of engaging in action research, predicated on the principles of feminist ethics and person-centred approaches, the co-participants in my research have had, to varying degrees, transformative experiences as conceptualised in TL. Furthermore, it is my belief that those TL experiences were engendered through the CCCEs, and my own TE and the way in which I approached the cogeneration of this new knowledge. I argue my research adds to gaps in understandings of student experiences, of TL, within the neoliberal agenda to dismantle public sector HE in England. These outcomes align closely with my own ontological and epistemological philosophical positions, such that, as I reflect on my doctoral research, it is my position that I have met the original aim of my research: to answer the research question:

> Is Transformative Learning Possible in Neoliberal Post 92 Higher Education in England?

My concluding contention is that transformative learning - in the context of a post 92 university media faculty - is possible, and I argue that the method and models I propose, along with my potential contribution to policy, are important for Higher Education research.

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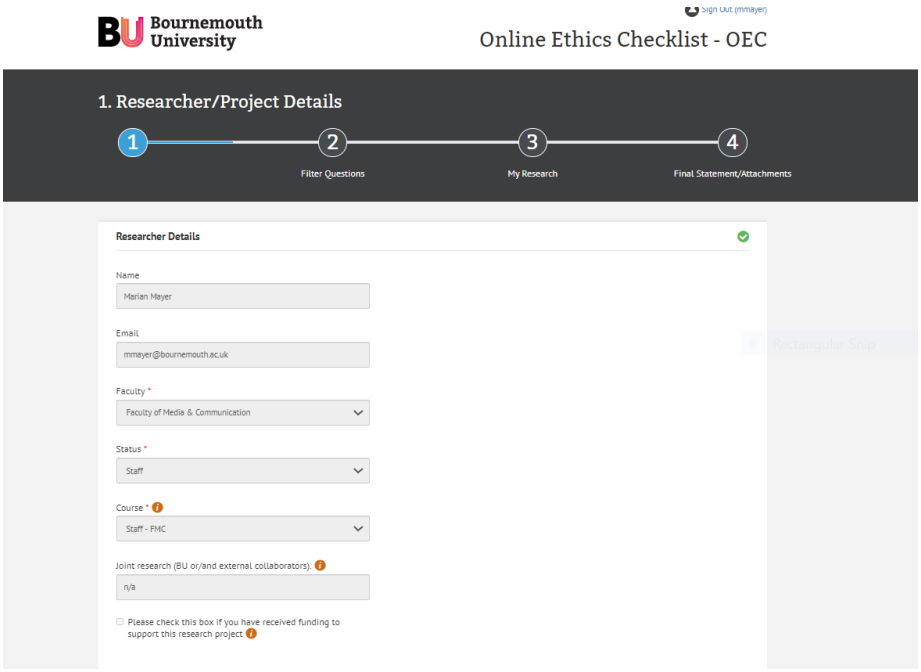
Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Proposal



Appendix 2: Ethics checklist

I have led on Learning Development in the Faculty of Media and Communication since 2004. Various CPD endeavours including participation in the PG Cert Ed, Education Excellence Programme and research published at conferences have led to an interest in the transformative impacts of education on undergraduate (UG) creative media students. These endeavours have culminated in the proposal of a study exploring the lived experiences, expectations, and perceptions of UG creative media students. A constructivist interpretivist approach will be adopted in the study, employing qualitative action research as understood by Eldin and Levin (1991), Heron (1996), Greenwood and Levin (1998) and Bradbury and Reason (2003). Purposive non-probability sampling will be undertaken whereby UG FMC students will be contacted via email and asked to read attached participant information sheet (Bryman 2012). Ethical considerations and boundaries will be agreed by the participants (Kimmel 1988; Heron 1996) within the Bournemouth University Ethics (2014) and British

Educational Research Association (BERA 2011) codes. Ethical procedures will be adhered to, taking into consideration BU ethics committee guidelines. Confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity will be observed throughout the process adhering to the Bournemouth University Code of Good Practice (2014). Informed consent and permission to use data from the interviews will be obtained taking into account co-researchers' confidentiality, privacy and anonymity (Holloway and Biley 2011; Atkins and Wallace 2012; Holloway and Brown 2012). The data collection will take the form of creative interviews: conversational, communicative exchanges focusing on the research questions (Mason 2014). This will be an iterative process and will entail follow up meetings to allow reflexive critique of data as it is analysed throughout this phase (Mason 2014). In particular I will strive to ensure that all participants feel a sense of agency in the interviews, and that they are aware that they may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

As I am seeking to generate data constructed from the co-researcher's viewpoint, I will ensure that as far as possible the data is interpreted as they intended. Participatory action research is not without ethical challenges, including notions of power balance and knowledge and respect for participants' dignity and autonomy. There is an inherent power balance that must be considered and navigated through the constant revisiting of informed consent (Holloway and Wheeler 1995; Atkins and Wallace 2012). The email approaches will limit the power balance as recipients are free to respond to or ignore messages. As I will necessarily be more knowledgeable about habitus and transformative learning theories I will - before interviews commence - ensure that co-researchers have an understanding of both as they relate to the study. I will offer co-researchers the opportunity to question me via email or in person about any aspect of the study and discuss individual boundaries with each co-researcher. This research aims to benefit UG media students as it could ultimately add to pedagogic understandings of transformative creative media education. Those who participate will have a voice which could inform future practice.

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Participant Information Sheet

Doctoral Research/Co-researcher Information Sheet

The title of the research project: Is transformative education in a neoliberal HE context possible: challenging the dismantling of public sector education'

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a study to inform research project as a co-researcher. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the project?

It is proposed to develop and implement a research project (a project in which those participating are all co-researchers exploring the experiences of undergraduate media students – which we will discuss further when we meet) in which insights are being sought into various impacts of education and learning on students views of themselves and the world of higher education and study. The first stage of this is to undertake face-to-face interviews with a small sample of students.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as a student on in the Faculty of Media and Communication as the study is seeking to understand undergraduate media students' experiences.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a

consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting your coursework in any way (see below). You do not have to give a reason.

What do I have to do?

The researcher invites you to register interest in a study involving face-to-face interviews to inform a research project. The interviews will take place at a mutually agreed time and take approximately 45 minutes.

The researcher who will talk to you is Marian Mayer.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The only risk of taking part is that I will ask that you give up some of your time and hospitality.

There will be discussion of your expectations of higher education, the reasons why you chose to study an undergraduate degree at the BU Faculty of Media and Communication, the influences on your chose, and your experiences so far.

The research is not connected with your coursework or grades and nothing undertaken within the study will have a negative impact on your coursework. If you decide to withdraw from the group mid-process, there will be no impact at all on any coursework or anything connected with your course.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there may be no immediate benefits for those people co-researching in the project, it is hoped that your participation will allow you to reflect critically on your expectations, experiences, and perceptions of studying.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential? What will happen to the results of the research project?

All the information that collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and if reported in subsequent publications will

be anonymised. I may publish our joint research in academic papers, and it will form part of my doctoral research.

What type of information will be sought and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

I am seeking information about your social and economic status, your family's experiences of and participation in higher education, your experiences thus far of learning, especially if they have impacted your view of the world or your perceptions of yourself.

Who is organising/funding the research?

The research has been made possible by funding from Bournemouth University via my doctoral research.

Contact for further information

Marian Mayer (mmayer@bournemouth.ac.uk)

Finally…

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and, if appropriate, a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read through the information.

Should you wish to make a complaint about your involvement in the research and you do not feel able to discuss this with me, please contact Prof Iain MacRury Deputy Dean for Research and Professional Practice: email imacrury@bournemouth.ac.uk or tel. 01202 9624625

Appendix 4: Description of my research

Study: Understanding Habitus and Transformative Learning in Undergraduate Media Students.

Invitation:

Your voice and your story of being a student are at the heart of this doctoral research project.

Through interviews comprising one or more conversations about your experiences, I hope to address the following questions:

1. How might your habitus shift through transformative education?
2. How do your identity, habitus and the transformative education you may have experienced interrelate?

In hearing your story and talking with you about your experiences I am hoping to better understand how your lived experiences can shape policy changes to better enable all students to access and succeed in higher education. I am also keen to understand how your experiences of higher education have transformed your understandings of yourself as a student, and the wider world.

Before you decide to be involved, it is important to understand why this work is being done and what it will involve.

Please read the following information and discuss it with others if you wish, before deciding to take part. If you have questions, feel free to contact me (my contact details are at the end of this information sheet).

Why have I been asked to participate in this study?

I have asked you, as a faculty of Media and Communication Undergraduate student to participate in my doctoral research as I am interested in your experiences and the decisions which you have made that led you to study in higher education. I am especially keen to interview students who self-identify as coming from a non-traditional background, to share your lived experiences of university. By ‘non-traditional background’ I mean students who come from backgrounds currently underrepresented and often marginalised in higher education, these can include:

- Mature students.

- Disability.
- Ethnic origin.
- Gender identity.
- First generation to attend university.
- Socio-economic groups.
- Areas with a low participation to higher education.
- Care leavers.
- Those with caring responsibilities.

Research tells us that some students encounter particular challenges when making decisions about studying in higher education, and whilst studying. I am seeking information about your social and economic status as you perceive it, your family's experiences of, and participation in higher education, and your experiences thus far of higher education, especially if they have impacted on your view of the world or your perceptions of yourself.

I want to learn from your experiences to find out how to make the university a fairer and more inclusive place.

However, your participation in the study is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part.

Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part. Your participation is entirely voluntarily. You are under no obligation to take part.

Whether or not you participate will have no impact upon your grades at BU or any future, current or previous support you have been offered by the university.

You have the right to withdraw up to the point of anonymisation of the data (i.e. where any information identifying individuals is removed). You do not have to give a reason for withdrawing from the project.

What do I have to do?:

The purpose of this study is to use personal artefacts of your choosing (which could be a treasured personal possession, photographs or mementos) and conversational interviews to share your lived experiences of being a student at Bournemouth University.

Participation in the project will take place during semester 2 of this academic year (9 January 2017 – 7 April 2017) and culminate in the publication of my doctoral thesis in June 2018.

If you agree to take part in the study we will arrange a mutually convenient initial meeting on the university campus to discuss where on campus, and when we will meet for the interview(s).

Our conversations (interviews) will be audio recorded so that I can concentrate on your views and have a full record of your thoughts. Any thoughts you share with me during our conversations will be anonymised in any publication. You will inform me of the pseudonym you wish me to use in future publications when discussing our conversations and the analysis of the data we generate.

What are the possible disadvantages and benefits of taking part?:

In the conversations (interviews) we will talk about your honest and lived experiences of being a student. The subject matters we discuss could cause you distress. However, people often find the experience of talking to someone about their experiences enjoyable. Moreover, your contribution could feed into recommendations that could change policy and practice at BU.

How will the information you share be used?:

The transcripts from the conversations (interviews) will be anonymised (so that others will not be able to attribute what was said to you). This data will be collated and analysed to look for commonalities and differences across all of the participants. In particular, I am keen to understand if, and how, changes could be used to enhance higher education experiences and create a more diverse and inclusive university.

The data and knowledge we create will be shared in journal publications, at conferences and in my doctoral thesis.

Who has approved the project?:

This project has been reviewed and approved in line with Bournemouth University Research Ethics Code of Practice.

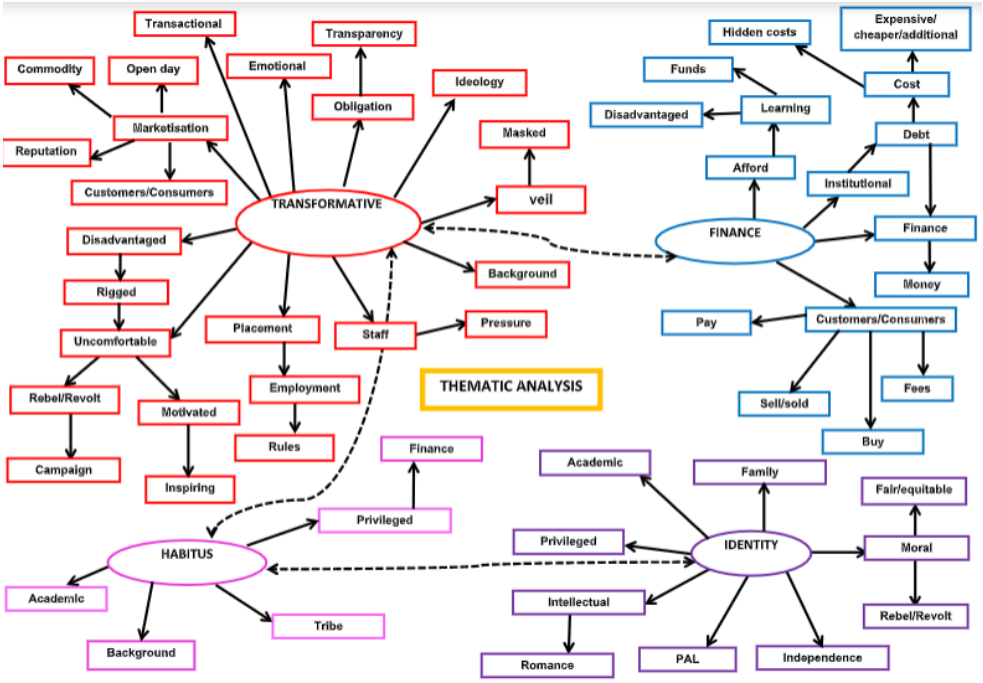
Researcher: **Marian Mayer: Senior Lecturer in Learning Development. Email:** mmayer@bournemouth.ac.uk **. Telephone: 01202 966696**

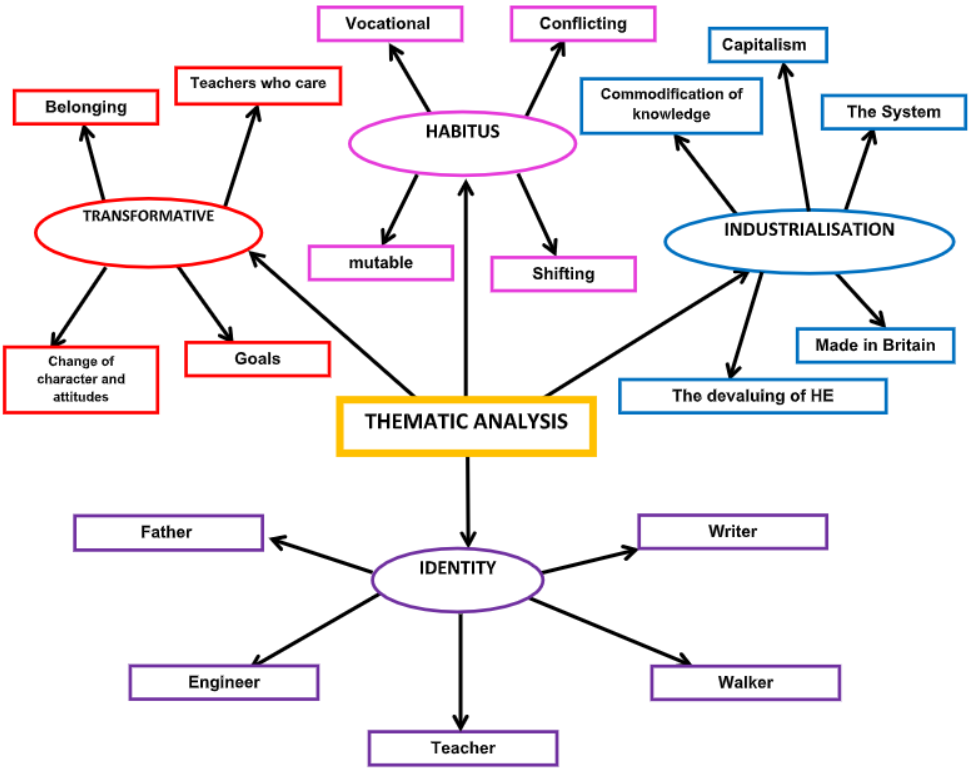
If you have any concerns or complaints regarding this study please contact:

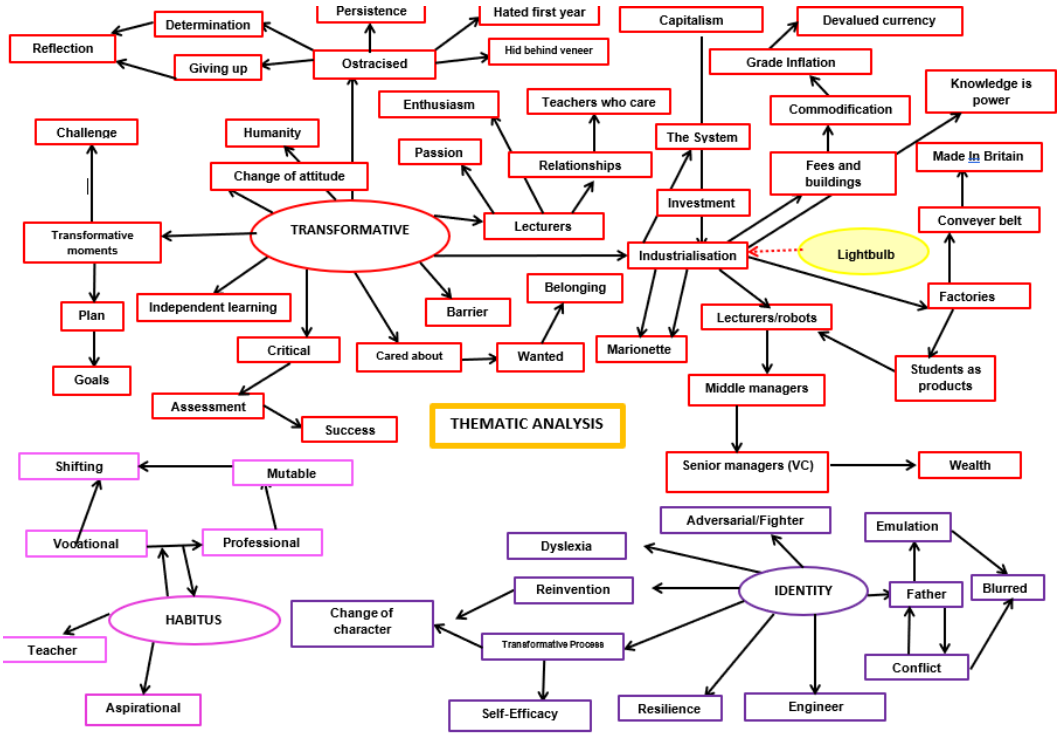
Professor Iain MacRury, Deputy Dean Research and Professional Practice Faculty of Media and Communication Telephone (0)1202 962465. Email: imacrury@bournemouth.ac.uk

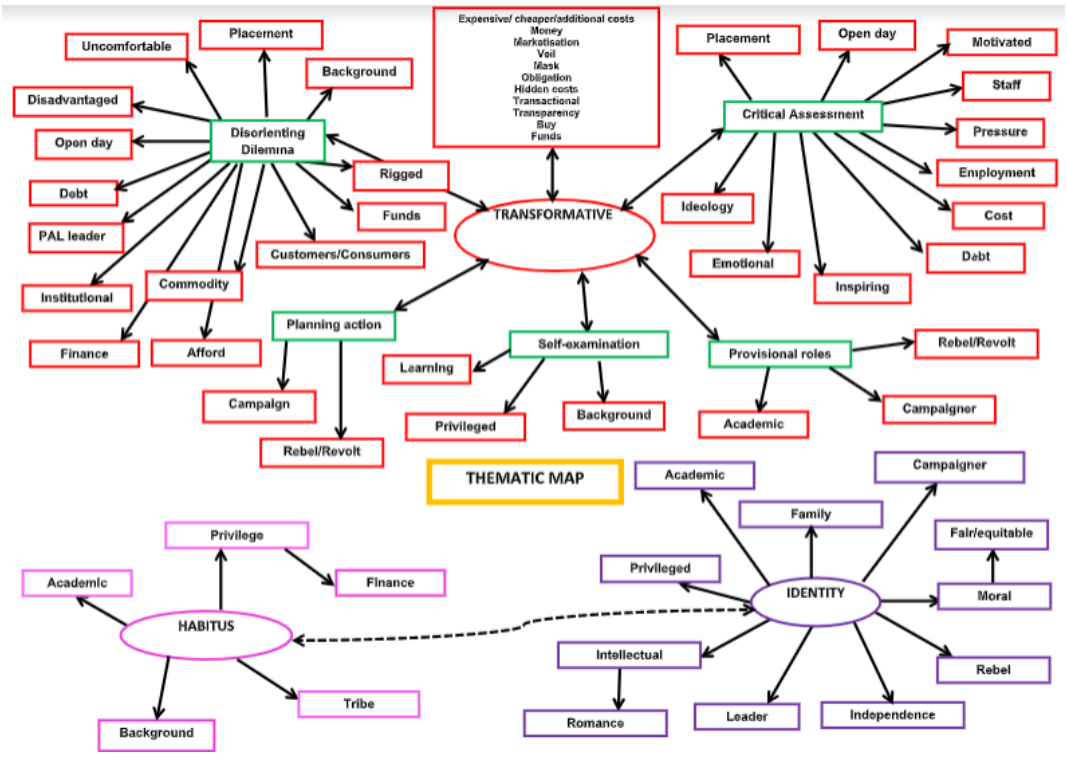
Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and considering taking part in this research study!

Appendix 5: First stage thematic analysis map further examples

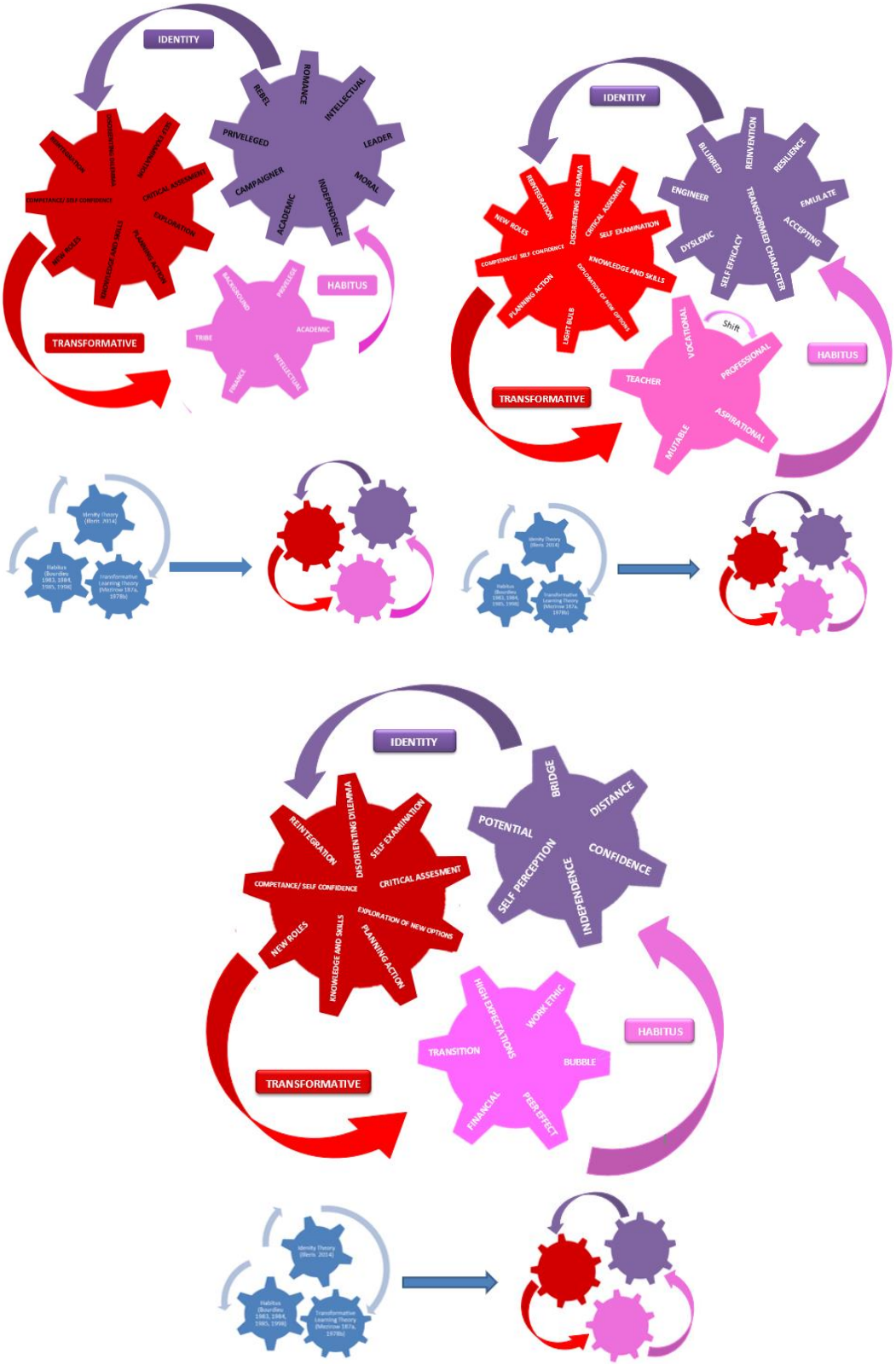





Persistence
Hated first year
Capitalism
Devalued currency
Determination
Reflection
Giving up
Ostracised
Hid behind veneer
Grade Inflation
Knowledge is power
Enthusiasm
Teachers who care
Commodification
Challenge
Humanity
Passion
Relationships
The System
Fees and buildings
Made In Britain
Change of attitude
Transformative moments
TRANSFORMATIVE
Lecturers
Investment
Conveyer belt
Industrialisation
Lightbulb
Plan
Independent learning
Barrier
Belonging
Factories
Lecturers/robots
Critical
Cared about
Wanted
Marionette
Goals
Assessment
Success
THEMATIC ANALYSIS
Middle managers
Students as products
Shifting
Mutable
Senior managers (VC)
Wealth
Vocational
Professional
Adversarial/Fighter
Emulation
Dyslexia
Reinvention
IDENTITY
Father
Blurred
HABITUS
Change of character
Transformative Process
Teacher
Conflict
Aspirational
Self-Efficacy
Resilience
Engineer


Expensive/ cheaper/additional costs
Money
Marketisation
Veil
Mask
Obligation
Hidden costs
Transactional
Transparency
Buy
Funds
Uncomfortable
Placement
Placement
Open day
Motivated
Background
Staff
Disadvantaged
Critical Assessment
Disorienting Dilemma
Pressure
Open day
Rigged
Employment
Debt
Funds
TRANSFORMATIVE
Ideology
Cost
PAL leader
Customers/Consumers
Emotional
Debt
Commodity
Inspiring
Institutional
Planning action
Self-examination
Provisional roles
Rebel/Revolt
Finance
Afford
Learning
Campaign
Campaigner
Privileged
Background
Academic
Rebel/Revolt
THEMATIC MAP
Academic
Campaigner
Family
Privilege
Fair/equitable
Privileged
Academic
Finance
IDENTITY
Moral
HABITUS
Intellectual
Rebel
Tribe
Romance
Leader
Independence
Background

Appendix 6: Development of Cog Conceptual Framework



Appendix 7: Students at the climate crisis (UCU 2019a)

Appendix 8: Black Lives Matter rallies and protests

Appendix 9: BU UCU's Four Fights: Decommodify Education Festival


11TH - 13TH MARCH 2020
In Solidarity with BU UCU's Four Fights
DECOMMODIFY EDUCATION FESTIVAL
FLIRT CAFE
21
THE TRIANGLE
BOURNEMOUTH
BH2 5RG
Programme
MARCH 11TH
MARCH 12TH
MARCH 13TH
FOUR FIGHTS ONE VOICE