

**REALISING POTENTIAL? THE CHALLENGES
OF WIDENING PARTICIPATION FOR
STUDENTS, FURTHER EDUCATION AND
HIGHER EDUCATION**

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REALISING POTENTIAL? THE CHALLENGES OF WIDENING PARTICIPATION FOR STUDENTS, FURTHER EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Abstract

This thesis, and the focus of my research, has emerged from my own practice and some of the challenges I have faced as a practitioner involved in developing widening participation initiatives and Foundation Degrees. It consists of an exploration of the value of a Professional Doctorate in enabling researching professionals to develop research in the context of their everyday practice, and how this can encourage practitioners to unsettle their taken for granted notions of their practice world. It uses both a Practice Development Project, and a research project to achieve this aim. In particular the study sought to explore whether widening participation policy and practice does realise the potential of those groups it targets, or whether it sustains the status quo of educational inequality. The study uses theoretical concepts such as habitus and sense-making in developing an understanding of the identities of non-traditional mature learners.

A Complementary Purposes Model was used to interview three different groups – higher education staff, further education staff and Foundation Degree students. A number of key themes emerged concerning the way in which Foundation Degrees are seen as being ‘not quite HE’ by students and staff alike. Alongside this FD students are seen as ‘other’ and different to traditional HE students.

Principally my thesis concludes that widening participation policy can be challenged in a number of ways, including the way it has been linked to the needs of the ‘knowledge economy’, and the way that it tends to be focused on individual learner deficits rather than on challenging oppressive social structures that reinforce and maintain inequality. Activity is focused on realizing individual potential rather than on the potential for learning that remains untapped within particular social groups.

Unless widening participation activity is embraced by all institutions with the same level of commitment and support, the status quo will remain, and the potential to learn within certain social groups will remain untapped.

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Glossary of Terms

DfES: Department for Education and Skills

DOH: Department of Health

D.Prof: Doctor of Professional Practice

EC: European Community

FD: Foundation Degree

FE: Further Education

GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education

HE: Higher Education

HEFCE: Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEQC: Higher Education Qualifications Committee

HESA: Higher Education Statistics Agency

HND: Higher National Diploma

LLN: Lifelong Learning Network

LSC: Learning and Skills Council

NIACE: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education

NQF: National Qualifications Framework

NVQ: National Vocational Qualification

OFFA: Office of Fair Access

ONS: Office of National Statistics

OST: Office for Science and Technology

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

QAA: Quality Assurance Agency

WBL: Work-based Learning

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‘Realizing potential? The challenges of widening participation for students, Further Education and Higher Education’

Prologue – chapter 1

Background context and overall aims of thesis

This chapter introduces the context of my thesis, the changing background of my roles and professional practice and the reasons why I choose to study for a Doctor of Professional Practice (D.Prof) over a more traditional PhD route. The thesis will also present chapters on my practice development project, literature review, research project and discussion. This will hopefully offer an integrated discussion of the issues I have encountered in my study and practice development work concerning widening participation and the development of Foundation Degrees. At the heart of my choice to undertake a Professional Doctorate over a traditional PhD route, was my perception of myself as a ‘practitioner’ rather than an ‘academic researcher’ within the context of my role as Head of Widening Participation (WP) in the School of Health and Social Care. As a post -1992 university, Bournemouth had grown out of the old polytechnic system and as such like other post-1992 universities

retained a centralised approach to governance and management, with a culture of management by specialist managers; within such a culture, ideas of the supremacy of the academic body had little place’ (Taylor, 2006, p.3).

As a result, the emphasis within the university was to focus on vocational excellence, and to provide qualified professionals to the local economy across a range of discipline areas. Historically, the emphasis had been on teaching rather than on other activities such as research or enterprise. I had taken the decision to try to develop a more balanced portfolio of skills, which involved becoming involved in both funded research activities and enterprise, alongside my teaching roles. Yet I still did not see myself as a ‘researching academic’, and on reflection I think my identity as an academic was very much informed by the overall ethos of the university which depicted teaching as the number one activity, and research and enterprise as minor additions.

Relevance to my own world of practice was therefore key in my decision to follow a Professional Doctorate route. I had previously considered studying for a PhD but had never really got past the browsing stage. Part of this was my concern that I would not be able to juggle my multiple roles as full-time lecturer, mother, and wife, and in fact the first time I considered applying for a PhD and actually got as far as registering I promptly got pregnant, and had to put my plans for study on hold. For me, the D.Prof offered a route to doctoral study that could more easily be accommodated alongside my working life, and would enable me to focus on my own developing practice at the same time. I also believed that it would be more meaningful to me as something that could be integrated into my everyday practice. Professional Doctorates can be seen as emerging models in education at doctorate level in Britain, and one that is focused more on the practice context of the student rather than pure research. I was concerned that a traditional PhD would be geared to a more academic mode of research which would be difficult to connect directly with my practice and work role, let alone the other roles I have in my life.

On a very basic level the D.Prof appeared to make sense to me. Being able to locate a topic for my own research and practice development activity that was firmly rooted in my professional role appeared attractive, and enabled me to consider issues that not only held a resonance for me as a practitioner, but also the department in which I worked. I hoped that such a route would not only develop my own understanding of widening participation further, but would lead to concrete practice outcomes. Head of Widening Participation was a new role within my academic school, as well as being an emerging area of activity for the university as a whole. As someone involved in developing widening participation activities, I felt that I lacked a critical understanding of this area of practice. The D.Prof allowed me the opportunity to explore some of these areas in depth, whilst exploring my own practice. My thesis concerns the following broad aims:

1. To acknowledge the contradictions in widening participation practice and the uncertainty, ambiguity and complexities which result from these contradictions.
2. To understand the implications of collaborative partnerships and the delivery of HE through FE
3. To explore how non-traditional learner identity and sense-making processes are influenced by the culture of learning experienced.

All of these aims have a resonance within my own practice experience. I felt that although I was involved in developing WP activities, this approach had an ‘uncritical’ appreciation of WP, and this probably echoed the understanding of the institution in which I worked. I therefore wanted to explore the complexities of this and challenge some of the taken for granted assumptions. My role demanded that I worked collaboratively with other institutions particularly in the development and delivery of Foundation Degree programmes. I was aware of some of the tension points in these relationships but felt that little was really understood about higher education (HE) perspectives of further education (FE) and vice versa. Finally, I wanted to discover more about the learner identities of mature non-traditional learners, so that my own practice, and institutional practice, could better accommodate their needs.

These aims involve trying to make more explicit the kinds of knowledge that inform practice, and the need to de-stabilize my own taken for granted ideas about widening participation and the needs of non-traditional students. The aims have led to the formation of the title for this thesis which concerns the challenge of whether widening participation activity actually enables those involved with it to realize their true potential as learners. On the surface this would appear to be a straightforward question, particularly as much government policy and rhetoric is focused on widening participation to higher education. However, once the surface is scratched this debate is not so clear cut, and it becomes apparent that despite much government policy and rhetoric directed at widening participation to HE, class still remains a major determinant of opportunity to progress into HE, as well as the type of university and programmes that students may enter. My own experience of changes in institutional policy also highlight the importance of how cultures of learning can either embrace or disengage from a widening participation ethos.

Why choose a Professional Doctorate

The following section will explore three inter-related themes:

- What do D.Profs offer in relation to traditional PhDs
- Dual identities – researcher versus practitioner
- The role of critical reflection in practice development

A doctorate is the highest level of academic award that can be achieved and it is expected that those holding them 'will be able to conceptualise, design and implement projects for the generation of significant new knowledge and understanding' (Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)2001, p. 2).

As a qualification the Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) has been in existence in the UK since the 1920s following a period of resistance by English universities. They had been first introduced in the USA about 60 years earlier (Simpson, 1983). Professional Doctorates have a more recent history in the UK, appearing in the early 1990s (Bourner et.al 2001). The narrow focus of traditional PhDs and their applicability to the 'knowledge economy' was questioned in the Government's 1993 White Paper on Research Policy (Office of Science and Technology [OST] 1993) which suggested that 'the traditional PhD is not well-matched to the needs of careers outside research in academic'(OST, 1993, p. 3). More recently it has been suggested that the PhD has little influence on employment outside academia (Neumann 2005; Kuang-Hsu Chiang 2003), and thus little relevance for the knowledge economy. As Evans (2002, p.157) suggests

'the traditional PhD is scrutinised because it focuses on the production of significant knowledge to a discipline, rather than new tradeable knowledge marketplace'.

The development of professional doctorates have occurred at a time when the 'knowledge economy' is a major concern for central government, alongside an emphasis on continuing professional development and lifelong learning (Bourner et al. 2001, p.74). The 'knowledge economy' discourse has at its heart the importance of research which will develop practice and feed into sustaining a productive and sustainable economy. Within a knowledge economy, knowledge becomes a commodity and due to its increasing abundance and sophistication, begins to assume an economic value as well as a more traditional use-value (Lyotard 1984).

The knowledge economy discourse not only affects doctoral education, but is relevant across all post-compulsory education. It is a central feature in the development of new types of educational qualifications that seek to meet the perceived skills gaps within the economy. This has resonance to the debate concerning the development of qualifications such as FDs whose remit is to meet the perceived gap in knowledge and

skills of associate professional and higher technician grade (DfES, 2003a, p.4). The knowledge economy discourse will be explored further as a theme within my literature review and practice development chapters, and is therefore a key theme within my thesis.

Seeing knowledge as a commodity means that it becomes something to be invested in through education and training. For individuals this may mean engaging in lifelong learning to ensure that they maintain and develop the necessary new skills required to remain employable. However, this brings into question other forms of 'pure' knowledge creation and research which become somewhat relegated in the quest for increased economic outputs and entrepreneurial concern. The knowledge economy discourse is defined in the UK, and in Europe, as the need to raise targets for higher level skills. These targets have been incorporated into the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) to produce a world leading knowledge-based economy in the European Union by 2010 (European Commission 2005).

Professional doctorates have been described as 'practitioner doctorates' in that they are concerned more with practice development and change than with pure research (Lester 2004). Research undertaken within the Australian context of professional doctorate programmes has identified a shift in higher education towards a more student led process as part of a move towards more work-based learning, vocationalism and professionalism (McWilliam et al, 2002). One definition of the professional doctorate is given by the United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE) which describes it as

'a programme of advanced study and research which, whilst satisfying the University criteria for the award of a doctorate, is designed to meet the specific needs of a professional group external to the University'
(UKCGE, 2002, p. 62).

My choice of a professional doctorate over a traditional PhD was that it enabled me to immerse myself in an area of research that was situated in my own world of practice. My work roles and practice experience focused my study and it is becoming increasingly recognised that certain generic doctorates allow students to be able to focus on their own professional experience. Stephenson et al. (2006, p. 26) describe this as

‘the pivotal position of the candidate as the principal agent of control of a programme situated within critical and demanding academic and professional contexts’.

The format of the Professional Doctorate has at its heart the centrality of professional practice. Bourner et al. (2001) offered an analysis of programme descriptions in the UK that identified a number of distinctive features of professional doctorates which reinforce the binary divide of ‘professional researchers’ (Ph.D) as opposed to ‘researching professionals’ (Prof.Doc). This type of ‘transformative learning’ is described by Bourner et al (2001, p.81) as being

‘attractive to those who view their own personal development and academic ambition as fully integrated with their professional development and have a commitment to furthering the cause of their profession’ .

This also fits into the distinction made by Gibbons et al. (1994, p.3) between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge, whereby Mode 2 knowledge is carried out in a context of application and ‘is more socially accountable and reflexive’. For me, it was important that the outcomes of my study and thesis have direct implications for developing my practice in higher education further, and would therefore have outcomes not only for myself, but for the wider organisation in which I work. This links into the idea of ‘knowing-in-action’ which locates the production of knowledge within the practice setting (Barnett 2000). Tennant (2004, p.440) argues that this is an artificial distinction and that the challenge for universities is not the distinction between traditional Ph.Ds and D.Profs, but the demands from the knowledge economy of a transformation from the ‘autonomous scholar’ to the ‘enterprising self’. The notion of enterprise and economic outcomes is a theme that runs throughout my thesis as the culture and context of higher education in Britain is increasingly framed within a discourse of economic competitiveness and increased economic outcomes (DfES, 2003a, p. 58).

My enterprising self at this point was linked into my role of Head of Widening Participation in the School of Health and Social Care at Bournemouth University. I undertook this role for the majority of my doctoral studies, until September 2007 when the university realigned its approach to WP and partnerships with local further education colleges (FECS). My role during this time included developing new

widening participation initiatives, working with HEFCE funded Aimhigher projects, liaising with the newly established Lifelong Learning Networks, and Foundation Degree developments. As part of this I developed a number of initiatives including taster events, conferences for schools and teachers, summer schools, and programmes of learning for mature learners under the Aimhigher Project. All these activities can be linked into my 'enterprising self', which increasingly involves me working in partnership with other organisations and groups, and considering new ways of engaging with 'non traditional' learners.

Reflexivity and Identity

There are tensions between one's practice role and being a student on the Professional Doctorate programme. I am aware that there may be problems associated with being a 'researching professional' in terms of moving beyond what we already know and do to achieve new insights and practice development. This may be particularly pertinent when I am an 'insider' researcher within the higher education institution I work in, and an 'outsider' researcher in the FE college environment. As Winter (1989, p. 34) suggests a 'research process must demonstrably offer something over and above this pre-existing level of understanding'. It is therefore important to adopt a critically reflective stance throughout my D.Prof studies to ensure that I move beyond what is already known and comfortable, into unknown 'risky' territory. This is important to demonstrate not only in the research aspect of my thesis but in my practice development project.

A reflective stance means that I need to engage in critical analysis of my own world of practice, synthesizing and evaluating this experience to create new knowledge. This involves me traversing my worlds as a widening participation practitioner and D.Prof student. This involves 'risky' territory to myself as researcher and practitioner, but also involves risk in terms of engaging in practice which may challenge the organisational context of my practice.

Central to this process is the ability to remain reflective about what I am doing and why I am doing it. This is made more complex by having co-existing identities as both student/researcher and practitioner. Being able to reflect upon these complexities is in itself central to practice development. As Freshwater (2001, p. 24) suggests 'Reflective practice can be seen as a companion and pre-cursor to practice

development in many ways'. Where does my practitioner role stop and my research and practice development activity begin? Am I Lee-Ann, Head of Widening Participation or Lee-Ann the D.Prof student and researcher? How do my identities of being mother, wife, daughter and friend fit into this? This may indeed reflect a post-modern perspective of the 'multiple identities' I have.

Postmodernism has evolved a perspective that acknowledges there is no one way of knowing, no one way of being, and no one way of experiencing reality (Warburton 1999). This raises the importance of recognizing 'otherness' by exploring the tensions and interrelationships of meaning (Chia 1996). I may therefore bring multiple perspectives into what I do as I am made up of different facets of identity. Self-realisation is a key component of reflection (Barnett 1997). Part of this involves challenging notions of 'certainty' and unsettling pre-conceived ideas and taken for granted thinking. As Cunliffe (2003, p. 984) suggests

'Reflexive scholars question the threads of philosophical and methodological certainty implicit in the goal of mainstream social science to provide an absolute view of the world'.

My choice of research and practice development activity is shaped by who I am and what I do. This has been described as 'personal stance' (Savin-Baden, 2004, p. 365). My personal stance includes my previous role as a social worker, my personal history, my past experiences, my present role, my values, my gender, and my social class which have all contributed to my choice of research subject and approach. I hope that my approach to my project will be both reflective and reflexive.

Schon's (1987) notion of swampy zones of practice has a certain resonance with my own background. Before embarking on my lecturing role at Bournemouth University, I was a social worker and the context of social work practice is very much one of reflection and reflexivity. The hallmarks of advanced practice as described by Youll and Walker (1995, p. 203) are 'the capacity for reflection, systematic review and critical analysis used in the development of responsive and innovative services'. What sets social work and social care apart from other caring professions, such as nursing, is the location of individuals in their social context (Scourfield 2002).

Social work practice is often value laden and it is important for practitioners not to lose sight of their own values and ‘personal self’ in practice. However practitioners need to be both reflective about their own practice and how values and beliefs impact upon service users, and reflexive in developing an understanding of how structural inequalities and power relations restrict life experiences as well. This is equally important for me as a D.Prof student, and is played out in a myriad of ways and in multiple contexts. I am aware of myself as a student/researcher within an institution of which I am a staff member and the need to be reflective about this.

In terms of the student experience or supervisory relationship this raises issues as I am being supervised by my peers. On a personal level this raises my anxieties about how I am perceived both as a student and peer by my colleagues. Equally important I am aware how structural inequalities and power relations within society can reproduce inequalities within the field of education. This is an important consideration within widening participation practice as students who experience widening participation initiatives and attend courses such as Foundation Degrees, may have experienced limited educational opportunity in their early life.

Adopting a critically reflexive stance is therefore central to my thesis, and has been described as being ‘inherently political’ (Wright, 2004, p. 40), and one in which it is important to be able to analyse a range of influences on the way we react to others and they to us. This moves beyond a reflection on myself as a practitioner and my own practice, and emphasises a critical knowledge of power relationships in which both personal and professional identities are embedded. It includes a critical understanding of the impact of structural influences and power relations on our daily encounters, and

‘a consideration of the perceptual, cognitive, theoretical, linguistic, (inter) textual, political and cultural circumstances that form the backdrop to- as well as impregnate- the interpretation’ (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000, p. 6).

Others have described this as ‘holistic reflexivity’ (Bleakley, 1999) which sets out an aesthetic and ethical agenda for practice or ‘epistemic reflexivity’ through ‘critical self-scrutiny’ (Usher and Edwards, 1994: 148-149). Within my thesis this includes developing a reflexive understanding of widening participation practice, the impact of inequalities and class differences in educational opportunity, and how these may be

reproduced rather than counteracted by widening participation policy. However I am aware that the path to reflexivity is 'a long and winding road', which has been described as being 'full of muddy ambiguity and multiple trails' (Finlay, 2002: 209). Reflexivity for me is about situating myself in the research and practice development activity, disclosing my value base, and developing a critical awareness of the way that the 'world' influences my thoughts and actions, and those of the people that I work and study with. In other words, I situate myself in 'unknown territory', and need to develop a critical gaze on both the world within and the world around me in order to generate new knowledge.

Reflexivity is used to explore how 'knowledge' is constructed by my multiple identities, as a widening participation practitioner, researcher and student. This highlights the need to use a model of reflexivity which acknowledges the existence of different versions of events (Taylor and White 2000). A reflexive stance requires me to subject my own knowledge claims and practices to analysis, and this involves unpicking the concept of widening participation which I had previously considered unproblematic and positive, and unsettling taken for granted notions about widening participation policy and practice. This process of metacognition (reflexivity) is central to deep learning and critical thinking (Moon 2007).

Reflexivity occurs on an individual level by self-questioning, whereby an internal dialogue is set up to explore the influence of my various identities, and that of others (Moon, 2004, p.216). It also involves me unpicking the concept of widening participation, and developing a more critical understanding of the impact of class and inequality on education, and how these are reproduced by institutional structures. It is therefore a political activity. However another important element within the D. Prof has been the role of the cohort in facilitating reflexivity. A key aspect of the cohort learning experience has been the role of 'telling stories' as a route to critical reflection and learning, and this has been achieved by the discussion and 'dialogue' we have experienced as a group. Therefore both 'internal dialogue' and 'group dialogue' have been important tools for reflexivity within this thesis.

Bohm (1989) used the word dialogue to refer to a particular form of interaction between people, and the process of dialogue encourages critical reflection (Brockbank & McGill 1998). Although language and communication are parts of our everyday existence dialogue has been described as

a form of conversation that makes it possible for participants to become aware of some of the hidden or tacit assumptions that derive from culture, language, and psychological makeup (Sparrow and Heel, 2006, p. 152).

The use of dialogue or telling our stories within group supervision can be viewed as a potentially empowering approach to learning which values the 'expertness' of the participants within the learning process. In a similar way to action research which is a collaborative approach to inquiry which involves participants in the research process as active members (Zuber-Skerrit 1996; Reason and Bradbury 2002), our group supervision sessions could be described as 'action learning'.

All of us contributed as participants and were involved in the learning and reflection that took place in these sessions. In the facilitated group supervision sessions we were encouraged to reflect upon the process of learning through stories (Lesham and Trafford 2006), which included how we came to choose our focus of research and the issues we faced as we negotiated these studies. We were encouraged to consider our thoughts and feelings, and the process of listening to our own stories and that of fellow students acted as a catalyst for both self discovery, and the identification of linkages across all of our studies. Just as the collaborative emphasis in 'action research' blurs the traditional boundaries between the dominant researcher and submissive research participant, so 'action learning' could be seen to enable new bonds to develop in contested spheres of knowledge.

This involves Professional Doctorate students being active partners in each others learning process. It therefore recognizes the expertise of scholar researchers, enabling them to share their own experiences and 'insider' knowledge, and as a result impact upon the learning process of the group. It also enabled us to be reflexive about the power relations and structural constraints which occur across a range of practice areas. For example one link that became a common theme or *leitmotif* in our discussions was the impact of 'organizational constraint'. We were able to draw parallels between the constraining effects of organizational structure and culture across a range of public services including education and health. We were able to explore on individual levels how it felt to be 'disempowered' by the organization, yet at the same time consider new ways of thinking about the issues based on the reflections of fellow students.

In this way our dialogue opened deeper understandings on both individual and cohort levels. Our experience of developing deeper levels of understanding through dialogue is supported by research into doctoral students, which concludes that story telling can 'extended learning from the individual to the group' (Leshem and Trafford 2006, p.24). The process of dialogue through group supervision could therefore be seen as a potentially empowering process for the doctoral students involved. At the beginning of the four years we were confused, overwhelmed by the task ahead, and feeling pretty much helpless. However, over the four years of the programme we have used narrative and stories in our dialogues with each other, and as a result our learning has become enriched and empowered by the process.

As it is important to unpick and unsettle my pre-conceptions about widening participation, I feel it is particularly important to reflect on my own fears and experiences, as well as being reflexive at what I see as 'collision' points between my worlds and identities. For example what challenges are there in the professional world where I exist as both student and employee? What challenges do widening participation policy and practice offer in terms of the way that 'non-traditional' students are perceived by HE and the impact this has on my own professional practice?

I have both insider and outsider perspectives of the organisation in which I am both employee and student. Does this raise issues for my fellow D. Prof students? Four work outside the HE institution and so come to the institution as 'outsiders' and are seen purely as students. Myself and one other student are employed by the same institution and are therefore both employee and student, or both 'insider' and 'outsider'. I feel at times this can be challenging as I have certain perspectives which are informed by my 'insider' knowledge of the institution in which we study. It also adds a level of complexity to my identity as full-time lecturer/part-time student, as both of these identities are within the same institution.

Another 'collision' point are the worlds of FE and HE, and this collision happens at multiple levels in my role as HE academic researching FE students experience, my role as Head of WP working alongside FE colleagues, and also my experience of being a part-time HE student researching part-time FE student experience. It is important to be critically reflexive about the power inherent in these different worlds

and roles, and the impact this may have not only on participants' responses to me, but on my own interpretation of what they say based on my 'insider' knowledge. I am also aware that the creation of new knowledge may be challenging for the worlds I work in particularly if it 'unsettles' the established views and practices of HE and FE. Drawing on my previous experience of social work I am aware that to be reflective means

'acknowledging the relevance of diverse forms of knowledge – practice wisdom, intuition, tacit knowledge and artistry as well as theory and research' (Ruch, 2005, p.116)

An individual's capacity for reflexivity encourages the development of self-awareness, whereby individuals consciously reflect on their actions and question the value of the decisions and judgements they make. Reflexivity is central to anti-oppressive practice, and encourages a capacity for self monitoring one's own values as well as the impact of dominant professional constructions influencing practice (White 1997), alongside the impact of structural inequalities. This is a form of self awareness in which individuals consciously reflect on their actions and question the value of the decisions and judgments they have made, taking account of their social, political and ethical contexts.

This is an important consideration for widening participation activities where 'non-traditional' learners may be portrayed as 'needy' or requiring extra support (Hudson 2005). Have these pre-conceptions which portray widening participation students as 'other' influenced my own practice and the way in which I see WP students? I believe these questions are central in adopting an anti-oppressive approach, and that reflexive research appears to be a natural interest for me as a result of my previous social work background, which has informed my interest in the idea of 'radical-reflexivity' in research (Cunliffe 2003). This raises questions about how we as researchers (and practitioners) construct meaning and

'means recognizing that we are working within a number of linguistic communities (e.g. academic, business) and need to unsettle our forms of reasoning and any claims of objectivity or truth' (Cunliffe, 2003, p. 989).

Reflexivity is therefore not just about developing greater self-knowledge, but is about developing practice through a more critical knowledge and understanding of the role

of power relationships within the structures and institutions in which we work. It encourages practitioners to question the epistemic basis of their practice, and unsettles the taken for granted notions that can inform practice. As part of this process I need to unsettle my own pre-conceptions concerning non-traditional students, HE through FE and Foundation Degrees. Links can be made here to the role of 'transformative learning' (Moon 2000) whereby critical appraisal and reflection lead to the development of restructured and creative practice. For example, I believe at the start of my thesis my 'practitioner' approach to widening participation students was informed by a view of their earlier educational failure (Taylor and Cameron 2002) which perhaps emphasises their own deficits rather than the impact of educational disadvantage.

I believe I had a rather naïve view that Foundations Degrees are a positive way to widen participation, and did not really appreciate that they could also be seen as sustaining rather than challenging social exclusion by creating a two tier system mainly delivered through FE (Gibbs 2002; Leathwood and O'Connell 2003).

My role in developing FDs did not really encourage me to adopt a critically reflexive stance towards what Foundation Degrees represent, but the D.Prof has encouraged me to do this.

One of the challenges of the D.Prof has been developing an awareness of the differences in reflection that I experience as a student and as a professional. Am I reflecting on the same things in the same way or do these different roles bring nuances and subtleties to the reflective activity? How do I integrate these two perspectives? In terms of my practitioner role, many of my day to day activities, meetings and projects have implications for my research and practice development and visa versa. My role has enabled me to discover some useful resources, and in particular enabled me to apply for funding to enable my practice development activity to take place. I have seen this as a fluid, organic experience but one in which I have needed to be aware of the boundaries of my multiple roles and the implications this has on my ability to develop my practice further.

The value of the 'cohort' to the learning process

As mentioned previously, the D.Prof cohort was central to the overall learning process through the group supervision unit. At the start of this journey, the

Professional Doctorate was an unknown quantity for me in terms of what was expected and how the four sections would finally come together as a whole thesis. Group supervision sessions were taken up with concerns about how our thesis would emerge from the initial ideas we had, and anxieties about attaining a doctoral standard of work. The cohort became and remains an integral part of this experience, and I see my fellow D.Prof. students as essential travelling companions.

In one early group supervision session I used the analogy of the London Tube map to describe our cohort experience. We all had the same destination in terms of a successfully completed D. Prof but we were all taking different routes to get there – one on the Circle Line, one on the District Line, and so on. In first year, when I started to undertake my comprehensive literature review and practice development project, I felt stuck on the platform. The doors were open but I was too afraid to step into the train in case I hurtled off in the wrong direction. This feeling passed once I had identified the focus of my practice development project, and started to plan for this. However, on reflection this was not a lonely process: I was not alone, but surrounded by my fellow students, who were also wondering about ‘which train to catch’ and which route to take.

The learning within this process generated was immense, as we discussed ‘the Phenomenological route’, the ‘ethnographic route’, ‘the auto-ethnographic route’, ‘the narrative route’, and many more. Although we all undertook the taught research units as part of the learning process, the theories and approaches discussed became far more meaningful as we grappled with them in our group supervision sessions. We were in this together, maybe some of our journeys would take us to dead-ends, but as a group we would support each other until we all got to our final destination.

A pivotal part of the D. Prof for me is being part of a cohort of students, and I think it would have been a far lonelier and less enriched journey without the companionship of my fellow students. The cohort identity and group supervision sessions are a key feature of the D.Prof programme, and served to reinforce us as a community of scholar practitioners. Central to this group identity were mutual respect, trust, understanding, co-operation and a feeling of enrichment. A process of holistic learning (academic, professional and personal) maybe better enabled through a group cohort experience (Mullen, 2003). In respect of the Professional Doctorate programme at Bournemouth University, cohort learning may be described as a

process through which a cohort of scholar practitioners engage in collective reflection and exploration of their perception associated with their doctoral study and practice development.

The discourse around professional doctorates focuses on the use of critical thinking and peer supervision, and in the Bournemouth model this is facilitated through the group supervision unit. To begin with this was supported by two staff facilitators who supported us to critically reflect on our experiences of being D.Prof students and our journeys through the programme. As our confidence and trust in each other grew the group became increasingly self-facilitating, culminating in a complete break away from the outside facilitators towards the end of the third year of the programme. Our move towards complete self facilitation was precipitated by a 'crisis', when one of our members informed us that she was transferring out of the programme and onto a traditional PhD route. Although not a life threatening crisis, I feel it was a crisis for the cohort, and certainly elements of a crisis as described by Parry (1990) were evident. This included a sense of uncontrollability, a disruption of routine, uncertainty about the future and individual distress (Parry, 1990, p. 15).

This transfer out of the D.Prof programme was prompted not by a change of focus in her study, which she continued to describe as being completely focused on practice development, but on difficulties with one of her supervisors and a belief that a PhD would allow for more creativity within her thesis. Although as a group we supported her in her choice, we all felt strongly that she was an essential part of our cohort of 6, and we wanted to remain a cohort despite her transferring out of the programme on to a traditional PhD. We also believed that a key element of the D.Prof was its emphasis on practice development and creativity, and it appeared wrong that a student should transfer out of this route as she felt that a PhD offered the scope for more creativity.

This caused much anxiety and distress within the group for two reasons. Firstly, it appeared to undermine the identity of the D. Prof as being rooted in practice and creativity, and secondly because it challenged our cohort identity. This 'crisis' brought us closer together as a group. In part I think this was because the 'crisis' made us question the value of the D. Prof and our choice of a more practitioner focused award. We felt threatened by her departure because it questioned our own choices and journeys, and as a result we huddled together more as a group.

Professional doctorates emphasise the importance of a connection with practice through the research topic (Lee et al. 2000) , yet one of us was transferring out of it as she felt it was the only way she could be creative in her thesis and practice development. This seemed fundamentally wrong at the time, and still does. The fact that the ‘cohort’ remained intact following the crisis speaks volumes about the identity and strength of the group, and the value of ‘group learning’ in such programmes.

An added complexity at the time, and indeed throughout the programme, has been my identity as a D. Prof student, within an institution in which I’m employed as an academic. These complexities are explored further in my thesis, but it is pertinent here to raise some of the issues of being a colleague to those that are supervising or facilitating learning on my doctoral programme. The ‘crisis’ outlined above raises issues of ‘loyalty’ and ‘identity’ when one is both a student and employee. The tension caused by dual identities as student and academic within the same university are highlighted in research by Denicolo (2004) into colleague supervisory relationships. How should I respond to my fellow student who had experienced a difficult relationship with her supervisor, particularly when this didn’t mirror my own positive experience? How would I respond to my colleague who was no longer her supervisor, particularly as this person facilitated the group supervision unit as well? I had ‘insider’ insights into what it is like to be a student, at the same time as having ‘insider’ insights into being an academic and supervisor. There was a collision between the two ‘cultures’ of learning in which I exist.

On reflection I feel that cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) has some resonance with my situation at this point. I had insights into both positions, and this made me feel uncomfortable. This uncomfortable feeling was not only on a personal level, but also concerned how the cohort would respond to these issues. I was also concerned that my fellow students would see me differently as an ‘insider’ academic with loyalties to the academic perspective rather than student perspective. In retrospect, I don’t think this happened, and indeed we remained very much a cohort throughout the experience. We were faced with a dilemma; we could remain in our existing model of group supervision, without one member of the cohort but with our staff facilitators; or we could go it alone remaining as a cohort of six.

On the particular session where this all came to light, we decided we needed to be together as a group, and we sent a message to the supervisor that we did not want him to join us that day (the other supervisor was away). The discussion was painful. We were angry that our fellow student felt compelled to leave, and felt let down by the programme. We also felt that her decision to transfer to a traditional PhD programme, because it would allow for more creativity, undermined the D.Prof. as a programme. My choice, my study and my identity as a D.Prof student felt undermined at this point, and I think this was a common feeling across the cohort.

Reflecting back over the events of that day I think we were all going through a process of anticipatory grief (Scrutton 1995). We would no longer be 'whole' again as one of us was leaving and as Scrutton (1995, p.81) describes

‘a period of anticipation can allow survivors to begin the task of mourning, and begin to experience the pain of loss’.

Although not a loss through death, the sudden departure of a key member of the cohort was a significant loss nevertheless. It was also unexpected, and therefore accompanied by a great deal of shock. I think as a group we also felt guilt that perhaps we should have noticed the unhappiness of our fellow student earlier in the year, and given more support. Our response was to pull together as a group and remain as a cohort of 6 even though one member had officially left the programme. This was an empowering decision and one that reiterated the central importance of the cohort to the learning experience. We *are* the D.Prof – it is a human dynamic experience.

We decided to remain together as a cohort, and go it alone without academic facilitators for the group supervision unit. On reflection these events have reinforced the importance of the group learning experience and 'group identity'. I believe that a particular strength of a D. Prof route is that the cohort and group supervision elements offer a 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998) that facilitates and supports learning in a way that would not happen on a more traditional PhD route. Such a community of practice facilitates both reflection and reflexivity within learning, and the cohort learning experience has been central in enabling us to develop a reflexive stance about the worlds of practice we inhabit.

This has developed deeper insights into the way in which parallels exist in the way that structural and power inequalities are reproduced across all institutions and areas of practice. This certainly helped to develop my own understanding of the impact of power relations in education and widening participation, and how this is played out in the arena of FE and HE provision.

This chapter has set the scene for my thesis in terms of exploring my choice of a Professional Doctorate, the centrality of my own practice context to my study, and the centrality of 'reflexivity' to critical thinking. The following chapters within my thesis draw together the various strands of the Professional Doctorate programme, including literature review, practice development, research project and narrative to produce a holistic exploration of the challenges of widening participation policy and practice, and whether it works towards realizing the potential of the students involved. Chapter 2 contains a literature review which was undertaken in order to contextualise the background to widening participation policy and the development of Foundation Degrees. This was driven in part by a 'practitioner' focus on the literature, and this also helped to establish the background context of my Practice Development Project, which is explored in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 contains a review of the theoretical literature related to the work of Bourdieu which emerged as an important theoretical construct within my thesis during the literature review, and reflections upon my practice development project. It therefore serves as a bridge between the 'practitioner' concerns which are explored in the Practice Development Project, which focus upon engaging excluded 'non-traditional students'; issues identified within the literature review concerning educational disadvantage and exclusion; and the themes that arose as a 'researcher' into the experience of Foundation Degrees which highlight the importance of habitus and social capital for non traditional students attempting to engage in higher education. The development of these three Chapters illustrate the complexity of widening participation practice, and the different focus that is reflected in the emerging literature that may be policy based, practice based, or related to theoretical constructs. These three elements will be reflected upon again in the discussion and conclusion chapters of my thesis.

The next chapter will explore in more depth the following areas:

- The emergence of my practice development project from within the ‘swampy zones’ of my practice (Schon 1987)
- The emergence of ‘practitioner’ focused literature
- A comprehensive review of widening participation literature.

Chapter 2: A practitioner review of the literature

Introduction

The reflective nature of the D.Prof can be described in terms of the lived experience or practice based experience of me as both researcher and practice developer. One of the aims of the Professional Doctorate as stated in the Bournemouth University (2002, p.18) D. Prof Student's Handbook is 'to facilitate students to undertake critical, reflexive appraisal of practice, and to demonstrate new contribution made by a practice development project'. It is not designed to meet the specific needs of one particular professional group but rather allows the candidate to focus on the topic that suits their own context and practice. The structure of the D.Prof at Bournemouth suggests that the thesis will be constructed in four parts. These are

- a research thesis
- reflections on practice or casework with evidence of practice development
- A systematic review of practice or a related topic
- Narrative defending the integration of work and original contribution to knowledge

At the beginning of the programme I felt confused about how these four elements would emerge, and in particular how the practice development element would 'fit'. Would it emerge from my research study, or would it be related to some other aspect of my practice or my thesis? My own lived experience of being 'worker', 'researcher' and 'practice developer' cannot be treated as unproblematic sites for knowledge production as it is 'constructed and re-constructed within history, context and discourse (Johnston and Usher, 1997, p. 141). In reality these different aspects of my thesis merged together, in a way that is similar to the blurring of my own identities as practitioner, student and researcher.

The context of my practice development project influenced my early review of the literature and these two elements took place concurrently. This part of my literature review therefore had a 'practitioner focus', as I was approaching the practice development project with my WP practitioner hat on, and had an interest in the policy

and literature which underpinned my own practice. At this stage I was interested in exploring the background to widening participation as a discourse, and research that explored the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of WP interventions. The questions that concern 'me the practitioner' may have a different focus to the questions that concern 'me as researcher' and as a result I divided the literature review into two parts.

As a practitioner I have been interested to understand more about the complexity of widening participation policy, and the issues which influence my own practice such as working with FE, and the experiences and needs of mature learners. This review of the literature therefore relates to the widening participation literature and policy that grew alongside my practice development project. As my thesis developed I began to explore aspects of the literature which informed my research and the experience of mature non-traditional learners who are studying on FDs. This included literature concerning the impact of class on education, and specifically the theoretical approach of Bourdieu.

This division of the literature review within my thesis can be seen to link to one of the overall aims of my thesis which is 'to acknowledge the uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity of widening participation practice'. Part of this complexity is the result of the different drivers for WP, and the different focus that is reflected in the emerging literature that may be policy based, practice based, or related to theoretical constructs. This suggests that the literature which practitioners find useful may be different to the literature that academic researchers are interested in producing. This also highlights the co-existing identities within my thesis, and the way in which my 'practitioner' identity comes to the fore when considering issues related to practice.

My interest in the literature on widening participation therefore needed to look at different aspects of the same phenomenon and the existence of multiple views. However the intention was not to identify all the literature on a particular topic but 'to identify specific groups of papers that possess characteristics that are relevant to the phenomenon being studied' (Booth 2001, p.8). The model proposed by Booth (2004) is useful when exploring the range of literature that can be useful to practitioners. This includes research where there is a direct application of results; research that has conditional application of results; derivation where some aspects may have relevance for practice; and enlightenment where the research has no direct application to practice but enhances appreciation of a particular issue (Booth, 2004, p.197).

Alongside this range of literature, I was also interested in the grey literature on widening participation which is made up of government policy and guidance, as well as the emerging practitioner focused literature being produced by agencies such as Foundation Degree Forward, Aimhigher and the HE Academy.

The focus for my review of the widening participation literature was to explore the background context of widening participation and the evidence underpinning it. This included:

- The policy background
- Theoretical discourse linked to the widening participation debate
- Research studies which inform widening participation practice

The initial search of the databases took place during the first year of my study. Although it could be argued that the literature on engaging non-traditional learners includes the large range of resources concerning Access to Higher Education programmes which developed in the UK from the 1970s, I chose to focus the start of my literature search on the period following the election of the Labour Government in 1997. This boundary is highlighted by the publication of three national policy reports, Fryer (1997), Kennedy (1997) and Dearing (1997), which all placed widening participation centre stage. Foundation Degrees development joined this arena in 2000 with the publication of the government's consultation document on Foundation Degrees (DfEE, 2000b). The boundary of my initial literature review is therefore 1997-2005, although as my research and thesis progressed, I revisited the initial literature review.

The method used for this comprehensive review of the widening participation literature included a number of broad-based search terms: 'widening participation'; 'widening-access'; 'under-represented groups'; and 'non-traditional learners'. As I was also interested in the way in which new types of qualifications feed into the widening participation debate, and the impact of offering higher education through further education colleges I also included the search terms 'lifelong learning' 'Foundation Degrees', and 'HE through FE'. As this review was driven by my own 'practitioner focus' and the context of widening participation within a UK context, my inclusion criteria were UK based policy documents and research, and my exclusion

criteria were non UK policy documents and research related to non-UK widening participation policy, and research where there might be different policy contexts and educational cultures.

I used electronic searches of the following data bases: Academic Search Premier (1997-2005), Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts ASSIA (1997-2005), British Education Index (1997-2005), ERIC (1997-2005), the HEFCE website, Aimhigher website, HE Academy website, and the Foundation Degree Forward website. Since this initial review of the literature, I have revisited these sources in order to update my thesis.

A number of key themes emerged from this review of the literature which included:

- the links between widening participation and an economic discourse of education
- the links between lifelong learning discourse and an economic discourse of education
- social exclusion and educational inequality, which can be linked to the theoretical framework of Bourdieu which is discussed further in Chapter 4 of this thesis.
- The role of Foundation degrees in trying to bridge the gap between economic imperatives of up-skilling the workforce, whilst achieving social justice and inclusion for traditionally excluded groups within higher education.

The following section contains a comprehensive review of the literature related to widening participation, and the related topics of Foundation degrees and the delivery of HE through FE.

Background

In 1997 the concept of widening participation was put firmly on the map due to several key reports and the election of New Labour with a promise of ‘education, education, education’. Three national policy reports focusing on the need to expand post-16 participation in education, Fryer (1997), Kennedy (1997) and NCHIHE (1997) all placed widening participation centre stage. The Dearing and Kennedy Reports provided an impetus for consideration of differential access to higher education (HE)

in various sub groups of the population, whether in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability or socio-economic status.

Widening participation implies that all young people should have access to some form of education or training beyond their statutory schooling, thereby extending the notion of equality of opportunity to all. However widening participation is a complex arena, and the drive towards widening access and participation in higher education has been described as a mixed bag of a social movement (Thomas 2001). It is not just about widening access to 50% of all young people by 2010 (DfES 2003b) but is focused on 'including' those groups traditionally 'excluded' from participating in higher education. It is therefore about broadening student diversity, not just increasing numbers (Thomas 2001) and 'diversity' is claimed to be the most significant emerging concept in post-compulsory education (Elliott 2003).

The widening access and participation agenda has become embedded as a significant core practice in higher education (HE). The White Paper "The Future of higher education" (DFES 2003b, p.17) confirmed the Government's commitment to the philosophy and practice of widening participation by declaring that

The social class gap among those entering higher education is unacceptably wide. Those from the top three social classes are almost three times as likely to enter higher education as those from the bottom.

The White Paper not only reinforces the importance of social class within educational inequality, but also roots government policy towards widening participation within a knowledge economy discourse which links future economic competitiveness with lifelong learning and the need to up-skill the workforce. The expansion of HE is therefore a pre-requisite of a growing economy.

This is highlighted by the way in which the expansion of HE and the government target of increasing participation to 50% of those aged 18-30 by the end of the decade, is focused on two-year work-focused foundation degrees (DfES,2003b, p. 7). Initiatives to widen access and participation in higher education from under-represented groups are supported in a variety of ways:

- Re-introducing a grant of at least £1,000 per year

- Continuing fee remission, targeting people from poorer backgrounds who will not have to pay the first £1,125 of any tuition charge, and some being exempt from the whole £3,000 charge
- An Office of Fair Access (OFFA) overseeing universities charging plans and widening access policies

The introduction of grants and fee remission acknowledges the importance of countering low participation rates due to social disadvantage, but in many ways this simplifies the ways in which those from lower social economic groups are excluded from higher education. The impact of social class on exclusion from higher education is a key theme in the sociology of education, and this along with the work of theorists such as Bourdieu will be explored more fully in a later chapter. For now this literature review will continue to consider the policy context of WP and discussion of terms such as under-represented and non-traditional.

Definition of terms

Widening participation is not only a key government policy initiative, but also a major focus for university activity due to financial incentives and expectations from HEFCE. However, it is a complex area of debate, one that is informed by both economic and social exclusion discourse, alongside an understanding of the changes that educational systems are experiencing due to the impact of ‘new managerialism’ which stresses quality audit, and other outcome measures such as HEFCE performance measures (Deem and Brehony 2005).

In Britain, HEFCE continues to provide annual performance indicators (HEFCE 2003) for all Higher Education Institutions showing recruitment and retention trends for ‘under-represented’ groups as well as benchmarks based upon entry qualifications, age of students, subject studied and location of the institution. HEFCE uses three major indicators of access, in relation to young entrants, in its annual Performance Indicators report:

- The percentage of entrants from state schools or colleges
- The percentage of entrants from social class IIIM,IV or V
- The percentage whose home area, as denoted by postcode, is known to have a low proportion of 18 and 19 year olds in HE

Within the literature different terms are used to describe those groups traditionally excluded from higher education which includes 'under-represented' as used with HEFCE indicators, and 'non-traditional' which has a variety of interpretations. Different discourse will tend to frame 'non-traditional' differently. These different ways of highlighting those groups and individuals excluded from learning at HE level can be linked with different discourse.

Within an 'equality of opportunity discourse' those described as 'non-traditional' learners are those that have been socially or educationally disadvantaged which included

those from working class backgrounds, particular ethnic minority groups, immigrants, and, in the past frequently women
(Schuetze and Slowey 2002, p. 312).

An equality discourse can also be seen to be central to including those with disabilities within HE, and this is reinforced in QAA and HEFCE benchmarks for participation (Riddell 2007). A 'life-cycle discourse' tends to focus on mature or adult students with a work-based learning background who have unconventional learner profiles, and links can be made lifelong learning discourse and skills improvement. This has resonance with my thesis which explores the experiences of non-traditional learners who are engaging in learning on Foundations degrees, and the benefit this can offer to their long-term career development.

Central to any discussion concerning WP is the way in which the 'excluded' are identified, and how this influences the way in which certain groups are targeted by WP activity. The issue of social exclusion and developing initiatives to combat it within the sphere of education is a central tenet of Aimhigher initiatives. Recently the effectiveness of Aimhigher initiatives in targeting those who are 'excluded' has been questioned particularly in terms of the accuracy in targeting initiatives on 'under-represented groups'.

A recent review by HEFCE (2006a) highlights the need to effectively target initiatives using appropriate measures such as parental occupation or relative deprivation data. This echoes previous concerns that widening participation activities such as 'Excellence in Cities' which was established by New Labour to boost inner-city state

schools, actually benefited middleclass children more than working class children who attended the same school (Whitty 2001, p.292). This raises questions about the effectiveness of strategies to combat social exclusion within education, and whether they indeed benefit those groups that they are meant for. It also raises the issue of whether middle class children and parents are better able to make use of projects such as Aimhigher as HE perpetuate a system which valorises middle rather than working class cultural capital (Ball 2003). Middle class families can therefore benefit from projects set up for under-represented groups by playing the game to their best advantage.

A widening participation discourse

Although participation in HE has increased dramatically in recent years, the increase in participation is not uniform across all social groups (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997). Research has highlighted that many children from working class backgrounds do not aspire to HE as they do not see it as a place for them (Archer et al, 2003). This finding is echoed in the international literature, which confirms the position that although there has been an expansion in the numbers of those in HE, this is not mirrored by an increase in participation by under-represented groups. This position is summed up by the Council of Europe (1996) which stated that

higher education, in terms of its accessibility by all socio-economic groups, is clearly not for the masses (Council of Europe 1996, p.55).

Following publication of the White paper *The Future of Higher Education* (2003b) the Government published a document entitled 'Widening Participation in Higher Education' (2003d) that put forward proposals for the creation of the Office of Fair Access (OFFA). Within this document the Government suggested that the principle barriers to widening participation were raising attainment and aspirations of under-represented groups, stating 'that raising standards of education and attainment are the best long-term route to widening participation in higher education' (2003d, p.2). Proposals included in this policy were that the requirement to pay tuition fees upfront would be abolished. Students deferring their fees would do so following graduation through the tax system. The Government created the Office of Fair Access to oversee the implementation of widening participation activity.

When discussing widening participation policy, it is important to explore what this term actually means, as the terms widening participation and widening access both appear in the literature. Are widening access and widening participation the same thing, or put another way does widening access ensure that those from lower socio-economic groups participate in HE? It is useful to offer further clarification here.

Widening participation is about widening ‘diversity’ in the student population and not just increasing numbers of students in HE. Tonks and Farr (2003) take this further by suggesting that ‘widening access’ means increasing the representation in HE of particular sub-groups which are currently under-represented, whereas ‘widening participation’ means seeking a more representative cross-section of young people across all universities and subjects.

The distinction here is that diversity should not only be increased in HE but across all universities and courses. This relates to concerns that WP activity has tended to be focused within the post-92 universities, the old polytechnics, rather than within the elite institutions. This is relevant to my own position and study as I work within a post-92 university, where there has been a reasonably good response to dealing with issues of widening participation. This might not be the same picture if I was employed by a so-called elite institution. It has been suggested that WP students are pathologised as lacking aspiration and ability (Leathwood and O’Connell 2003) and this serves to exclude them further from access into the elite institutions and courses as they are depicted as different and needy.

Government interpretations of widening participation have actually compounded this issue by focusing on new types of qualifications which are increasingly offered outside of traditional HE environments. Patricia Hodge, the Education Secretary in 2002 suggested that widening participation would occur through foundation degrees and sub-degree qualifications (Hodge 2002). This approach has been interpreted by some as promoting a two-tier system, ensuring that the old elite system continues to thrive alongside a new mass system of education, although ‘mass’ still predominantly means middle class students (Leathwood and O’Connell 2003). Others have linked access within this new mass system to the relatively ‘advantaged’ within communities of disadvantage (Forsyth and Furlong 2003).

The widening participation agenda within HE means that it is imperative for HEIs to draw from a wide pool of potential recruits and this is summed up by Hatt and Baxter (2003: 18) who state that

... if the government target of 50 per cent participation in HE by 2010 is to be achieved then HEIs will need to recruit students from different educational and social backgrounds. Many of these entrants will have progressed to HE from a college of further education.

Therefore partnership between FE and HE is centrally important to the widening participation debate, and the development of progression routes is a key part of this relationship. As a result it has been suggested that the distinction between further and higher education is becoming increasingly blurred as

the move towards a single seamless system is in keeping with the prevailing policy focus on social inclusion and widening participation (Young 2006, p.1).

The widening participation debate is not just confined to Britain – indeed many European countries are focused on the issue of how to widen participation in HE. The European Union expressed concerns about widening access in its White Paper on the learning society (EC 1995) and focused on combating social exclusion in education by offering second chances to individuals. Within a European context widening access to educational opportunity has been a continuing commitment of the European Community which speaks of ‘equal opportunities for access to quality learning throughout life to all people’ (Commission of the European Communities 2000, p.4).

Indicators of access are just one part of the equation and it is important to be aware of other measures of success such as outputs concerned with achievement, progression and employment (Elliot 2003). Indeed a key feature of widening participation involves working with schools and the community in ‘sensitive, trusted and sustained outreach’ (Fryer 1997, p.16). Partnership activity, be that between schools, work, community, and FE will continue to be a key feature of HE in the future (Murphy and Fleming 2003). Increased participation in education was linked to increased HE/FE collaboration in the publication of the Government’s 1991 White Paper Higher Education: A New Framework. More recently HEFCE has spoken of the need to

increase collaboration between HEIs and partners from other education sectors to improve progression routes to HE from underrepresented groups (HEFCE 1998, p.14b).

The way in which higher education institutions operate have altered over the last two decades in part due to the massification of higher education systems (Tynjala et al. 2003) which encompasses a changing culture of HE alongside an increased and diversified student body.

Economic Discourse and Widening Participation

One of the arguments used to support widening participation links it to economic imperatives, and its central role in sustaining continued growth and success of the economy of Britain. Discourses around social exclusion, lifelong learning and widening participation are woven together within this debate. Increasing the numbers of those entering HE has been depicted as one of the key ways to ensure the relevant skills mix required to ensure economic competitiveness, and in doing so, combat social exclusion (Lister 2000). This is summed up by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES, 2002a, p.3) which suggests that

In the 21st century, to be prosperous, the economy will depend heavily on the creativity and skills of its people. In a knowledge economy it is vital that we tap the potential of every one of our citizens.

As part of this, the UK has been active in promoting education for growth (Wolf et al. 2006). The Government in both the recent White Paper (DfES 2003d) and the previous key policy documents such as the Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997) sets the context of widening participation with that of economic competitiveness. This frames the benefits of higher education in terms economic benefits to the individual as well as to society as a whole.

On a micro level, there has been shown to be a strong link between an individual's qualifications and their earnings, with evidence of a higher wage premium associated with higher levels of qualifications (Campbell 2001, p. 5). Education is linked to economic growth, and higher education is the most significant link to economic growth (DfES 2003a, p.58), whereas low skills are related to high unemployment and low pay (Layard et al. 2001). Interestingly, the link between education and economic

performance goes back to Victorian times when education was blamed for the loss of Britain's economic supremacy (Sanderson 1999).

Feeding into this economic discourse are concerns over skills shortages. This is supported by forecasts offered by the Institute for Employment Research (2001) which show that by 2010, the number of jobs in higher level occupations such as those in the associate professional grade and higher technician grade, will grow by over one and a half million. This suggests a need to invest in high level skills to maintain a competitive community, and this is a theme which is developed by the 2003 White Paper '21st Century Skills'. This White Paper stresses that

We must compete on the basis of our capability for innovation, enterprise, quality and adding greater value through our products and services. All that is dependent on raising our skills game (2003a, p.11).

It has been argued that the demand for more workers with higher levels skills is pushing the drive to widen participation as the demand can no longer be met by the middle classes alone (Watts 2006). In this way widening participation can be seen as more than just a social justice/social inclusion discourse, with the ideal of combating inequalities and including those groups which have been traditionally excluded from education. It is also one that has the economic discourse at its heart and as a result it has been argued that

the desire for social justice is undermined by a utilitarian need to produce an increased workforce with higher level skills in order to stimulate economic growth (Watts 2006, p. 301).

A focus on the economic discourse has taken place in the context of wider changes within British social policy over the past twenty-five years. These changes have impacted on the relationship between the 'self' and 'society', and are influenced by the way the government funds and provides access to a variety of provision including, health, social care and education. Within education there is a move away from the concept of 'learner' to that of 'student' (Leathwood and O'Connell 2003). This move shifts the responsibility of learning from the state to the individual.

Changes in the economy, globalisation and the need for a flexible workforce have promoted the notion of the 'lifelong learner' (Jary and Thomas 1999), placing the

responsibility on each individual to equip themselves with the necessary skills to compete in new employment markets. This is similar to the way in which ‘patients’ and ‘clients’ have been constructed into ‘consumers’ within the health and social care markets. The individual is made to take increasing responsibility for meeting their needs in both sectors. This can be seen to have its roots in neo-liberalism and free-market thinking, and the concepts of autonomy and self-determination (Dean 1999). The impact of this increasing ‘individualisation’ in education is that the individual is made to take responsibility for themselves as learners, and consequently to ensure that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to make them employable. As Levitas (1999, p.121) suggests what is described as a ‘lifetime entitlement to learning’ is effectively a lifetime obligation to acquire and maintain marketable skills’.

The emphasis on economics and ‘employability’ feeds directly into the development of Foundation degrees, with their emphasis on work-based learning and key vocational skills. This is linked to the ‘detraditionalisation’ of higher education (Johnson, 2003, p. 6), which

although central within the widening participation debate, might also lead to ‘a more instrumental practice of vocationalism (Johnson, 2003, p. 7).

This might reinforce the notion for the more traditional ‘elite’ universities, that widening participation through new types of educational provision, such as foundation degrees is not for them. This is reinforced by the way that non-traditional students are perceived by ‘elite’ institutions, and feeds into the way in which some HE institutions perceive widening participation initiatives as ‘risky’, due to possible extra support being required and higher attrition rates.

The ethos of some HE institutions can act to disadvantage ‘non-traditional’ students as it reinforces a view of them as ‘other’ within the higher education community of learning (Tett 2000; Read et al. 2003). This can be linked to the notion of a class ceiling (Brine and Waller 2004), which serves to prevent the movement of ‘non-traditional’ learners past certain positions. However findings from research into these areas indicate that widening participation students will be at least as likely to complete their studies as those groups who have traditionally entered HE (Hatt et al. 2003). The importance of supporting widening participation students appropriately is raised in research conducted by MacDonald and Stratta (2001) that highlights the importance

not only of macro policy but of the micro culture of institutions and individuals engaged in widening participation activity.

There is consequently a paradox in the widening participation debate. A policy which has been conceived to reduce inequalities and improve social inclusion can sometimes work to increase social exclusion as it reinforces the current education system as being basically sound, whilst declaring that 'there is something wrong with the people who do not participate' (Martin and Williamson 2002, p. 52). Therefore those that it intends to include within higher education, can become pathologised by widening participation (Leathwood and O'Connell 2003). Alongside this, changes in funding could be seen to add to the exclusionary aspects of government policy. Although the government frames widening participation in terms of economic considerations and social justice (DfES 2003d), there appears a paradox in this policy due to the abolition of the maintenance grant and the introduction of tuition fees. To try to compensate for this a new raft of initiatives have come on line including Aimhigher Partnerships for Progression, Summer Schools Programmes, Excellence in Cities and Education Action Zones.

Lifelong Learning Discourse

'Lifelong learning' as a term is open to debate, and can be seen to be bound up with notions of 'citizenship', inclusion and exclusion. It has been suggested that 'the dominant discourse of lifelong learning is a political rather than an educational discourse' (Martin, 2003, p.566). The political and economic dimensions of education and learning were famously highlighted by Tony Blair, Prime Minister, who said 'Education is the best economic policy we have' (Blair 1998, p.9). Therefore within the lifelong learning discourse education and training across the lifespan is linked to improving social inclusion and social equity, as well as increasing economic competitiveness. This is closely bound to the economic discourse of education that sees education as linked to economic growth. Within this discourse higher education is the most significant link to economic growth (DfES 2003a), whereas low skills are related to high unemployment and low pay (Layard et al. 2001).

Links between economic success and lifelong learning policies have also been promoted by the European Union (EU). Lifelong learning was first identified as a strategic priority in the 1993 White Paper on *Growth, competitiveness and*

employment and then in 1995 in the White Paper on *Teaching and learning: towards the learning society*. Lifelong learning was proposed as a response to increased globalisation and technical change, and a key to sustain European economic growth and competitiveness. Historically, what has been given less attention is whether the processes and function of learning throughout the life-course are different from initial education (McNair 1998), and this has implications for the modes of learning offered and the type of support required by mature non-traditional learners. This is relevant within my thesis which explores the experiences of non-traditional mature learners on FD programmes, and their needs as learners.

A key issue is the learner identities that such learners construct and the type of support offered by HE institutions to meet their learning needs. The needs of those engaging in life long learning may therefore be qualitatively different to younger students, or indeed those from backgrounds where progression into HE is the norm rather than the exception. In Britain the ‘lifelong learning discourse’ of education has been reinforced by the Government through Lifelong Learning networks which are funded through HEFCE, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the DfES. This is a way of encouraging joint approaches to promoting progression into higher education. Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) have particular implications for vocational and mature learners. Most LLNs are regionally based, although there are a number of national projects. All of the LLNs emphasise partnership as a central principle in improving learning opportunities for vocational learners.

Part of the remit of LLNs is to ensure that learners have access to a range of progression opportunities so that they can move between different kinds of vocational and academic programmes as their interests, needs and abilities develop (HEFCEa 2007). The work of the LLNs has been given increased relevance by the publication of the Further Education White Paper: *Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances* (DfES 2006) and the *Leitch Review of Skills* (2006) which have raised the profile of vocational learners, through an emphasis on lifelong learning.

A commitment to lifelong learning suggests that post-compulsory education can no longer just be an option for the selected few, but must be provided as a right for all (Young 2006). These changes have impacted on the relationship between the ‘self’ and ‘society’, and the responsibility placed upon the individual to take responsibility to engage in lifelong learning and skills development. This is influenced by the way

the government funds and provides access to a variety of provisions including, health, social care and education. This discourse reinforces the importance of individual advancement and responsibility in ensuring that one has the necessary skills to engage in employment across the lifespan. This is an argument made by the 2003 White Paper '*Skills for the 21st Century*' which stresses that 'the imperative now is employability for life' (2003a, p.11). A critique of this is that such an approach could be seen as pathologising those that don't engage in developing their own skills and abilities and playing their part in the knowledge economy by becoming lifelong learners.

Social Exclusion Discourse

The concept of social exclusion has recently been described as a 'leitmotif' in policy initiatives in a number of countries (Jarman 2001). The Commission of European Communities (1992; 1993) have highlighted social exclusion as a key theme within social policy in Europe, and 'participation' is seen as being central within this policy (Commission of European Communities 1993 pg.47). However, it remains an ambiguous term and one that has various contradictions and meanings embedded within it. The European Union (1990) defined social exclusion as 'social rights of citizenship...to a basic standard of living and to participation in the major social and occupational opportunities in society' (Room, 1993, p.14). Although using the rhetoric of social rights and citizenship, the European Union context is linked to the objective of achieving social and economic cohesion (Percy-Smith 2000) and this approach can be seen to be strongly linked to the economic discourse of education.

It has been suggested that the terms social exclusion and poverty are blurred and that both are concerned 'with a lack of possessions, or ability to do things, that are in some sense considered normal by society as a whole' (Howarth et al. 1998, p.18). However, others suggest that the concept of 'social exclusion' has displaced the term 'poverty' signalling a move to a social rights definition which neglects fundamental issues of power amongst different social groups (Byrne 1999) and an uncritical acceptance of capitalism (Levitas, 2000:358).

Social exclusion has been defined as 'the denial (or non-realisation) of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship' (Walker and Walker 1997, p.8). This definition ignores the role of power in exclusionary processes, and the impact of particular groups excluding others. For example within higher education this would

account for the power of the middle classes to colonise HE as their own, whilst excluding other groups. Social exclusion can therefore also be viewed as a relational concept in the way that individuals or groups are excluded by 'social boundaries' from other groups and from society as a whole (Madanipour et al. 1998, p.17). The impact of social boundaries and their exclusionary impact will be explored further in the literature review attached to research section of my thesis.

Social exclusion has become a central focus within British social policy (Humphries 2000), and was targeted by the last Labour Government (1997-2001) with the creation of the Social Exclusion Unit in 1997. The Social Exclusion Unit (2001) in the Report '*Preventing Social Exclusion*' defined social exclusion as

a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime bad health and family breakdown (2001, p.1).

This definition does not refer to citizenship rights, but links more to the concept of disadvantage and the outcomes of disadvantage, rather than the processes that might lead to disadvantage. The concept of 'citizenship' also has links to the social exclusion debate. It has been claimed that the language of citizenship lies at the heart of New Labour (Dean 2002). Here citizenship is equated with individual responsibility, and it is individual responsibility rather than individual rights which are central to this debate. Individual responsibility is located at the heart of the lifelong learning discourse, where the responsibility for skills and career development is placed firmly on the shoulders of the individual.

Participation is a central concept within the social exclusion debate and one way of viewing participation is to consider it as a 'citizenship right' (Lister 1998). This approach views citizenship in terms of participation, and as such participation 'can be understood as representing an expression of human agency' (Lister 1998, p. 27). This could be seen in terms of political activity or voting, but also through less formal means such as participation in local community activities or family life. New Labour has seen education as central to combating social exclusion and central to the process of modernization and 'national renewal' (Blair 1997).

A key theme in New Labour Britain is characterised by terms such as ‘The Learning Age’ (DfE 1997b). This links into an economic discourse, whereby not only the individual but society as whole becomes more economically competitive, and thus becomes a tool in combating social exclusion. This approach is supported by research that links poverty and low skills with areas that are difficult to regenerate (Lupton 2001 cited by Glennerster 2002). Social mobility is also a key part of tackling social exclusion but traditionally this social mobility narrative has been focused on working class males (Delamont 2001).

Historically in this narrative, education is seen as a good thing, being framed as a way that working-class boys could escape from their class of origin (Delamont 2001, p. 31). Social exclusion is consequently a complex and contested concept (Levitas 1999), yet one that allows us to use a wider framework for understanding the impact of inequalities linked to gender, ethnicity, age and disability (Barry 1998).

Alexiadou (2002) suggests that the meaning of the concept is inconsistent across different levels of policy making and implementation with regards to education policy, and education itself is seen as a tool in combating social exclusion by not only expanding opportunity but by ‘promoting social justice’ (DfES 2003d, p. 4). Levitas (1999) offers three approaches to understanding the concept of social exclusion which can be seen in the British approach to tackling it.

- An awareness of structural inequalities and a commitment to a Radical Egalitarian Discourse (RED);
- A repudiation of the welfare system and ‘dependency culture’ through the Moral Underclass Discourse (MUD);
- The importance of paid work as a route back to inclusion offered by the Social Intergrationist Discourse (SID).

All of these three approaches can be found in various strands of UK policy towards social exclusion and widening participation to higher education. There is some awareness of the structural inequalities in current access to higher education which depicts those from certain socio-economic groups as being disadvantaged (Kennedy 1997 *The Higher Education White paper*, 2003b). A repudiation of the dependency culture and the importance of work are evident in the approach to encourage individual responsibility for the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills to gain paid employment (Laylard et al. 2001).

Alexiadrou (2002) identifies three discourses of social exclusion as related to education.

1. The product of under achievement and unsuccessful participation in education and training. 'Education is the key to creating a society which is dynamic and productive, offering opportunities and fairness to all. It is the Government's top priority' (DfEE 1997). This links to the importance of paid work offered by the Social Intergrationalist discourse.
2. Social exclusion and under-achievement within a context – identifies social deprivation as a factor contributing to social exclusion. This can be linked to the notion of employability. In this approach citizenship is viewed in terms of 'economic participation' and Levitas (1996, p12) suggests that in such discourse 'society dissolves into market relations'.
3. Social exclusion: a structural problem linked to mainly economic factors and structural issues and exclusionary social mechanisms that produce further poverty.

The response taken to tackling the issue of social exclusion by the current Labour government in Britain may be seen as ambiguous with all three approaches being apparent in their approach (Benn 2000). One of the key features of social exclusion identified by the Department of Social Security (1999) in its first annual report was lack of opportunities to acquire education and training. Learning has been described as a weapon against poverty as 'it is the route to participation and active citizenship' (Kennedy 1997, p.4). However this is not education for education's sake, but rather education as a route back into employment. Therefore education is depicted as a route to employment, and employment is seen as a weapon against social exclusion.

Another strand of the government's approach to tackling social exclusion is through the social justice discourse. It has been argued that New Labour proposes a particular definition of social justice which rather than being concerned with an egalitarian redistribution of income and wealth, seeks to promote the rights and responsibilities of individuals to make use of the opportunities offered by the state (Bathmaker and Avis, 2005). New Labour's slant on social justice therefore proposes that educational opportunities should be seized by individuals, and this can be linked to the way in which citizens are incited to become 'homo-economicus' (Drummond 2003, p. 62).

The challenge in this discourse is to improve on patterns of educational achievement and participation. Patterns of achievement and participation that are established in childhood are mirrored by levels of achievement and participation in adulthood – thus low levels of achievement at school are likely to be reflected in low levels of participation and achievement as an adult (Taylor and Cameron 2002). Qualifications at age 16 are the key predictor of the likelihood of continuing education (Kennedy 1997). The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) survey found that 56% of those that left school at 16 had not participated in learning since completing their full-time education, whereas the figure for those that completed their education at 18+ was only 14% (Sargant et al.1997). The challenge is to support and encourage individuals to avail themselves of the learning opportunities on offer, and this is difficult when these individuals lack the confidence or self-identity to re-engage with learning.

Prior to the Labour government coming to power in 1997, education and training had still been on the policy agenda although rather than being focused around the concept of social exclusion it was instead focused around the concept of business effectiveness.

The DfEE have a particular focus on social exclusion stating that

Learning is of particular importance to the socially excluded....the challenge for the DfEE is to re-engage individuals in developing their skills (DfEE 1998, p.5).

Again this reinforces links between WP and the knowledge economy discourse, where the individual is seen to have a responsibility to upgrade their skills to remain economically productive.

Funding may be a key issue if widening participation policies are to be successfully implemented and the government has highlighted increasing access through funding initiatives within the White Paper (2003b). Increasing fees whilst at the same time allowing poorer students exemption from fees is one way of ‘shifting resources from today’s well-off to to-day’s and tomorrow’s worse off’ (Barr, 2003, p. 379). However, it has yet to be seen whether funding changes will encourage or discourage wider participation in higher education, and other factors such as culture and aspirations may equally have a significant role to play.

Promoting access into HE and into professional domains of practice is a key challenge for government policy in light of the introduction of tuition fees and student loans, and there has been some effort to ensure continuing access of under-represented groups. *The Higher Education Act (2004)* provided a framework for the work of the Office of Fair Access, and the role of 'Access Regulator' to approve access agreements before any institution could charge higher variable fees. This is an independent public body which seeks to promote and safeguard fair access to higher education from under-represented groups, in light of the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2006. All HE providers are required to submit an Access agreement detailing how they will promote fair access within their institutions.

The Gateways to the Professions Report (2005) was undertaken in part to explore how the introduction of tuition fees would influence recruited into the professions. A number of the recommendations of this report link into the themes of both my research and practice development project, particularly:

- developing flexible recruitment and training strategies for older workers and people who wish to change careers (2005, p. 8)
- to design flexible entry routes into the professions, including fast-track and part-time routes (2005, p. 9)

The current emphasis within government educational policy is focused on skills and lifelong learning to ensure continued economic prosperity and flexibility within the workforce. In 2004 the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary for State for Education and Skills commissioned the Leitch Review to explore the skills required to maximise the UK's economic prosperity and growth. The central importance of skills was emphasised within the report which suggested that

to achieve world class prosperity and fairness in the new global economy, the UK must achieve world class skills (2006, p. 9).

This report, along with the publication of the Further Education White Paper: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances (DfES, 2006), has reinforced the centrality of lifelong learning and skills development in current policy. This approach reinforces the notion of vocationally focused learning and professionalization, and the idea of promoting skills and competence for particular sectors of the workforce. This links into wider

discussion of the purpose of education. Is it purely focused on up-skilling the workforce to ensure economic prosperity, or does it have a broader role to play in questioning the nature of society and economy?

The role of Further Education

For the most part the ‘massification’ of higher education has been located within the post-92 institutions and through Further Education Colleges (FECs), therefore it could be argued that the blurring of boundaries occurs on the periphery of the system where FE rubs up against the post-92 universities, through developments such as Foundation Degrees. Increasingly Further Education (FE) colleges are seen as making an effective contribution to the Government’s policy of widening access to HE, and they are perceived as

effective in creating flexible educational opportunities for a range of students who have not traditionally been able to benefit from HE (QAAb 2004, p.3).

This policy discourse has been targeted by funding agencies for the past decade, and a key aim has been to widen participation of under-represented groups by developing partnerships between HE and FE. A key HEFCE funding objective has been to

build partnerships between HEIs, schools and the FE sector to improve progression rates to HE of previously disadvantaged students (HEFCE 1999, funding objective 2d).

FE colleges have traditionally offered a wide range of education and training provision including post-compulsory vocational education, occupational courses for 14-16 year olds, HE courses, remedial or basic skills and adult education (Norton Grubb 2005). They have been an important route for non-traditional learners to access learning opportunities, and their expertise in this area by been acknowledged by the QAA (2004b). A particular feature has been the Access to HE programmes which have been seen as a way to redress educational exclusion amongst low participating groups (Parry 1996).

It has been suggested that the FE sector in the UK is now the public sector charged with providing education and training for adults (Gallacher et al. 2002). HE through FE is more accessible for non-traditional learners as it is both geographically and

culturally closer to students (Jones 2006), however others suggest that there remains some ambiguity about the role of FE as providers of HE for the masses (Parry 2003) due to continued concerns about quality and standards.

FE colleges differ from HEIs in terms of the types of students that attend their programmes, and the ways in which they provide their local community opportunities for lifelong learning across a range of levels. They have provided a different educational function to HE and there are a number of traditional divisions between FE and HE including funding, research, inspection and accreditation and degree awarding powers (West 2006). Typically they have been described as the ‘Cinderella of British education – the overlooked beauty who comes to widespread attention because of her courtship by the prince’ (Norton-Grubb 2005, p.23). Despite HE in FE now being seen as a zone of high policy, there still remains an ambivalence towards FECs as being ‘the normal and necessary settings for undergraduate education’ (Parry 2003, p. 335).

Traditionally, there have been differences in the approach to scholarship between FE and HE, with FE lecturers being seen as interpreters rather than developers of knowledge. Over fifteen years ago the Higher Education Qualifications Committee (1993) expressed concern over the level of scholarship and specification associated with teaching HE which was not previously associated with FE colleges:

Academic staff in HEIs are appointed as scholars for whom teaching, scholarship, subject development and research are normally part of the expected roles. FE lecturers have an obligation to keep abreast of developments in their subjects, but have traditionally been interpreters of subject matter and modifiers of curricula rather than originators (HEQC 1993, p. 19).

This is an important consideration when exploring the growth of Foundation Degrees within FE in recent years, and the expectations placed on FE staff to deliver programmes at an HE level, without having an HE culture of practice to draw on. At the same time it is possible to draw comparisons between the culture of scholarship within FE, and the new post 1992 universities, which grew out of the old binary divide where polytechnics provide teaching rather than research. FECs provide a learner focused approach within a supportive learning environment and this creates a positive learning experience which can develop confidence levels and the identity of non-traditional learners (Tett and Maclachlan, 2007).

Beliefs about teaching and learning have been described in different ways with include knowledge transmission (teaching centred) approaches and learning facilitation (learning-centred) approaches (Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001:300). The educational ethos within FE has been depicted as teacher-intensive (Bamber, 2005). There is a pedagogical concern for the individual learner that is linked to FE expertise in supporting non-traditional students through programmes such as Access to HE, and by providing remedial support which enables non traditional learners to build confidence to re-engage them in formal learning (Wojecki, 2007).

The focus has been on teaching rather than knowledge facilitation, and this culture of FE has implications when trying to support HE programmes. The challenge of creating an HE ethos within FE is to maintain the culture of support that is typical of FE, but to encourage more self-directed learning which encourages deep rather than surface learning (Jones, 2006). The importance of FE to widening participation policy has been highlighted by both the QAA and HEFCE. The QAA (2004, p. 3) stresses the key role that FE has in creating flexible educational opportunities, whilst HEFCE (2006, p.9) stresses the 'inclusive' approach HE through FE offers in the way it can:

- promote and provide the opportunity for successful participation in HE to everyone who can benefit from it
- ensure that all HE students benefit from a high quality learning experience fully meeting their needs and the needs of the economy and society

FE is therefore depicted by policy rhetoric as having a central role within the WP debate by providing progression routes for non-traditional learners through local provision, and these type of positive learning experiences in familiar local environments can motivate learners on a path of continued post-compulsory education (McGivney 1998, 1999). However there appears to be ambivalence from universities towards the notion of HE within FE as it represents a 'detraditionalisation' of HE, and offer new forms of learning provision that challenge the traditional culture of HE (Brain et al. 2004).

Therefore despite FE being placed centre stage in the WP debate, there is a clash of culture between the supportive approach taken by FE to engage non-traditional learners, and the traditional academic culture of learning within HE, where the habitus

of traditional HE students is viewed as the ‘proper’ habitus and ‘non-traditional’ is seen as other (Thomas 2002). This is important when consideration is given to the fact that the majority of FDs are run by FECs in collaboration with HE. It has implications for the way in which both students and staff in FECS are perceived by the HEIs that validate FD programmes.

Mature Learners in Further Education

In the UK a mature student is classified as someone who is aged 21 years or older on admission to university. Widening participation policy and discourse has acknowledged the need to include mature learners by using the notion of ‘lifelong learning’. Lifelong learning has been a central part of European social policy discourse since it was adopted as a master concept by UNESCO in 1970 (Parnham 2001).

One of the major entry routes for mature entrants in to higher education courses is through Access programmes run in FE colleges, and these types of courses have been described as the third recognised route into HE (Jones 1992). Yet FE colleges have expanded enormously since the 1970s (Melville and MacLeod 2000), and have a central role to play in offering a wide range of educational opportunity to the population. This includes post-compulsory vocational education, occupational courses for 14-16 year olds, HE courses, remedial or basic skills programmes, and adult education (Norton Grubb 2005).

Access to Higher Education courses that are run through FECs attract mature students from a wide range of social backgrounds. For many mature students, attending an Access Course in FE is their first step on a path of lifelong learning. These students often choose to study part-time, due to work, family or other commitments, and many have had a substantial break from formal education. In 1987, the White Paper, Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge, set out a revised policy on widening access in higher education, including an objective to increase the number of adults, particularly from under-represented groups, participating in HE.

Since 1997-98, when the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) started collecting data on Access programmes, there has been an increase in the number of students registered on recognised Access programmes (from 32,600 in 1997-98 to 40,218 in 2002-03) and

a rise in the number of Access certificates awarded (from 13,844 in 1997-98 to 18,393 in 2002-03) (QAA *Access to Higher Education Development Project* 2004).

Figure 1: Students on QAA-recognised Access programmes Students awarded Access to HE certificates

1997-98	32,600 (registered)	13,844 (awarded certificates)
1998-99	36,132 (registered)	15,276 (awarded certificates)
1999-00	37,729 (registered)	17,706 (awarded certificates)
2000-01	38,684 (registered)	16,404 (awarded certificates)
2001-02	40,484 (registered)	17,085 (awarded certificates)
2002-03	40,218 (registered)	18,393 (awarded certificates)

The typical student on such a programme is mature. They tend to be relatively young adults, and in 2002-03, 43 per cent of Access students were under 30, with the next biggest group, representing 33 per cent of the total, being those between the ages of 30 and 39 (QAA 2004). Over the last 25 years, Access to HE has helped to transform the lives of hundreds of thousands of adults, for whom it has provided a unique route into higher education. Research by Egerton and Halsey (1993) found that the percentage of students from an intermediate or working class background are much higher among those who were educated in the decade after leaving school (Egerton and Halsey, 1993).

Access to Higher Education courses were first established in the late 1970s and continue to be an important route for mature entrants into higher education, and according to recent research ‘one in four first-time mature entrants to full-time degree programmes still enter via an access course’ (Gittoes 2006, p. 3). Access to higher education courses have traditionally combined two main features: a curriculum concerned with preparation for HE, and a course of study aimed at those ‘excluded, disadvantaged, delayed or otherwise deterred by the need to qualify for (university) entry in more conventional ways’ (Parry 1996, p. 11). Access courses therefore provide an alternative to taking A levels for adults intending to enter higher education, and prepare students for the rigours of HE, including study skills and confidence building. However some dispute that all mature students need to attend an access to HE course prior to going to university, and suggest that for some flexible entry for those without formal qualifications may be a better route (Wray 2000).

Over the past twenty five years, mature learners with non-traditional qualifications have been increasingly taking up places at university, especially in the new university sector (Connor et al. 1999). Although the current Labour Government has put education, and specifically widening participation at the centre of its HE agenda, mature entrants into higher education courses have been rising for the past 40 years, from 255,000 in 1970 to nearly 1.5 million in 1998-9, which equates to an increase of 435% (Fuller 2002).

This has occurred at a time of cultural change in the English university system, whereby universities can now be viewed as businesses that are subject to market forces (Darlaston-Jones et al. 2003). Increasing numbers of students have meant that universities have moved from a sellers' to a buyers' market (Deer 2003) whereby potential students are 'courted' by a variety of mechanisms to join a particular HE institutions including Credit Accumulation and Transfer, vocational degrees, work-based learning and incentives to attract non traditional students into university, such as Summer School activity.

Access to higher education has been found to be related to four main variables: the structure of education, the type of political system, the type of economy and the dominant beliefs and ideology concerning the social distribution of opportunity (Halsey 1992). The recent introduction of Foundation degrees has opened up HE within an FE setting further, building on earlier types of HE provision offered through FECS such as HNC/D awards.

A focus on adult learning has become a policy priority for economic growth and social development for over a decade, with the majority of learners accessing learning for professional purpose with the statement that 'we can only create wealth through the knowledge, skills and enterprise of our people'(DfES) 2001a, p.6) Returning to education challenges the identities of students and this happens when students enter FE to study at Access course level as well as when they enter HE learning environments. Access courses can be seen as points of transition for new learners (Brine and Waller 2004).

Although research highlights that mature students in university attain higher levels of achievement than their younger peers (Pascall and Cox 1993), other research suggests

that mature students often feel inadequate in their academic ability (Shanahan 2000). Their self perceptions about their own learning ability, and their belief in their own learning ability is influenced by their 'habitus'. Habitus is described by Bourdieu (1973) as being influenced by social structure and is an internalised representation of the experience of early socialization. This will be explored more fully in chapter 4. Mature students are also grappling with the competing demands of employment and family life which makes study 'doubly difficult' (O'Hara and Bingham 2004).

The profile of mature students entering HE tends to be different from a younger student profile. According to research by the DfES (2002b, p. 8) mature entrants 'tend to enter higher education without A-level qualifications or the equivalent'. Research by the DfES (2002a) identified a range of employment related benefits that mature returners to study have identified. These include 'exploratory learners' who are on their first steps back into paid employment, 'vocational learners' who were not in employment when they started learning but perhaps had some idea of the employment related field they wish to enter. They also identified 'vocational learners' who although employed, wanted to progress their career prospects. Increasingly, FE colleges are involved in delivering vocationally focused HE programs which straddle both the FE and HE sector, and as a result some FE colleges can be seen as 'dual sector' institutions (Burns 2007). This raises questions about the boundaries between HE and FE institutions, the culture of learning that is offered to HE students within FE, and the experiences of students on such programmes.

The other side to widening access to HE is on retention of students once they get to university. Entering higher education as a mature student has been depicted as a time of risk, change and threatened identity (Johnson & Robson 1999; Baxter & Britton 2001). Mature students tend to be found in the 'new' universities, and the majority of part-time students are over the age of 25 years (Broomfield 1993). Their lives are often complex as they cope with the demands of study, family life, caring commitments and employment. Their learning journeys can be explained within the lifelong learning discourse where learning is not just located in the early part of life, but is an activity that we can all participate in throughout our lives. This issue will be returned to later in this thesis.

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can be seen as 'dual sector' institutions (Burns 2007). This raises questions about the boundaries between HE and FE institutions, the culture of learning that is offered to HE students within FE, and the experiences of students on such programmes. These are themes that will be explored in more depth in later chapters of this thesis.

The impact of 'new managerialism' on FE and HE provision

Alongside the importance of widening participation policy to higher education, and the influence of the economic discourse, lifelong learning discourse, and social exclusion discourse, the ideology of 'new managerialism' also has a major influence on the way that both HE and FE are managed and approach the development of new programmes such as Foundation Degrees. 'New managerialism' refers to the way in which business practices and private sector ideas and values have been applied to publicly funded institutions such as the NHS, local authorities and education (Ferlie et al. 1996). It has its origins in neo-liberal philosophy which proposes that efficiency and effectiveness can be improved through measurement (Riddell et al. 2007). The introduction of new managerialism into the public sector is a method supported by governments who seek to reduce public expenditure costs (Deem 1998).

The motivation behind new managerialism is therefore to increase efficiency, effectiveness and continuous quality improvement in organisations, and a belief that all activity should be measured against agreed targets (Clarke and Newman, 1997). The result is that performance is closely monitored against set targets both internally within the institution, and externally by government agencies. An example of this within the NHS has resulted in the 'purchaser-provider split'. The intention of this was to create multiple providers of services who would compete for contracts, thus encouraging cost-effectiveness and improved efficiency (Exworthy and Halford 1999). Models of quality improvement and external audit measure the effectiveness of such strategies. New managerialism has influenced the education sector across all levels. The FE sector is described as being over-regulated by the Learning and Skills Council (Norton-Grubb 2005), and it has been suggested that new managerialism with FE has led to new modes of management control over the professional autonomy of FE lecturers (Shain and Gleeson 1999).

A culture which is focused on competitiveness and profit has led to increased stress for college lecturers as their contracts are changed and their pay and working

conditions are squeezed. This has threatened the autonomy of college lecturers, and has led to increased teaching loads (Randle and Brady 1997). Within the HE sector this means quality measurements against externally set criteria. This includes QAA benchmarking, RAE ratings, HEFCE performance targets regarding widening participation and league tables. At the same time there has been unrelenting pressure on funding levels, with an emphasis on accountability and value for money (Taylor, 2006). Research suggests that academic managers have embraced new managerialism and as a result they assert their rights to manage other academic staff within the institution (Deem and Brehony 2005).

Over the past twenty years there has been a shift in the culture of HE created by 'new managerialism, academic capitalism and academic entrepreneurialism' (Deem 2001, p.8). Alongside this, the 'massification' of HE has also had a major influence on the culture of HE turning it into the McDonaldisation of universities and a system that is focused on outputs (Parker and Jary 1995). It has been argued that the impact of new managerialism on those that work within educational institutions has been an attack on academic professional autonomy and identity through increased management power (Parker and Jary 1995). It has also been suggested that a managerial ethos that focuses on quantitative quality measurement creates the paradox of a decline in quality as so much time is spent measuring quality rather than delivering a quality learning experience (Trow 1994).

Where some perceive challenge and loss, others suggest that new opportunities to re-configure self-identity are offered. It has been suggested that individuals respond as active participants within this restructuring process (Thomas and Davies 2002), and that they engage with these new opportunities to reconstruct their professional identity. For example, it has been suggested that changes in the culture of FE have simultaneously led to new re-professionalizing opportunities (Leathwood 2005). Therefore, the impact of new managerialism contains many nuances for the individual lecturer. Although, it has been argued that professional identity can be threatened by increased managerial control and loss of autonomy, such situations can also lead to a 're-inventing of the self', and there are many responses to such academic change (Trowler 1998).

This can be linked to previously discussed ideas such as the 'enterprising self' (Tennant, 2004 cited in Chapter 1), and Technologies of the Self '*pratiques de soi*'

(Drummond 2003 cited in Chapter 3), and adds to the complex and often contradictory discourses to which we all are subject (Halford and Leonard 1999). It has implications for my thesis in terms of the context within FE and HE in which widening participation activity is played out. This includes the measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of such strategies, as well as developing an understanding of the pressures that exerted on both FE and HE staff involved in developing and sustaining partnership activities and Foundation degrees.

The development of Foundation degrees

Foundation degrees are a key component in the Government's attempt to widen participation into HE and as such have both an economic and a social inclusion function. They have been introduced as a means of dealing with a perceived national shortage of workers at the intermediate skills levels particularly focused on the associate professional and higher technician grade (DfES, 2003c). In the Foundation Degree Consultation document 2000b the then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett stressed the links to knowledge economy by suggesting that the expansion of HE will be based on the Foundation Degree which

will help to maximise the potential of our people and bolster our workforce ready to compete in the toughest of global markets.

The government intends that the bulk of future growth in HE will be achieved through Foundation Degrees (HEFCE, 2000:6), yet they have been criticised as being driven by political ideology rather than a carefully considered appraisal of the need for such an award by the academic community (Smith & Betts 2005). Foundation Degrees can be seen as a central component in supporting the knowledge economy, but they also have a democratic function as they link into widening participation activity by providing new types of vocationally focused HE provision which provide not only accessible but flexible routes into higher level learning (DfES, 2003c).

This new type of educational provision challenges the traditional courses offered by HE and therefore may change the culture of HE transforming it 'into a tool of social exclusion policy' (Brain et al. 2004, p. 136). To support this HE institutions have been offered a carrot to introduce them. Firstly, in the form of additional funded places for them in preference to traditional honours degree courses; and secondly, in

the form of development funding for institutions and employers to collaborate in the development of new foundation degrees (DfES, 2003, p.62).

The DfEE (2000b:1.8) described Foundation Degrees as having the following core components:

- ‘a programme that delivers the specialist knowledge which employers require yet is also underpinned by rigorous and broad based academic learning
- accredited key skills
- credits for appropriate qualifications and experience
- active links between a student’s work experience and academic study;
- guaranteed arrangements for articulation and progression to first degree courses. Our expectation is the Foundation Degrees would be designed in such a way that students who successfully complete them could progress on to an honours degree with only one and a third years of extra study’ (2000b:1.8)

The above emphasises the links to the ‘knowledge economy discourse’ in which the need for skills relevant for the economy are stressed, and links are made to lifelong learning through the notion of a top-up programme. Foundation degrees are expected to meet the demands of the knowledge economy

by equipping students with a combination of academic knowledge and technical and transferable skills demanded by employers, while facilitating lifelong learning in the workforce (Doyle 2003, p. 276).

This is linked to the re-definition of jobs that is becoming the cornerstone of the modernisation of the workforce. This new type of ‘skills’ related provision is linked into an economic discourse of higher education, by providing education which links specifically to employers’ needs and ultimately to employability. This economic focus on the skills needed for 21st century markets can be seen as a challenge to more traditional forms of higher educational provision (Brain et al. 2004) and an increasing future emphasis on vocationally related provision.

The link between future employment and this type of course was stressed by the Government who suggest the document ‘*Widening Participation in Higher Education*’ (2003d) that Foundation degrees ‘will provide new choices for students

with a clear route to a high quality job' (2003d, p.14). An alternative view is that the current configuration of FDs are seen as being lesser qualifications to honours degrees means, and this results in those who choose them as being 'more vulnerable, under-represented and under privileged' (Gibbs, 2002, p.203).

This suggests that FDs are not just different types of qualifications related to the needs of the workforce, but rather inferior qualifications which continue to reinforce the divides that already exist between different types of awards and different types of learners. Some have criticised the Dearing Report (1997) for focusing the widening participation debate around the growth in foundation degrees which are depicted as sub-degree level qualifications mainly provided in FE colleges (Sand 1998). Others have pointed out this foundation degree provision is largely 'untested' (Floud 2003).

The link to the world of work was highlighted by Recommendation 18 of the Dearing Report which encouraged institutions

to identify opportunities to increase the extent to which programmes help students to become familiar with work, and help them reflect on such experience (Dearing, 1997, Summary Report, p. 44).

Foundation degrees are located at level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and a key feature is the expectation that they will be employer-led and designed to offer progression routes from Apprenticeships and NVQs at level 3 (HEFCE, 2000). Tensions have been apparent in the development of FDs, particularly as the demands of employers might be at odds with the demands of an academic programme. This has been described as the economic dominating the democratic imperative within educational policy (Coffield 1997). Employer involvement in the design of these new types of provision, whilst ensuring 'fitness for purpose' in terms of the demands of the market, might actually focus on the needs of the market above those of the student (Gibbs 2002) and the overall student experience. Yet despite these concerns there is some evidence that the differentiated entry qualifications of students coming onto FDs, and the fact that many students are also likely to be in employment, demonstrate that they do widen participation (Yorke 2000; Doyle and Doherty 2006).

Central to the debate surrounding FD development is the Work-based learning discourse. Work-based learning is a complex and dynamic area of practice and has been described as simultaneously facing in a number of different directions (Avis 2004, p. 213). It is a term that has multiple meanings, due in part to the multiple stakeholders involved in it. Work-based Learning has a long history which can be charted through General and National Vocational Qualifications (G/NVQs), BTEC programmes, apprenticeships and sandwich degrees. More recent policy has focused on vocational GCSEs, Foundation Degrees and Modern Apprenticeships (LSC, 2001). It has been suggested that

Work-based Foundation Degrees are essentially those which are involved with workforce development and with providing the higher level knowledge and skills, in part, for new roles and functions in the public sector or for the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Doyle and O'Doherty 2006, p.7)

There has been rapid evolution in the practice of WBL in the last decade, spurred by the success of the Department for Education and Employment funded initiatives to develop the relationships between Higher and Further Education (HE/FE) and the world of work, and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) emphasis on the need for a skills revolution and increasing vocational emphasis within HE. However the rapid expansion of WBL in both compulsory and post-compulsory education has added to the confusion over what it actually means. This confusion has led some writers to advocate for particular approaches to WBL rather than seek to develop an evidence base about work-based learning practice or the meaning of the term WBL.

This expansion has occurred within a changing policy context that has emphasised both the importance of the market place as a means of facilitating individual choice and organisational performance and the value of collaboration and partnership as a means of promoting effectiveness and efficiency. There is a contradiction in these two positions. At the same time the notions of lifelong learning and the learning organisation have enabled a new synergy between personal development and organisational development and the emergence of new forms of partnership between educators and employers (DfEE 1998).

WBL has existed in HE previously as part of professionally assessed work placements and sandwich degrees, however has more recently come into the spotlight within higher education (HE) through its central location within Foundation Degree

development and the prospects of vocational links highlighted by *the Dearing Report* (1997) which spoke of preparing students for the world of work. It has been described as ‘any planned programme of accredited learning in a HE context (Major 2002, p. 26)

WBL is distinguished from other processes of learning by the existence of three stakeholders - the employer, the learner and the institution - and by the way that negotiation is used to define learning outcomes, meaningful and challenging assessment tasks, and learning support which is primarily based in the workplace. These stakeholders have different priorities and drivers, which means that different and potentially competing discourses emerge.

Therefore the discourse of partnership is central to WBL and Foundation degree development debates (Brennan and Little 1996). This links into the pedagogy of WBL – as partnership suggests that HEIs are relinquishing some of their rights to knowledge production, to design curricula and support learning. Partnership aims to diminish the barriers between formal and informal providers of learning (Reeve and Gallacher 1999). It also encompasses partnership with learners and a shift from more didactic forms of learning to learner managed learning. However a move away from HEI control over learning can be challenging for HE institutions.

The development of work-based learning as an accredited activity within higher education was stimulated in the mid 1980s by an initial group of 11 pilot projects which were funded by the then Employment Department (ED 1994), which focused on equipping learners with the necessary skills required for employment. These projects can be linked to an economic discourse of learning and a move to vocationalise higher education. Reeve and Gallacher (1999) suggest that current discourses of WBL can be located within wider discourses of lifelong learning’. *The Fryer Report* (1997) brought together much of the thinking on lifelong learning that had occurred since the publication of the report of the Commission on Social Justice in 1994 (CSJ 1994). Widening participation was seen to be central in driving forward a culture of lifelong learning and workplace learning was seen as a key element on keeping workers up to date with the skills necessary for the workplace.

This is linked to the idea of ‘a vocational ladder of opportunity’ (DfEE 2001a, p.10) which links vocational qualifications such as vocational GCSEs, the recently

introduced Diploma, vocational A levels and finally onto Foundation degrees. *The Government White Paper 14-19 Education and Skills* (2005, p.4) highlights not only the need to tackle low participation but also the need to provide the knowledge and skills ‘for further learning and employment’. The introduction of new diplomas is aimed at introducing more opportunities to learn at work and outside school.

Boud and Symes (2000, p. 14) suggest that

Work-based learning acknowledges that work, even on a day-to-day basis, is imbued with learning opportunities, heretofore not recognised as educationally significant or worthwhile. Work-based learning gives academic recognition to these opportunities, when suitably planned and presented.

Through the process of WBL, universities and FECs, in partnership with employers, are being asked to achieve the ‘ambitious goal of vocational excellence for all’ (DfEE 2001a, p. 9-10). A positive spin is given to WBL within *the Dearing Report* (1997, p.144) which states that

....we see historic boundaries between vocational and academic education breaking down with increasingly active partnerships between higher education institutions and the worlds of industry, commerce and public service.

However, despite the positive rhetoric such an approach offers a challenge to the traditional role of universities as centres of knowledge production. One of the challenges to the implementation of WBL within HE is epistemological, in that is there is a difference between the kinds of knowledge and skills seen to have authority and be valued in the workplace in comparison with that seen as authoritative and important by HEIs (Brennan and Little 1996). For programmes such as FDs where WBL is a central component to become embedded within HE culture, there is a need to re-configure HE structures, processes and pedagogic practices. This will lead to an inevitable radical paradigmatic shift in what constitutes a ‘university’ (Laycock 2003, p. 5) Despite Government rhetoric promoting WBL as being essential to the knowledge economy, it is not a clear cut activity, and not all partners are equally focused or enthusiastic to embrace WBL. There is a contradiction in the rhetoric of up-skilling.

This contradiction results in little employer involvement and employer reluctance to engage in the education/training of their workforce (Coleman and Keep 2001). This

poses particular problems for FDs where WBL is proposed as a central component. Foundation Degrees are usually classified as being one of two types - either with Work-Related Learning (WRL) or Work-Based Learning (WBL) and they can be of Types A to D. This is confirmed by the QAA benchmark for Foundation Degrees (2004) which states that

authentic and innovative work-based learning is integral to the design and delivery of the award. It enables learners to take on appropriate role(s) within the workplace, giving them the opportunity to learn and apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired as an integrated element of the programme. It involves the development of higher level learning within both the institution and the workplace (QAA 2004 para 23).

A major concern is how to engage employers with programmes such as FDs, and this remains a particular tension. The difficulty of engaging employers in FD development as well as supporting students through work-based learning is problematic, and poses particular challenges in terms of how employer engagement can be incentivised or enforced (Edmond et al. 2007). Lack of support from employers can have a negative impact on learners on FD programmes, and this may be particularly pertinent for learners with low self confidence (Cunningham 2004).

Conclusions

This chapter has offered a comprehensive review of the literature related to widening participation. This has highlighted the complexities involved in widening participation, and some of the paradoxes involved in such a policy. A major theme within Government policy and rhetoric has been the link made to economic imperatives associated with higher education, and the development of new skills related qualifications in the form of Foundation Degrees. *The Dearing Report* (NCIHE1997, 1.2) sought to establish a link between HE and economic outcomes whilst seeking to 'maintain a cohesive society and a rich culture'.

However, widening participation is more than creating policy initiatives to widen access but also encompasses the need to challenge and change attitudes towards HE and 'the importance of getting people to think that HE is for them' (Baxter and Hunt 1999, p.36). FE is increasingly identified as an important tool to widen participation as it becomes a site for the delivery of higher education, and FE certainly has the expertise to re-engage non-traditional mature learners. Yet the distinction persists

between elite universities, and the new universities which tend to foster partnerships with FE in the development and delivery of FD programmes. This raises questions as to whether widening participation policy truly widens access across all types of HE provision, or merely creates a second tier of HE and HE qualifications which are mostly delivered through FE.

Inconsistencies within policy can therefore be identified which suggests that there is a need to challenge the traditional views of higher education, and there is a need to embrace structural, cultural and pedagogic change to make HE fully inclusive (George and Gillon 2001). But most activity is discretionary – and despite an ‘equality of opportunity discourse’, post-compulsory education is still not seen as a right.

As Osbourne (2003, p.54) concludes

despite the merits of any particular intervention, it will ultimately not lead to the broadening of participation to all parts of the higher education system as long as this action remains discretionary.

This raises questions not only for my practice development project which focuses on a project to raise aspirations amongst non-traditional mature learners, but also in my research which explores the experiences of students and staff of an FD in Health and Social Care.

As I developed this review of the literature I began to see parallels in my own lifelong learning journey, and that of the students I interviewed. This made me begin to question the D.Prof route with its emphasis on practice and ‘enterprise’, in the same way that I began to question Foundation Degrees and their emphasis on work-based learning. This leads to much bigger questions concerning the purpose of education and the vocationalist discourses which represent a rejection of the older liberal humanist ideas of the diffuse benefits of education per se. Should education be ‘vocational’ with clear work-based or practice outcomes, or should education be seen in terms of developing the individual learner? Should the individual be made increasingly responsible for making sure they have the necessary skills for the knowledge economy and through this be coerced into buying into the lifelong learning discourse?

I feel that in practice these answers are not clear cut. I wanted to study for a doctorate for myself, to prove that I could do it. I also chose a Professional Doctorate as I wanted to develop my understanding of my own area of practice and hopefully develop my practice as a result. However, I am also aware of the expectations placed on me by the university to get a doctorate. Motivations are therefore complex and nuanced, and an individual's choice to enter HE may be influenced by any number of ambiguities and motivations.

The following chapter concerns my practice development project, which in practice occurred concurrently with this review of the literature. Each element informed the other, thus I was able to reflect upon my collaborative partnership with FE staff in the development of the practice development project, whilst reviewing the literature concerning both the role of FE in widening participation.

Chapter 3 – Practice Development – Chicken or Egg?

This chapter follows on from the review of the literature presented in the previous chapter, although in reality the literature review and the practice development project occurred at the same time. The literature review was therefore informed by the practice development project, and the practice development project was in turn informed by issues which emerged as part of the development project. This reinforces the difficulty of distinguishing the multiple identities I have as practitioner, student and researcher as in reality these aspects blur together.

This chapter presents the context of my practice development project, and has the following aims:

- To explore the context of practice development in the Professional Doctorate programme in terms of whether it is ‘chicken or egg’
- To acknowledge the uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity of practice development in terms of the different drivers involved eg.. funders, partners, participants and my own motivations as both practitioner and D.Prof student
- To explore the implications of working collaboratively to facilitate practice development.

Several opportunities presented themselves for constructing my practice development project during the early part of the D.Prof., a key element for all of them was about being able to apply for funding to undertake particular projects, and increasingly focused on working in partnership with other agencies. When I reflect upon this stage of the D.Prof process, I feel it was a time of creative opportunity. Sometimes this creativity led to a few false starts in terms of practice development, and on other occasions I was able to develop projects that I later decided not to use for the purposes of my thesis. However, the process was one of thoughtfulness, which enabled me to reflect further on my own personal motivations and experiences, and encouraged me to become more grounded in self knowledge, which in itself should be a product of practice development.

I would define self-knowledge in this context as an understanding of the influences on my practice including both internal (who I am, past experiences, values etc) and external factors (context of WP policy, institutional culture, availability of funding, expectations of others etc). The first opportunity presented itself out of a research project that I was already undertaking with a local voluntary sector agency. This was called the *Gay and Grey Project* and used a participatory action research methodology to work with older lesbians and gay men. As part of this project the volunteers were supported to undertake the research themselves, and I supported the volunteers with this process (Gay and Grey in Dorset, 2006).

I was interested in developing this as a project not only because it complimented the research project that I was already undertaking with Gay and Grey but because it linked into notions of adult education and community development which interested me. From working in partnership with both the voluntary sector agency and National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), it became possible to gain funding to offer a Community Research programme to a wider group of older people who wished to develop their research skills. I managed to secure funding through a NIACE scheme called Older and Bolder which funded education opportunities for older people, and went on to run a six week Community Research course with up to 10 participants from a local voluntary sector agency. A key element of this was to understand how the previous learner identities of the participants might influence their ability to access the Community Research unit and the learning opportunities it offered. Would there be barriers based on previous negative learning experiences?

Before the course commenced participants spoke about hoping to feel more confident about engaging in research and in learning about it. Fear was another concern of participants, particularly about learning after a very long gap in study and the 'fear of having own weaknesses highlighted' (Fenge 2006, p.18) Throughout the process the participants were encouraged to reflect upon their learning from each session and keep a portfolio in which they could evidence their learning using templates, and feedback from other participants.

On a personal level this really did develop and challenge my practice. Most of the students I had taught before were under 50, and I felt that there were ageist assumptions about learning that I had to challenge within myself, particularly as the oldest participant was 84 years of age. I felt that my previous practice, as a social

worker, was central here as I was acutely aware of the negative impact of ageist assumptions and stereotypes (Thompson and Thompson 2001).

A further challenge was developing learning for a group who had very different previous learning experiences, from those with no formal qualifications after leaving school at 15, to those that had degree level qualifications. At the same time I needed to acknowledge their vast pool of experiential knowledge and their ability to apply this. Another challenge was to develop a programme of learning that would be interesting, meaningful and useful to the participants, and this was particularly difficult as only one of the participants was engaged in a research project at the time of the course. I felt nervous about meeting the needs of such a diverse group of learners, particularly as this did not match my previous teaching experience. Although teaching research skills was familiar territory, I was outside of my comfort zone teaching such a diverse group of older volunteers.

Although I decided the development of this Community Research Unit could not be used within my D.Prof, it certainly did inform the process, and in particular my understanding of the needs of non-traditional learners returning to study after a considerable gap. A key issue from this experience was to reinforce for me the importance of adopting an anti-oppressive stance towards the participants, making sure that I did not appear patronizing or condescending. It was important to value their life experiences and the life skills that the participants could apply to research.

I had to challenge the assumptions I had about what constitutes a 'non-traditional' learner, and develop sensitivity about the learning needs of the participants. This helped me to develop my understanding of what my practice development project would eventually be, and encouraged me to develop a focus around engaging non-traditional learners in learning as a first step towards eventual study in higher education.

Lack of confidence was a key issue for the participants, and all of them expressed fear about re-engaging with learning. It was therefore important to pace the learning at a level that reinforced the positive aspects of what each participant could offer, rather than looking at their weaknesses or deficits. This emphasized their transferable skills, and how these could be applied to research scenarios. I felt that this approach drew on

my understanding of empowering practice from my previous social work background and the importance of adopting an ‘inclusive’ rather than ‘exclusive’ approach.

Issues of confidence, or the lack of it, for those returning to study developed a certain resonance across both the research aspect of my thesis and my practice development activity. In the months after this particular project finished, the issue of building confidence for non-traditional learners became embedded further for me when I undertook another piece of practice development shortly after as part of my Aimhigher work.

My focus on engaging non-traditional learners was sharpened further by a second project which involved the development of learning opportunities for house-keeping staff within a local hospital. These workers all came from different ethnic minorities backgrounds, mostly the Philippines, Brazil and Eastern Europe and were identified as mainly migrant workers. Whilst the current migrant worker population is mainly situated in London and the South East (Salt and Millar 2006), this picture is changing and rural areas with low unemployment are also seeing a significant increase in the numbers of migrant workers, particularly in the broader health care sector (South West Learning and Intelligence Module (SLIM) – South West Observatory 2005).

Little attention has been focused on migrants working in unskilled jobs (McGregor 2007) despite the fact that the health and social care sectors within the UK face staff shortages ‘not only of health professionals and social workers, but also of unskilled and semi-skilled carers’ (McGregor 2007, p.801). This particular project was developed in collaboration with a local hospital trust that had identified a lack of learning opportunities available for these workers. Many of these staff had been unable to access other learning opportunities within the hospital, apart for English as Second Language training. It was hoped that this Aimhigher funded project would enable these workers to explore their own learning needs further, and give them the opportunity to explore progression pathways within the NHS.

This was in line with *Agenda for Change* (2004) and the widening participation strategy for learning within the NHS, and again links into themes within my thesis concerning non-traditional learners, progression pathways to learning and eventual career progression. This programme of learning mapped onto the 6 core themes of *The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework* (KSF 2004). This enabled participants to

explore their own job role in terms of the KSF, as well as exploring their future learning needs and aspirations. This allowed them to explore their potential learner identities and how these could be developed. They were also able to explore their role within the wider organisation. Topics covered could contribute to a portfolio of evidence for participants to be used in future appraisals.

I ran five sessions with a co-worker for two separate groups of workers. This was to enable participants who worked on different shifts to attend. In total 25 staff attended these sessions. These sessions were interactive, with opportunities for group work, communication activities, as well as reflection on current practice. We were very concerned to enable participants to feel relaxed and able to contribute to the sessions, particularly as they would be communicating in their second language. Like the previous Community Learning project, the background of the participants was diverse ranging from those who had little formal education, to those that had university degrees. It was therefore important to pitch the learning at a level that would not only be accessible but interesting and meaningful to the participants.

Evaluations from participants were very positive. They enjoyed the interactive style of the sessions, and being given the opportunity to think of wider issues (i.e. not just what mop to use). This located them within the wider organisation, and some identified other roles within the NHS that they would aspire to. They evaluated the sessions on communication and team work particularly well. A number of participants either wanted to or had already enrolled onto NVQ 2 qualifications by the end of the project. Others had longer term aspirations in terms of progressing into health care assistant roles and then onto professional education. These groups appeared to have a lot of potential in terms of their enthusiasm for learning, their previous experiential learning and their longer term aspirations to progress their careers.

I decided that this would not become my practice development project for my D.Prof, as in a similar way to the first project, it was unlikely that these individuals would progress onto higher education in the near future. However, the project certainly developed my practice further by giving me a greater insight into the issues involved in developing learning for diverse groups of individuals. A central part of this concerned the need to offer 'inclusive' rather than 'exclusive' approaches to learning. Another theme, which has resonance for what was to become my practice development project, was that of building aspiration and confidence to progress

further, and the fact that a number of participants went onto NVQ2 study is evidence of this.

With these two projects influencing my thoughts on working with learners from diverse backgrounds, I began to focus on the impact on those who are traditionally excluded from learning. The focus of developing a deeper understanding of widening participation into HE therefore emerged as a central core theme within my thesis, and I began to identify a practice development theme that would 'hatch' into my eventual project. This incorporated issues of working in collaboration and in partnership with other agencies, as well as acknowledging the needs of 'non-traditional' mature learners with aspirations to progress into HE.

On reflection there were elements of 'chicken' and 'egg' with regards to my choice of practice development project. Did I seek out funding to run a summer school because I was looking for a practice development project or did I seek out funding in my role as Head of WP, and then spot its potential as a practice development project? I think the truthful answer is that I don't really know and perhaps the 'swampy zones' of practice that Schon (1987) describes exists between and within the worlds of being a D.Prof student and practitioner.

At times it was difficult to distinguish between me 'the practitioner', me 'the researcher' and me 'the student' and the identity of my practice which existed alongside these elements. In many ways serendipity had a hand by providing the possibility of funding for an Aimhigher Summer School during 2005. It was an opportunity waiting to be taken, and perhaps practice development to some respects hinges on the ability to be creative by seizing opportunities for funding or development as they present.

Reflection within work settings has recently been reconceptualized as 'productive reflection' which is described as being 'key to unlocking vital creative forces in employees' (Boud et al. 2006, p. 5). Creativity and reflection therefore go hand-in-hand, both being key elements in practice development and as Dawson (2003, p. 38) suggests creativity is an 'essential dimension of human thought and consciousness'. However, there are often tensions in being able to embrace critical reflection and creativity with the confines of work settings and as Dawson (2003, p. 38) asserts

‘the conditions in which we all labour as academics, students, and education practitioners seem almost antithetical to these requirements’.

Being a D.Prof student enabled me to think about projects using a different lens, and in many ways being a student gives license to think more critically about the ever changing worlds in which we live and work. Fundamental questions which arose during this time, and which are discussed in this thesis involve the business of widening participation, and the motivations of both government and HE to engage in WP policy. Other questions arose as to the nature of the learning experience for so called WP students, and their own motivations for engaging in work-based programmes of study. As an academic in HE involved in developing HE in FE, I do not think I would have thought as critically about these developments without being on the D.Prof programme, and in many ways it has enabled me to step outside of my ‘professional box’ to engage more fully in some of the debates about the changing context of learning in HE.

An added tension to this as a practitioner/student is the need to engage as a critically reflective and creative agent in my role as D.Prof student, whilst inhabiting a practitioner world which is so hectic and busy as to often preclude this type of ‘thoughtful’ and time consuming activity. Previous research I have undertaken with colleagues into the role of reflection within post-qualifying social work education has also highlighted the tensions for practitioners in trying to engage in critical reflection in a meaningful way during the course of their working lives, and the ‘space’ that engaging in a programme of learning and education can give for this type of creative and thoughtful activity (Brown et al. 2005).

The D.Prof programme has in many ways given me a ‘license’ to engage in critical reflection about my practice as it is a requirement of the programme. This in itself has perhaps empowered me to seize opportunities to be creative as they arise, and the process of engaging in critical reflection is itself a creative activity. Certainly it has encouraged me to think more critically about how the Summer School was developed, issues of working across agency boundaries, and the multiple influences on my practice, in a way that perhaps I wouldn’t have done outside the structure of the D.Prof. The practice development project sits at the heart of my thesis; it does not sit in isolation but is an integral part of the whole thesis that explores themes of exclusion and inclusion in education, particularly for mature learners who are

returning to study. In this way it runs alongside the themes raised in my research, and explores progression into learning in FE and aspirations beyond.

The aim of the practice development project was to run a summer school for mature learners that would give them an insight into study at both FE and HE level. It would also develop their study skills and confidence, and provide valuable information about progression routes into HE and careers in health and social care. A pivotal element of this would be the centrality of working with FE, with the outcome being the delivery of a multi-agency educational programme. This links to the notion of a 'seamless web' of further and higher education (Melville 1999), which encourages a smooth transition from one stage in a students learning career to another. Pre-entry and early engagement with students through outreach work has been found to improve the retention of students from lower socio-economic groups when they enter higher education (Yorke and Thomas, 2003).

A movement towards increased partnership and multi-agency working is the focus of recent government policy in both the public services and education, and this is highlighted by HEFCE guidelines (1999) which stress the importance of building partnerships between HEIs, schools and the FE sector to improve progression rates to HE. This policy often simplistically highlights 'partnership' as a positive and easy activity, which can be achieved through dialogue and collaborative aims. However in practice the reality of partnership working is that there are complex webs of partnership practice across different layers within an institution. Partnerships occur at different levels within and across institutions and consist of 'layers of collaboration' (Dhillon 2005, p.214).

Developing partnerships across HE/FE boundaries is a complex activity. It is not just a matter of increased dialogue, but involves challenging cultures of practice and entrenched views that impact on how organisations are managed and adapt to change. This can be linked to the previous discussion of the impact of 'new managerialism' with education, and a culture of education that is increasingly focused on competitiveness and profit. It has been suggested that such an approach attacks academic professional autonomy and identity through increased management power (Parker and Jary 1995).

A focus on performance and outcome might lead to more peripheral activities, such as widening participation activity, being given a lesser focus within institutions. In this scenario it might be increasingly difficult to engage with colleagues in FE to look at developing projects such as the Mature Learners Summer School, as it does not feed directly into the performance measures used by the college. However, as discussed in the previous chapter ‘new managerialism’ contains many nuances for the individual lecturer, and whilst professional identity can be threatened by increased managerial control, a flip side is that such situations can also lead to new opportunities for development as lecturers seek to re-invent themselves in response to academic change (Trowler 1998).

In practice, I found the latter to be true. Colleagues in FE were keen to work collaboratively with me through Aimhigher initiatives, and were enthusiastic about any opportunity to work more collaboratively with HE. It was as though practice development activities provided a balance to the high teaching loads that they experienced in their roles as FE lecturers, and enabled them think creatively about developing such projects. They also had the confidence to work alongside me as we had already worked on joint initiatives before through the development of the FD Health and Social Care. However on reflection this could have worked against me if FE colleagues had formed an unfavourable perception of me through our previous dealings. Luckily this didn’t happen.

The thoughts behind this project were influenced by research which highlighted the routes that mature learners take into study (Walters 2000). This includes:

- Regeneration: of frame of reference
- of meaning perspective
- of self-concept
- of self-esteem
- of self-confidence
- of orientation
- of life and other skills (Walters, 2000: 267-8)

All of the above elements can be seen to impact upon individual learner identity which in turn will influence their decisions as to whether to engage or disengage from learning. Individuals are motivated to study for a variety of reasons, some personal in terms of wanting to improve their self-esteem or confidence, and other have a more external focus in terms of wanting to progress career. This could be seen as part of the

lifelong learning discourse of education, as discussed in the previous chapter, which encourages individuals to take responsibility for up-grading their skills so that they can participate in the knowledge economy.

Within the Mature Learners Summer School it was felt to be important to improve the participants' self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as providing them with learning skills that would enable them to progress on their learning journeys. It was funded through a regional Aimhigher Summer School bid, the aim of which was to widen participation of under represented groups into learning at HE level. As the School of Health and Social Care (SHSC) already participates in a University wide Summer School which targets younger students from WP backgrounds entering HE, the opportunity was taken to offer a Summer School to a group of students who are not normally targeted by Aimhigher initiatives, namely mature entrants to FE, who have long-term plans to progress to HE study.

I led the proposal process, but from the start this was very much a collaborative effort as the focus of activity was on students entering FE rather than HE. I therefore worked with colleagues from College X in developing the outline plan for a Mature Learners Summer School, and in terms of understanding the needs of mature non-traditional learners', I was very much the 'novice'. This was FE territory, and as such was not familiar to me. I was therefore reliant on the expertise of my colleagues in FE to help design and develop the programme.

This was an interesting position for me as it represented a reversal of the usual roles I had experienced as an HE lecturer working with FE. Traditionally, in most of our collaborative work with FE, HE staff tend to be in a more powerful position than FE colleagues as we are usually looking at ways to work together to deliver HE programmes in FE, or to provide transition routes for FE students into HE. HE therefore tends to be the expert in these situations, supporting FE to deliver HE. This project, alongside other Aimhigher initiatives, levels the playing field, and is much more collaborative in nature.

I could recognize my own 'inexperience' in working with non-traditional learners, whilst recognizing the expertise of FE in this field. This revealed to me the importance of recognizing my 'own' deficits and weaknesses in knowledge about the needs of mature learners and how best to engage them. It also demonstrated that

sometimes the strength of a practice development project is the way that it brings together individuals or groups whose skills can complement each other in the execution of a particular aim. Therefore ‘complementarity’ is an essential element of successful partnership working. The knowledge and expertise of FE staff was an essential part of running a successful Summer School aimed at mature non-traditional learners, and this involved reducing the gap between two different communities of practice.

The FE culture is one that offers a supportive learning environment to non-traditional learners which is inclusive and enables them to develop confidence levels and the identity of non-traditional learners (Tett and Maclachlan 2007). The HE culture is one that stresses learner autonomy and tends to exclude non-traditional learners by depicting them as ‘other’ (Tett 2000; Read et al. 2003). The collaborative focus allowed a bridge to be drawn between the two. The broad aim was to offer a taste of what college and university could offer to mature learners, to build their confidence and learning skills, and to provide information about progression routes into health care careers. This was obviously informed by practice that I was undertaking within my role in HSCS, but was a new development for me in several respects:

1. I had to apply for funding through the Aimhigher Summer Schools Scheme, which I hadn’t done before
2. This was a collaborative project which would be both developed and delivered in partnership with FE – FE were also the experts in this area.
3. It would target learners with little prior learning who had aspirations to progress their learning within an FE and eventually an HE environment, and ultimately progress their careers within the context of health and social care.

Background context and literature related to the Mature Learners Summer School

The ultimate aim of this project was to widen the potential pool of learners who could progress into careers in health and social care sectors. This is the basis of the Regional Aimhigher Health Care Strand activity and also underpins much of the work that I undertook in my role of leading widening participation activities in SHSC. The need to widen access into careers in the health care sector is influenced by both local

demographics and national trends. Nationally, the health service has a large and complex workforce of around 2.75 million, which is growing by about 1% a year. Of these 1.5 million work in the social care/voluntary sectors (NHSU 2004). This workforce is predominantly female and it is projected that due to the ageing workforce that there will be major supply problems and skill shortages in the future.

The total Health Service workforce requirement is for 145,000 people to fill jobs by 2012. (Wilson et al. 2006). The personal care workforce in the South West is set to increase by 65,000 (the largest growth of all sectors) and it also needs to replace 80,000 of its current care workforce which is ageing. The SW has the lowest proportion of children and the highest proportion of pensioners. This has implications for the recruitment, training and retention of staff (2001 Census). There is a need to ensure a competent work force and the Care Standards Act (2000) contains basic skills targets and national learning targets for NVQ2 and participation in HE by 2010. Foundation degrees are being introduced to deal with shortage of workers at intermediate skills level (associate professional grades) and work-based awards at level 4 of the National Qualifications framework offer progression routes from NVQ3.

New 'assistant practitioner' roles are developing requiring new skills within an inter-professional practice context. This will require engagement with both the younger workforce and the development of progression pathways for those from under-represented groups who lack formal entry qualifications into Higher Education (HE), including mature learners, long-term unemployed, and women returners. It also involves designing progression routes for those already employed within the health and social care workforce in support roles such as house-keepers, porters, healthcare assistants etc, so that they can develop their careers whilst continuing to work. Alongside vocational routes such as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) which have traditionally been seen as 'the badge of excellence' by health and social care employers (Thurgate et al. 2007, p.220), Foundation Degrees also offer work-based learning routes for these types of non-traditional learners.

The Government has recognised the need to recruit more people into health and social care careers and as part of this and has funded initiatives to widen access into higher education and professional education. The Department of Health and Aimhigher jointly fund a distinct strand within the nine Aimhigher regions which is focused on

widening access into health care professions. The aims of this scheme include raising the attainment of potential recruits to healthcare professions from under represented groups so that they are able to gain the academic or vocational qualifications and learning skills that will enable them to enter HE courses relevant to health (Aimhigher Practitioner Website 2007).

This can be linked to the discussion of the economic discourse of education discussed in the previous chapter. There is a concern of skills shortages in key areas, such as health and social care, which ultimately will impact upon long term prosperity. This is supported by forecasts offered by the Institute for Employment Research (2001) which show that by 2010, the number of jobs in higher level occupations such as those in the associate professional grade and higher technician grade, will grow by over one and a half million. The Department for Education and Skills response to the final report of the National Skills Task Force (DfEE 2000, p. 3) concluded that

‘skills and learning must become the key determinants of the economic prosperity and social cohesion of our country....it is education and skills which shape the opportunities and rewards available to individuals’.

In many ways the focus of the Regional Aimhigher Healthcare Strand activity is focused on promoting skills and learning for the healthcare workforce of the future. This is not a surprise as HEFCE and Department of Health funded initiatives to widen access in to healthcare careers follows the skills approach to career development. This is also the focus of recent workforce developments within the NHS including *The NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework* (2004) which lists skills and competencies that all healthcare workers need to meet, and *Agenda for Change* (2001) which offers a structure for pay and progression within the NHS workforce.

The South West of England

The South West is a large and diverse geographical area, with 10 per cent of England’s population. Between 1991 and 2001 the population grew twice as fast as the national average at a rate of 4.5 per cent per annum. The South West has the highest percentage of pensioners and includes the lowest proportion of school age children in England. The region has only 17 per cent of its people in the 15-30 age groups but in the urban areas, such as Plymouth, Bournemouth, and Bristol, these

younger age groups account for at least 20 per cent of total population. The region's ethnic minority population represents only 2 per cent of the total population. It is concentrated in Gloucester (5.7 per cent), Bristol (5.1 per cent) and Swindon (3.1 per cent).

Over half of the region's population lives in rural areas, some of which are remote and are poorly served by transport infrastructure. Against this background, the SW has found it best to organise its Aimhigher programme around one regional and three area partnerships. These partnerships are learner-centred and are aligned with strong FE-HE provider networks. Although the area boundaries do not map easily onto other administrative boundaries, they have worked well to deliver a cost effective programme to learners from WP target groups.

A pre-cursor to this activity, which served to develop educational partnerships in region was the Dorset, South Somerset and South Wiltshire Higher Education Partnership (DSW). This took place between the years 2001-2004 and was supported by a grant of £1.6 million pound from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The DSW project was established to support partnerships across HEIs and FECs in the region. This partnership set out to support curriculum development and infrastructure development to enable the planned expansion of HE in the region (Last and Powell 2005).

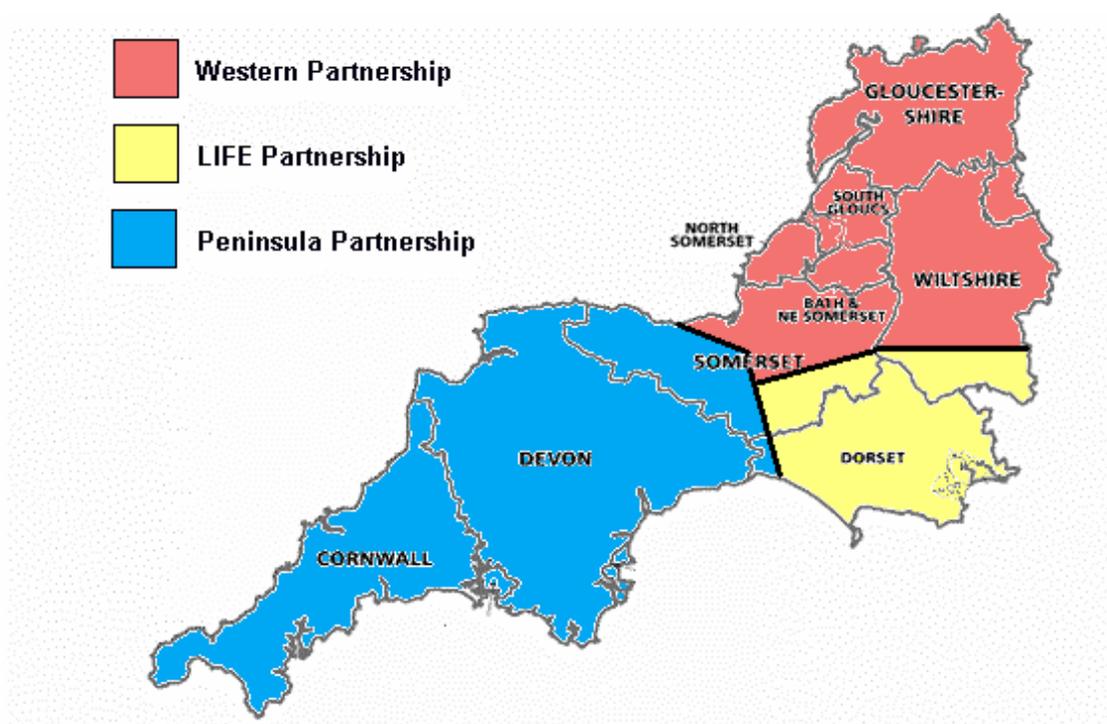


Figure 2: Area Partnerships in the South West

The students targeted by Aimhigher initiatives are identified as coming from under-represented groups. These are defined as

- those from clerical, administrative or manual backgrounds
- certain minority ethnic groups – namely Afro-Caribbean men, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women
- disabled people
- those on vocational routes or with vocational qualifications

Alongside this Aimhigher activity, which targets particular under-represented groups, the Regional Aimhigher Healthcare Strand builds on the existing links with local health and social care providers across both the statutory, private and voluntary sectors. Activities such as taster days, work based learning opportunities, and student conferences have been developed in partnership with local FE colleges, schools and employers. Activity focused around widening access of non-traditional learners into higher level learning is a complex web of policy and practice.

In 2004 the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) launched Partnerships 4 Progression (P4P) that created regional networks of partnerships all with a widening participation remit. In 2004 this was re-labelled Aimhigher when P4P was merged with the Excellence Challenge and Excellence in the Cities initiatives. Aimhigher works nationally to widen the participation of under-represented groups into HE. Alongside this, Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) came into existence in 2004 as another HEFCE funded initiative. Their remit was to improve progression for vocational learners through FE and HE partnerships, locating a commitment to providing progression routes as part of lifelong learning (HEFCE 2004).

Developing the Mature Learners' Summer School

At the outset I was aware that the concept of 'practice development' has multiple meanings. My understanding and the outcomes that I might expect as someone engaged in practice development, might be different to other stakeholders involved such as my employers, or agencies involved in funding may be different. I was also aware of this activity as part of my enterprising self within the 'knowledge economy', and the impact that undertaking this as part of my own educational enterprise might have on the process. This is highlighted by Drummond (2003) who suggests that, one of the results of the knowledge economy is, it requires 'a transparency of performance' through a 'regulated transparency of competencies and outcomes' (2003, p. 59).

Therefore I was not only undertaking a practice development activity, but I was undertaking it within the requirements set out within the D.Prof Student Handbook (2002) which are benchmarked against the academic standards of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Within the Bournemouth University Doctor of Professional Practice programme the Managing Practice Development and Research Unit is linked to 7 specific intended learning outcomes, and those specifically linked to practice development include:

1. Demonstrate ability and high level skills in undertaking inquiry and practice development in practice
2. Demonstrate a systematic acquisition and understanding of practice development, which is at the forefront of professional practice.
3. Demonstrate ability to conceptualise, design and implement a practice development initiative or undertake systematic critical reflection of casework, for the application of new insights and understanding, which is at the forefront of the discipline.
4. Demonstrate the ability to make informed judgements about complex issues in unpredictable practice environments, often in the absence of traditional data, and be able to communicate these ideas to colleagues and teams.

My learning through this process is therefore not just on a personal level for myself as the 'knower' and practice developer, but is also measured against learning outcomes open to external scrutiny and benchmarked against QAA standards. In this way it could be described that 'knowledge, as a commodity, becomes, as it were,

exteriorised from the knower: 'treated' separately from the knower' (Drummond 2003, p. 59).

This commodification of knowledge may be seen as being central to recent developments within higher education and the focus on programmes such as Professional Doctorates and Foundation Degrees which link directly to applied knowledge that has particular outcomes for the economy. However, I would argue that through this process, not only is knowledge commodified, but the learner is commodified as well as a 'lifelong learner' with a responsibility and a need to develop their skills to match the demands of the knowledge economy. These themes will be explored later in the thesis in the findings and discussion section.

The relationship between the commodification of learning and learner is illustrated by the model of 'the knowledge economy and self' developed by Drummond (2003). Drummond (2003) applies Foucault's (1986) 'codes of conduct' to explore the relationship between the Knowledge Economy and the self, and in particular the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself (*rapport a soi*). I have used these ideas within this section of my thesis to explore how the *rapport a soi* relates to my own role in the knowledge economy. The *rapport a soi* refers to 'how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions' (Foucault 1986, p.352).

I feel this is important as both Professional Doctorates and Foundation Degrees can be linked to the knowledge economy discourse as they are both focused around the notion of work-based, practice driven outcomes. In my learning journey I am able to reflect upon my role as D. Prof student and practice developer and the outcomes achieved in relation to the framework offered by Foucault's (1986) code of conduct. By undertaking a Professional Doctorate it might be suggested that I have 'bought in' to a knowledge economy discourse of higher education.

Foucault describes four interrelated dimensions in the *rapport a soi*. The first is the Mode of Subjection (*mode d'assujettissement*), which links to our moral obligations. In many ways this places the responsibility on the individual to adapt to the demands of the Knowledge Economy by engaging in skills development and lifelong learning. This is relevant on two levels within my thesis. Firstly it is related to my own learning journey and choice of undertaking a D.Prof. Part of my motivation in completing

doctoral level study was its economic value to me in terms of my academic career – to progress my career I need a doctoral qualification.

This is linked further into a knowledge economy discourse by my choice of a Professional Doctorate over a more traditional PhD programme. A D.Prof could be seen as part of the commodification of doctoral education as it is related to applied practice outcomes, rather than the development of ‘pure knowledge’. This argument can also be linked to the wider debate surrounding widening participation and the need to equip workers to engage in the knowledge economy, where the commodification of HE increasingly links outcomes in terms of economic imperatives rather than other more humanistic outcomes linked to education for personal growth and enlightenment. Within a knowledge economy discourse I can describe myself as ‘a knowledge worker’, whilst seeing the parallels with those students who are beginning their journeys on the Mature Learners Summer School, and those students on the FD Health and Social Care.

The second dimension is the Ethical Substance (*substance ethique*). This represents the part of ourself that is targeted by the modes of subjection with the result that ‘the self always becomes an economic work-in-progress’ (Drummond 2003, p. 61). In many ways my own academic career is a work-in-progress, and the D.Prof is part of this. However alongside this is the need for me to meet the demands of other external measures of worth including RAE submission and the number of publications achieved. For those mature learners entering the Summer school or joining the Foundation Degree, their learning journeys are also a work in-progress, and their motivations are often linked to a desire to engage as skilled workers within the knowledge economy.

The third dimension is the Technologies of the Self (*pratiques de soi*). This is described by Foucault as how ‘we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subject’(1986, p. 354). This seems to relate to the notions of enterprising self as described by Tennant (2004) and the creativity that leads to practice development. In regards to my own ‘enterprising self’, I have described in chapter 1 how my own professional roles contribute to this, and how this is also experienced and reflected upon as part of my journey as a D. Prof student. For me to become an ‘accepted’ member of the HE community, I need a doctorate. My early childhood experiences did not prepare me for this, and like many of those entering university in the 1970s

and 1980s, I was the first generation of my family to have any formal qualifications, let alone a university degree. My career to date has meant that I have had to change myself, not only in terms of developing relevant skills, but also in challenging my own personal insecurities and feeling of ‘not really belonging’.

This has become more exaggerated since Bournemouth University has sought to reconfigure itself as a research and enterprise focused institution. In line with other ‘new’ universities who are seeking to compete with ‘traditional’ universities for research income, the result is that it places a demand on lecturers to re-configure themselves as researchers as well as teachers (Sikes 2006). This links into notions of ‘*rappor a soi*’ (Foucault 1986), and in particular Technologies of the Self (*pratiques de soi*), in the way in which I need to re-configure what I do as part of the institution. I feel there are parallels here again with the Mature Learners and FD Health and Social Care students whose previous learning experiences can act as a barrier to successfully entering HE. I have overcome this, largely I think by the fact that I had a successful experience of compulsory education, whereas those coming onto the Mature Learners Summer School, and the FD Health and Social Care, may have had to battle against negative early experiences of education.

The final dimension described by Foucault is the *Telos*. This subsumes the previous three modes and refers to ‘the kind of being we aspire to become, or are incited to become’ (Drummond 2003, p. 62). Parallels could be made here with the notion of self-actualisation as described by Maslow (1954). In terms of the knowledge economy Drummond (2003, p.62) suggests that ‘we are openly incited to become homo-economicus’. However, I feel that there are both elements of homo-economicus and self-actualisation in my choice to complete this D.Prof. I do need to conform to the expectations within my own institution that academics have doctorates. On a personal level the process of undertaking my doctoral studies has held many benefits including the experience of learning alongside my cohort, the chance to stand back and reflect upon my own practice, and the eventual sense of achievement on completion.

There may be similarities within my own learning journey and those of the students coming onto the Mature Learners Summer School. These individuals are re-engaging with learning as a process for their own personal motivations (self-actualisation) but also as part of their economic self with a desire to develop their knowledge and skills to enable them to develop their careers. The process of developing the Summer school

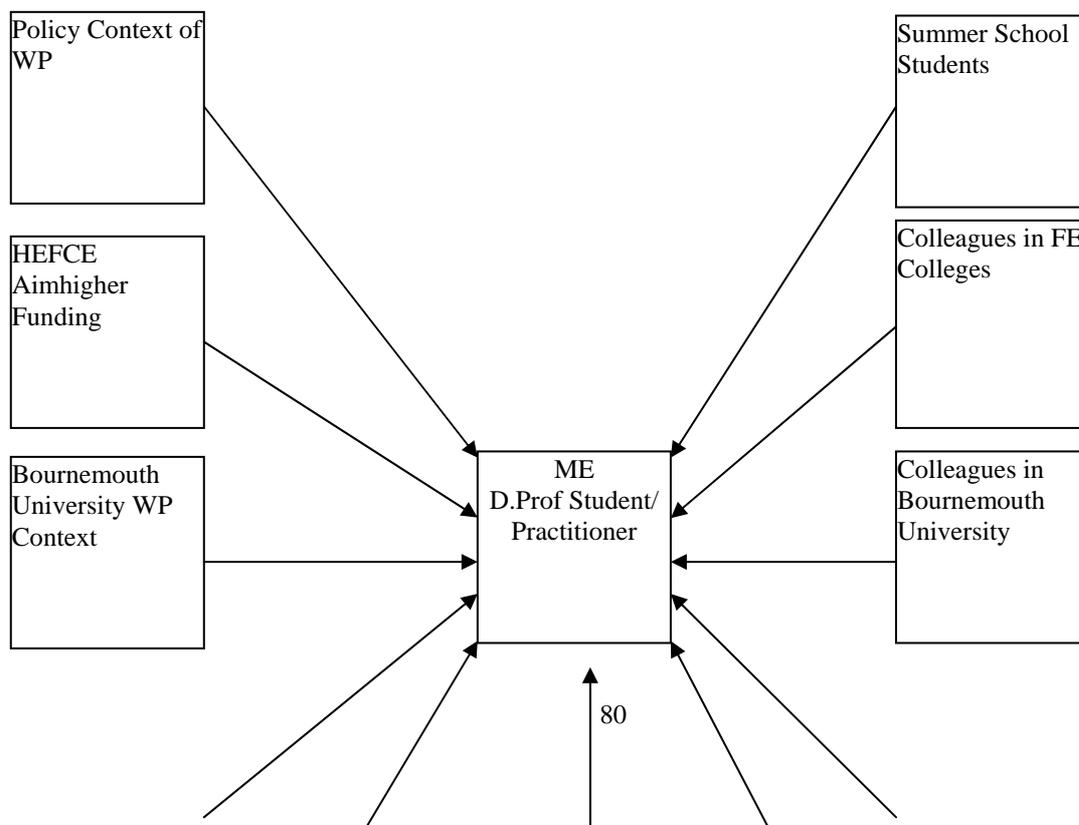
as an example of practice development within the Prof. Doc meant that I have viewed it with particular learning outcomes in mind, in a way that is different to how I might have approached the project had it just been part of my everyday work. I have therefore used a model to review my practice development project and my role within it suggested by Byrt (2001, p. 71), and developed this to apply it to my own context as both practitioner/D.Prof student (see Figure 3).

This places my practice development project within the context of my multiple identities as practitioner, student and knowledge worker. At the same time it locates my practice within the context of national policy driven initiatives, as well as organisational and personal contexts. I have also drawn on notions of personal, cultural and structural elements of power as described within the model of empowering practice by Thompson (1998) to illustrate my discussion of this process.

1. **Personal.** This relates to my own personal characteristics and experiences, my ability to communicate with others, and other interpersonal skills. This is key within my practice development project as I was obliged to work across traditional boundaries between FE and HE, as well as with outside agencies. Being able to work in partnership with other agencies was also a key theme. However this also encapsulates my own values and beliefs about working with mature 'non-traditional learners', and the challenges of widening access to learning for previously excluded groups. As part of this process I needed to widen my own understanding of the needs of these types of learners, as they are not a group I had previously taught within the university environment. This involved my recognition of my 'novice' self in relation to this area of practice, and the need to draw on the expertise of others within the FE community of practice.
2. **Cultural.** This refers to discourses around widening participation and mature learners entering new educational spaces. This also includes cultural perceptions of FE and HE. It encompasses not only wider societal views about class and education, but also the beliefs that learners may hold about their own abilities to study at a higher level. This involves challenging oppressive stereotypes that serve to exclude certain groups from accessing learning, as well as challenging organisation policy and procedures which can also exclude.

3. **Structural.** This relates to a developing awareness of structured patterns of inequality in education. Class, race and gender all operate as a form of social division, and have implications on access to resources as well as overall life chances. Within the field of education this serves to preserve the social order by maintaining HE as a middle class preserve, to the continued exclusion of others. I feel my journey on the D.Prof has heightened my awareness of these inequalities and the impact of social class on educational opportunity. It has also encouraged me to look more critically at my own educational journey to date, and how my early experiences have established an expectation within me that I 'fit' and belong within an HE environment.

Figure 3 Context of my Practice Development Project



Regional
Aimhigher
Healthcare
Strand Initiatives

Fellow D.Prof
Students

Partnerships with
local FE Colleges

D.Prof staff and
Supervisors

Family
background,

Educational
background

Partnership is a key element within this practice development project, particularly as this was a joint initiative between FE and HE. Increased links between FE and HE developed after the Government's White Paper in 1991 '*Higher Education: A New Framework*', and this has been reinforced in recent years by widening participation, social inclusion and lifelong learning discourses. The work of Aimhigher has reinforced regional collaborations between FE and HE in the development of progression pathways into higher education. The interface between Further Education and Higher Education has been particularly important in terms of widening participation and access to HE (Knox 2005), both through progression routes such as Access to HE courses as well as through the delivery of Foundation Degree programmes.

Historically, this type of relationship has been central to SHCS widening participation activity which includes Aimhigher initiatives and Foundation Degree development. My role meant that I had worked with colleagues from College X before through the development of Foundation Degrees, and as part of this work we had developed open and honest communication and a relationship of trust and mutual respect. Since September 2004, I had also been working regionally with Aimhigher on the Health Care Strand of activity, which involved work with partner colleges, in terms of scoping health and social care progression routes for learning. I felt confident that I

could work with colleagues from FE on the summer school project, although this would be a new activity for both of us. I also feel that the culture within the health and social care department at College X was one that embraced opportunity and creativity. This was based on my previous experience of working with them over a number of Aimhigher initiatives and I felt that if I approached colleagues there with my ideas for a mature learners' summer school, this would be seen as an exciting opportunity for collaborative working, rather than a risk or potential problem.

On reflection, a number of issues identified by Barrett et al. (2005) as influencing successful inter agency working were evident in this partnership. Firstly both FE colleagues and I were willing partners in the project. We were able to communicate openly and honestly throughout the development process, and I believe this was built upon a relationship of mutual trust and respect. I can also relate to Laidler's (1991) model of 'professional adulthood', we all treated each other with equality and respect despite coming from different institutional cultures. I believe this was because both I and FE colleagues valued each other's expertise. As mentioned previously, I was a 'novice' in terms of my experience and knowledge of working with mature non-traditional learners within FE. I therefore respected my FE colleagues' expertise in this area, and recognized that the project could not proceed without their full involvement. At the same time they acknowledged my ability to apply for funding and my work with Aimhigher.

An awareness of potential power inequalities was also important when looking at cross agency working and partnership. This is particularly relevant in the context of FE and HE where traditionally FE has been seen as inferior to HE, with less resources and less qualified staff. Doyle (2002) has noted differences in organization and culture across HE and FE institutions, which can act as a barrier to collaborative partnerships at strategic levels. I felt that although we represented different agency cultures of learning, we did share in a community of practice (Wenger 1998).

Within the world of higher education power inequalities not only exist between FE and HE cultures, but also within the range of university provision. Hierarchical boundaries, which reinforce funding and power inequalities, exist between the 'old' elite institutions and the new universities which embody more vocationally focused programmes. This also encapsulates a hierarchical divide between 'pure knowledge'

and 'applied knowledge'. This can be linked to debates about the standing of PhDs versus D.Profs where the latter is linked to tradable knowledge (Evans 2002).

Communities of practice are ones in which new knowledge and understanding is created through joint enterprise, and through this process of mutual engagement new responses and resources are developed. Prior to the project, I feel that both FE and HE colleagues were beginning to work within the same communities of practice, as we sought to identify progression routes from FE and HE, and the possibilities for delivering our FD programmes out in FE. Regular twice yearly meetings had been established with staff across the two institutions, in this lead to a more open culture of communication and trust.

On reflection, I feel proximity and support from within management structures towards across agency working are also factors in how communities of practice develop. It is more than just a shared aim or vision, and I believe the fact that the college is located close to the university, means that it is far easier to develop a close and integrated approach. Indeed we work with other partner institutions in Dorset, South Somerset and South Wiltshire, and deliver FD programmes with them. But these relationships appear less formalised and responsive than our relationship with College X. Working across FE/HE boundaries is supported by the management within both institutions, and this has been important in establishing the principle of twice yearly meetings. I have tried to replicate this with the three other partner colleges we work with, but with little success. For the most part this has been due to staff changes within the colleges, and seemingly less importance being placed on establishing and retaining links

In a simplistic way, a community of educational practice developed across FE and HE structures that resulted in the development and delivery of the joint Summer School. There was little disagreement in the process of developing the programme of activities for the Summer School, and I deferred to the expertise of FE staff in engaging non-traditional learners. The process was one where there was a high degree of consensus about the objectives of the project, and the creation of a shared vision of what we wanted to produce. This was a venture that developed further our joined-up approach to widening participation, supporting mature students who commence their lifelong learning journey in FE, with the hope of progressing to study at HE.

A reflection on the qualities of practice developers as described by McCormack and Garbett (2003, p. 320) highlights some of the key themes that arose within this practice development project.

1. Promoting and facilitating change – this project was a new venture and consequently a change in practice between FE and HE, particularly in terms of the existing BU Summer School project which was an ‘in-house’ university delivered event for mainly younger learners entering HE. Our project targeted mature learners at the beginning of their learning journeys before they entered FE. This also involved ‘helping to create a culture to support change’ (McCormack and Garbett 2003, p. 320)
2. Translation and communication – this particularly involved my role in leading the practice development project and my situation between Aimhigher, who funded the Summer School, and the practice area where the Summer School would be delivered. This involved communication with colleagues in both FE and HE, as well as with outside agencies. This fits with the description of practice developers being ‘in between’ managerial structures and practice (McCormack and Garbett, 2003, p.321)
3. Responding to External Influences – this included not only the external policy context of widening participation and the need to attract more mature entrants into health related careers, but also the requirement to fit into Aimhighers criteria for funding.
4. Education – reflecting upon the educational opportunities of this project with both a practitioner and D.Prof student perspective, the process of developing the Summer School had educational implications, by both developing my own practice skills and knowledge, but by also forming part of my thesis. The programme also established the foundations for future cross institutional working and collaboration. Learning from the initial Mature Learners Summer School which ran in 2005, we built upon this experience and went on to develop a further Summer School Project in 2005.
5. Qualities and Skills – as mentioned previously colleagues brought different qualities and skills to the process, including expertise in understanding the

needs of non-traditional mature learners, the expertise of applying for funding, and skills in negotiating across agency boundaries to develop new practice.

Creativity can also be linked here as having 'vision' to underpin practice development activity is one of the themes identified in the McCormack and Garbett research (2003, p.323).

At the start of the process of developing a Mature Learners Summer School, I explored the literature around existing Summer School models, to review what could be learned from these, and what needed to be developed to fit the specific needs of mature learners in this project.

Models of transition programmes

Within the literature, there is evidence of different models of supporting students progressing from FE to HE. Many universities offer their own transition programmes, which aim to prepare students for life at university. For example the University of Dundee has offered a 10 week Access Summer School and 4 week long ASPIER course to students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds (Allardice and Blicharski 2000) The disadvantaged criteria applied to these students are; little or no parental experience of education post-16; limited family income; unskilled, semi-skilled or unemployed parent(s); living in a neighbourhood or other circumstances not conducive to study; educational progress blighted by specific family events at crucial times. Other summer school programmed target younger student such as 'Next steps at university' (Knox 2005).

The withdrawal rates from HE institutions that have a greater proportion of non-traditional students have been increasing (Select Committee on Education and Employment 2001). There may be many reasons for this, but part of the reason for attrition may be due to different expectations, and a lack of study skills. Lack of confidence or low self esteem have be one of the areas highlighted as being important for mature learners and their failure to progress. Self-esteem has been highlighted as an important issue for learners and particularly mature learners. Green and Webb (1997) identified three main motivations for mature learners in their study of mature

students who had chosen to return to study. These are all related to prior school experiences when they had experienced their potential as ‘untapped’ or ‘wasted’.

Anecdotally, similar stories were related to me by colleagues in FECs who reported concerns about the numbers of mature learners leaving Access to HE programmes. Partly in response to this a Pre-Access course had been developed by the college, in the hope that this would serve as a bridge to new learners, and equip them with the necessary skills to cope with study at Access to HE level. However not all potential applicants to Access course go onto the Pre-Access programme, and for this group of learners the Summer School was felt to be an important tool to bridge the gap back into study.

Research by Ross et al. for the DfES (2002 b, p. 95) concluded that many mature students ‘have experienced educational failure, and expect not to successfully complete educational courses’. They assume that higher education study will be similar to their school experiences in content, delivery and in their chances of success. This finding is supported by Britton and Baxter (1999, p. 183) who describe narratives of mature learners which include that of individuals who describe the ‘unfulfilled potential’ of previous learning or educational experience. This informed the aims of the Summer School by stressing the importance of establishing the difference between studying at FE level, and previous negative experiences through compulsory schooling. It was also felt to be important to build the confidence of non-traditional learners to re-engage with learning. We felt that some of the aspects of summer school aimed at younger students could be integrated into this programme.

Higher education summer schools

In the main, summer school programmes aim to give young students a taste of university life to help them decide whether to apply for higher education and what to study. Summer schools are particularly focused on students who are less familiar with higher education, perhaps because they do not know many people among friends and family who have been to university or who can advise them on what choices to make. All course and travel costs, as well as meals and accommodation, are provided free, as the schemes are funded via HEFCE and Aimhigher.

HEFCE have traditionally funded two types of summer schools:

- Regional Aimhigher summer schools (part funded by the European Social Fund in all regions except the West Midlands) .These are aimed at Year 10, 11 and 12 students, studying in England. Participating students can attend a university or college of their choice in their region (subject to availability) and gain an introduction to the academic and social aspects of higher education.
- National specialist summer schools - provide five day residential experiences. They are open to the same students as the regional scheme, but differ from the regional schools in that they provide a subject-specific introduction to higher education. In 2004 and 2005 there will be summer schools in medicine, art and design, marine biology, music, and a range of other subjects.

These Aimhigher Programmes operate on a national basis, so pupils can apply to attend a school in any region. Regional co-ordinators will consider each pupil's interest and experience in the relevant subject area when allocating places. Traditionally, summer schools are intended to better inform students who might not realise their potential or whose circumstances could lead them to consider a limited range of institutions and/or subjects, or not apply for higher education at all, and are targeted on school age students who should attend a state school or city technology college, and have the potential to achieve at least the minimum entry qualification for higher education (at A level or equivalent).

Most summer schools are aimed at younger learners who have the potential to progress into HE straight from secondary education. However, some community learning schemes have been established to support mature learners who wish to progress into HE. The Birmingham Reachout Project was set-up for adults who wished to return to education but who were unable to attend a college based Access to HE course because of work or family commitments (Bowl 2003).

This project aimed to provide advice, guidance and support for adults wishing to progress into HE, a flexible social science Access course, residential/weekend courses to prepare students for higher education, and financial support for childcare and travel costs (Bowl, 2003, p. 6). The guiding principles of this project were to :

- demystify academia – preparing students for the demands of university study
- build support networks – local community delivery

- break down hierarchies- between expert staff and inexperienced student

(Bowl 2003, p. 166)

This type of community focused project had parallels with what we set out to achieve in the Mature Learners project, and the ultimate goal of enhancing progression and retention of mature students by:

- orientating students to both the FE and the HE campus and learning environments, and demystifying learning
- enhancing relevant study skills, and encouraging the student to develop more positive views of themselves as learners
- enabling mature students to consider a range of careers in health and social care, and progression routes

Bournemouth University already ran an annual institutional widening participation summer school, and has been doing so since 2002. This is aimed at students planning to join BU courses in the Autumn term, who have firm offers of places at BU. Like other Aimhigher Summer School schemes it is focused on increasing the participation of sections of society that are under-represented in higher education. These include:

- People living in neighbourhoods where there is a low rate of participation to higher education;
- Young people whose parents have no experience of higher education;
- Mature learners who come from manual backgrounds;
- People with additional learning needs, i.e. physical disability or special educational needs;
- Work-based learners.

The BU Summer School runs a two week full-time residential programme and during the two-week period, students benefit from a variety of taught workshops covering topics which include:

- Approaches to study;
- Working in groups;
- Presentation skills;

- Essay and report writing;
- Reading and note taking skills;
- The Bournemouth University student IT system;
- Three full days of School-specific activity, including a library induction.

The plan for the Mature Learners Summer School was different both in duration and in the target group. We planned to target mature learners earlier in their learning journeys in the hope that this would build their aspiration to progress onto and complete an Access to HE course at college, and then progress on further into HE learning pathways associated with health and social care. The expertise of FE in understanding the needs of mature, non-traditional learners was vital here. It was agreed at the outset of the project that the aim would be to enable the participants to ‘realize their potential’ to learn and we were mindful that mature learners have often had educational experiences which have imbued them with a feeling of ‘unfulfilled potential’ (Britton and Baxter 1999, p. 183).

This is supported by a pedagogical concern for the individual learner within the FEC environment (Briggs 2006) that encourages an inclusive rather than exclusive approach to education. Recognition of the impact of previous poor learning experiences on the aspirations of individuals to enter learning again was also an important factor in our thoughts. What informed this was a realisation that there is

a deep learning divide in our societyincluding those who have little to show by way of formal qualification and achievement or who have not been involved in systematic learning since leaving compulsory education (Fryer 1997, p. 3-4).

Many mature learners have experienced educational disadvantage during the early years of compulsory education (Taylor and Cameron 2002), and this in turn is translated into negative beliefs and thoughts about their own potential to learn. The impact of negative early experience of education is that it can have the effect of putting the individual off further study regardless of their potential or ability to benefit from it (Marks 2000). We were mindful that we would be introducing potential learners to a new culture of learning, and we felt it would therefore be important not only to demonstrate what FE could offer them, but also to look ‘to the end of the rainbow’ in terms of potential progression onto HE and the careers beyond.

This informed our decision to offer a Summer School that would be hosted both within the FE college and within the HE environment. We hoped that by spending time within both settings, cultural myths about both FE and HE could be dispelled. This links into the notion of ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1973) which will be discussed in Chapter 4, in which mature learners’ perceptions of learning within both FE and HE could be challenged by exposure to it. It was hoped that by introducing the university to potential learners early on in their learning journeys, it would be less threatening for them and would depict it as a place with which they could identify and belong.

Development process

In January 2005, I was informed of the possibility of applying for funding to run a Summer School that year. I was advised that I would be required to submit an outline proposal together to the Summer School’s co-ordinator based at X University in the first instance. This was an opportunity for extra funding, and as such one that I felt I should embrace in my role as leading WP activities within SHSC. However, I did not want to replicate what BU already offered, and through my work developing the FD Health and Social Care, was aware of some of the difficulties that mature learner’s face when entering learning for the first time.

This was something that I felt needed to discuss further with my colleagues in FE, but the timescale to submit an outline bid was short. I therefore rang a colleague in FE with whom I had worked with on Aimhigher initiatives in the past, and ran past a brief outline with her. In principle, she agreed that it would be a good idea to target mature learners, and identified two potential courses within FE that could be targeted. Those applicants hoping to come onto an Access to HE course, but who had not completed a Pre-Access, programme, and those hoping to come onto the Certificate in Welfare Studies programmes. All of these applicants are normally over 21 years of age and, therefore, meet the criteria of being seen as a mature student.

On reflection, due to the short time scale involved, little thought was put into what we hoped to offer and why at this stage in the bidding process, and a brief outline was developed and submitted to the Summer School co-ordinator later that week. At this stage I was viewing the possibility for funding as a practice development opportunity from a practitioner perspective, but as work on my D.Prof progressed during the early

part of 2005, I could see the potential of this project fitting into the themes of my thesis around widening participation, inclusivity and non-traditional learners. I feel that it is difficult to distinguish my multiple identities within the project, as it was conceived as a practitioner, but delivered and 'given birth to' through the lens of being a D. Prof student.

The next stage in the development process took place after funding was confirmed, and I organised a steering group of myself and two colleagues from FE. At our first meeting we confirmed the target group, and it was agreed that targeting potential participants would be managed by FE, where potential applicants to the Access to HE course and Certificate in Welfare Studies were applying. An information letter was to be sent out to all applicants to the Access to HE programme who had not previously attended a Pre-Access programme, and all Certificate in Welfare Studies applicants. This process of recruitment was managed by the Access tutors and administrators at College X (See Appendix 1).

Funding would allow a four day summer school to take place, and it was quickly decided that it would be better not to offer a block, as in the existing BU Summer School and other Summer School model, as it was felt that this type of delivery would be difficult for mature learners to access. In part this was informed by previous BU Summer School report which had highlighted the difficulty for mature learners in accessing programmes run over consecutive days or weeks (BUSS Report 2004). The decision was therefore taken to spread the programme over several weeks.

An outline programme was identified as follows, and five key themes were:

- An introduction to studying at both FE and HE level
- An introduction to progression pathways at HE level
- Development of reflective practices and key study skills
- An exploration of learning styles and barriers to learning
- Presentation skills

Based on the discussion in the development group, it was felt important to value the skills that mature learners would bring into any programme, and this includes the value placed on experiential learning. This is informed by the work of Friere (1994) who promotes an empowerment approach to learning that seeks to build on the

strengths of mature learners, particularly in terms of experiential knowledge. For us, this also meant exploring with learners their transferable skills, and valuing them for what they already possessed.

An approach which empowers rather than disempowers potential students is also described by Moxley et al. (2000, p.339) who proposes seven access strategies which include empowering potential students with information, and knowledge and skills which will enable them to have the necessary knowledge to apply to HE, as well as helping them develop the necessary skills to apply. Encouraging potential students to have a better understanding of the progression pathways open to them, and possible career progression as an end result was also a key aim, and this fitted in with the aims of the Regional Healthcare Strand activity which was focused on raising aspirations and knowledge about careers in health and social care.

The steering group met on a monthly basis between March and June, to refine the content of sessions, as well as making sure that potential applicants were being targeted. A draft outline programme was developed during this time and sent to potential applicants (See Appendix 2). In June 2005, the first Mature Learners Summer School was held. The Summer School was held for four days in total, spanning three weeks between 29th June and 13th July 2005. In total, 57 students were invited to attend the summer school - all sourced from the categories previously described. The provision was free to participants, and refreshments and travel expenses were covered by the scheme.

An immediate learning experience for us concerned the number of those who were offered places, who then subsequently failed to turn up with out giving a reason. Out of the fifty seven potential applicants sent information and invitations to attend the course, twenty one expressed an interest and were offered a place on the course. However, on the first day of the programme only sixteen turned up out of the twenty one offered places. Subsequently, five then dropped out after the first session, and this resulted in only eleven completing the whole course. The five participants that dropped out after the first two sessions were followed up by the FE tutors and cited childcare problems and work commitments as the reason for non-completion. This highlighted the importance of considering timing of the programme, and although we felt we had taken on board previous feedback from BU Summer Schools regarding the needs of mature learner learners, and adjusted the programme accordingly, it still

did not meet the needs of some of the potential learners who had outside commitments to consider.

In many ways this highlights two flaws in the attendance mode of the project. The first concerns the speed at which the bid had to be submitted, which left no space to consult with the potential applicants about preferred mode of delivery. The second concerns failing to involve potential students in the planning process at a later stage. What we developed was based on our 'outsider' perspectives on the needs of mature learners in terms of types of attendance patterns. However, if we had consulted with potential applicants before about the mode of delivery, we may have been able to avoid some of the drop-out figures.

As I reflect on this failure to consult with potential applicants now, I'm surprised by it, as some of my previous research has been focused on adopting inclusive models, which value both insider and outsider perspectives. For me it highlights the continued need to be vigilant about assumptions and beliefs that we may have about our own spheres of practice, but which may be different for those that we work with as service users, carers, or students. Perhaps as a practitioner I am more acutely aware of the need to do this with service users and other stakeholders, but fail to adopt the same level of inclusivity with students. Perhaps it also highlights two different world views – two habitus- which perhaps collide when the worlds of mature learners and FE/HE institutions come together. As a lecturer in HE it is easy to fall into a pattern whereby daytime delivery is seen as the norm, without considering how this might exclude certain groups from accessing learning. However, it proved to be a learning point that we used the following year, when we ran a Mature Learners Summer School again.

The four day programme was designed to raise confidence and self efficacy for those students hoping to join an Access to HE course in September 2005. Icebreakers started off the process of cohesion and the group took part in group discussions and activities throughout both to facilitate learning and to build the group dynamics. Exercises were undertaken to identify transferable skills, to identify experiential learning and to ultimately increase confidence in the student's own abilities. Other session explored and identified barriers to learning in order to explore solutions and identify expectations, values and beliefs.

Students were introduced to the Learning Resource Centre in the college. This induction was undertaken by a particularly approachable librarian, and this reduced the fear of the unknown and started students off by developing some basic research skills for future study. Another session explored essay planning and referencing. This was felt to be an important preparation for students hoping to give them a head start in these important skills study in the Autumn, as many of them had limited study skill experience. Students were also able to see that these skills and experiences would be directly applicable to the courses they planned to progress onto. They were also included because they are areas that students worry about at the start of the course and find difficult.

Finally, the career day was designed to help students clarify and verify their career paths. The day at University included a tour of resources, and a visit to the Skills labs. Sessions were also undertaken exploring career options and progression routes onto them. This was felt to be important as it allowed students to explore different trajectory routes into their chosen career areas. Students also explored their own learning styles, and tools for facilitating learning.

The programme was run at both College X and Bournemouth University sites. It was felt that this would not only familiarise prospective students to the college campus and facilities but would also raise their awareness of what the university had to offer. Students were asked to evaluate the provision in terms of their hopes, as well as the usefulness of the content. A comparison of 2005 and 2006 can be found in Figure 4. The age of participants ranged from 19- 48 with the average age being 34.

Figure 4: Summary of Mature Learners Summer School 2005-2007

	Mature Learners Summer School 2005	Mature Learners Summer School 2006	Mature Learners Summer School 2007
Development Team	IHCS Bournemouth University, College X	IHCS Bournemouth University, College X	IHCS Bournemouth University, College X
Funded by	Aimhigher Summer Schools Strand	Aimhigher Regional Healthcare Strand	Aimhigher Regional Healthcare Strand
No: of participants offered places	21	20	20
No: of participants taking up places	21	12	14
No: of participants who completed the programme	16	11	12
Hopes identified by students	4 main themes a) Course preparation and/or learn about the educational environment. b) Knowledge about the course c) Learn new skills and develop career options d) Increase confidence/self-esteem	3 main themes a) Course information and/or learn about the educational environment. b) Study Skills c) Increase confidence/self-esteem	Main themes a) Develop new study skills b) Increase confidence c) Course and career information
Issues identified as being 'looked forward to' at the start of the programme	3 themes a) Meeting new people b) Learning about college/courses c) Information to aid career and course decisions	3 themes emerged: a) Meeting new people b) Learn about college/courses c) Learning about options for the future	4 themes a) Meeting new people b) Learning about college/courses c) Learning about their own learning needs d) Information about career decisions
Evaluation of content	Summer School helped prepare them for attending college They developed a clearer idea about what university would be like and the courses available to them after college. All felt it provided them with an understanding of their own learning needs.	All believed that the Summer School helped prepare them for attending college All believed it gave them a clearer idea about what university would be like and the courses available to them after college. All felt it provided them with an understanding of their own learning	All students reported that the Summer School gave an insight into what to expect in September, working as a team. They enjoyed the university visit, hopes and fears task, group activities, the poster and presentation, essay and writing skills. They felt that the information pack, and learning styles session provided

		needs.	useful information.
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As this first Mature Learners Summer School was positively evaluated by participants, it was decided to try to run the event again the following year, funding permitting. This was also supported by anecdotal evidence from tutors at the college who expressed the view that those students who came onto the Summer School were better prepared to come onto the Access course, than those who didn't. However, following the drop out of students during the first Mature Learners Summer School it was decided to vary the attendance times to accommodate childcare and work issues more easily by running evening sessions. As Figure 4 demonstrates, this greatly reduced the number of students dropping out the programme in 2006.

It became clear early in 2006 that changes in Aimhigher Summer School Funding meant that we would be unable to apply for additional funding to run a similar event in June 2006. However, I decided that it would be possible to support the project for a further year through the Regional Aimhigher Healthcare Strand budget. In total, 58 students were invited to attend the 2006 mature Learners Summer School – all sourced again from applicants to the Access to HE course and Diploma in Welfare Studies programme. A lesser number expressed an interest in the programme, and 20 were finally offered places to attend.

As in the previous year the programme was free to participants, and refreshments and travel expenses were paid. Prior to the start of the course eight of the original twenty expected to attend informed the college that they were unable to attend the course due to other commitments. Other applicants were contacted but were unable to take up the opportunity at such short notice. However of the 12 that attended the course, all but one completed the programme. This was a much better completion rate than the previous year, when daytime delivery meant that attendance for some participants was difficult. All 12 students offered places progressed onto the Access to HE course.

In fact, the success of the joint venture with College X, meant that for 2006 we ran two distinctly different Summer School events, the first repeating the Mature Learners Summer School and the second targeting Year 10 school pupils at two local WP schools that met the Aimhigher criteria (see footnote ¹). Therefore not only was this project sustained for another year, but an off-shoot of the Summer School was developed for younger learners.

In 2007, funding was secured for a third year through the Regional Aimhigher Health care Strand Project, which enabled both the Mature Learners Summer School and the Year 10 Summer School to run again. Information was sent out to sixty potential learners, and twenty offers were made. Again, shortly before the course commenced, a number informed us that they would not be able to attend, and eventually fourteen took up places, with twelve competing the programme. This pattern of non-attendance highlights the difficulties of running such projects, and suggests that more offers need to be made to attract the desired target of 20.

A number of issues make attendance for potential learners difficult. Some relate to the challenges of juggling busy lives and competing demands (Lowe and Gayle 2007), whilst others may be scared of taking a first tentative step along their learning journeys. This might be supported by the lack of confidence that participants coming onto the programme highlight, and the impact of negative previous learning in reinforcing to these individuals that learning is not for them.

A learning point is trying to think creatively about how to encourage and support non-traditional learners who have may low levels of self-confidence and previous bad experiences of learning (Marks 2000) back through the doors of an educational institution. Offering places on such summer schools, although a step in the right direction, for some is still a step too far. Their confidence may be improved by providing them with access to more community focused learning, such as through libraries, day nurseries and other community provision, which perhaps offers a less threatening environment.

Recommendations for running Mature Learners Summer Schools

The evening delivery of this programme proved to be a successful model for running a Summer School aimed at promoting the health and social care learning

¹ A WP school is measured on lower participation neighbourhood criteria

opportunities for mature learners. Evening delivery should be considered as the better option for this group of learners as it appears to fit better with their family and work commitments. Therefore, a key aspect of widening access to learning opportunities is ensuring that they are accessible both in terms of location, timing and cost. Cost is a factor and it is important that the institutions/ and or funding bodies supporting such projects view them as offering value for money. In terms of value for money, the costs of running the Summer School worked out at £150 per student per day (including student travel expenses and refreshments). It was hoped that this would become an annual fixture in the collaborative work across HE and FE. However, embedding this activity in everyday collaborative activity across FECs and the university is a challenge due to funding constraints, and it was only because of external Aimhigher funding that this project was able to take place.

- **Duration:** Four days is about right for the Summer School in terms of time needed to undertake a range of activities and reflect upon learning between sessions, without overwhelming participants will attendance days. This has to be linked to what is possible for the learners in terms of fitting with other commitments, as well as appearing manageable in terms of the learning offered. We felt it was important not to ‘overwhelm’ the participants in what might be their first brush with education in many years.
- **Activity Content:** As we were hoping to build confidence in the learners, as well as provide an experience that would be informative, we focused the content on being enjoyable, achievable and relevant to the students. They wanted information not only on their proposed Access to HE course, but also on how this related to other progression routes and professional education within health and social care. Building confidence is a key outcome of this type of programme therefore the content must be focused on developing study skills, as many of these students have been out of education for sometime and felt anxious about embarking on the Access course. This approach is informed by research which suggests that being able to prove themselves as successful learners is linked to improved retention in other studies of mature learners (Thomas 2002; Tinto 1993). The programme needed to build the participants’ confidence in their own abilities.

Therefore, the importance of developing good inter-personal skills, particularly time management, good communication and effective group-working were discussed and encouraged whenever an opportunity presented itself during the programme.

Personal reflections

As well as developing the Summer School in collaboration with FE colleagues, I also delivered the university-based day. I was mindful at the start that I needed to present the university as somewhere that the participants could identify with, and that they could identify themselves as future learners that belong within the institution. It would therefore offer them the chance to explore what might lie 'at the end of rainbow'. I decided to make the session as informal as possible, and the session began with refreshments and an informal chat. The group talked about their current situations in terms of current employment or aspirations and our discussion stressed the importance of transferable skills, experiential learning, approaches to learning, and previous learning experiences. I felt that it was important to stress their strengths rather than their deficits as learners. This was informed by an understanding of how individuals might feel empowered through 'habits of the heart' (Baldock and Ungerson 1994), which suggests that previous life experience, beliefs, habits, etc may all influence how individuals deal with the potential to be empowered.

I felt that it was important to stress that university was a possible option for them and this was informed by the work of Moxley et al. (2000) who proposed seven access strategies to empower potential students. This included providing the participants with information about HE and career pathways open to them; providing information and skills which would enable them to have the necessary knowledge to apply to HE; and finally giving them an insight into Bournemouth University as a place in which they could belong. However, as I planned this session I was aware of the potential paradox in empowering approaches to practice.

Empowerment has increasingly become a theory of professional practice in which practitioners have taken a central role in defining need and developing technologies of empowerment (Anderson 1996). A paradox exists for practitioners committed to

empowerment who at the same time wield great power in terms of gate keeping and access to resources. As a lecturer I have a powerful position in relation to the participants in this project. I therefore need to be vigilant about the power of my position so that I do not oppress the participants further. I am aware that individualistic notions of empowerment aimed at developing the capacities of individuals tend not to be concerned with changing oppressive social structures that can maintain and reinforce inequality. As a result of this, I felt that it was important to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of educational inequality within my thesis, and this is contained in the following chapter which explores the work of Bourdieu on class and educational opportunity.

In terms of my own practice development, I feel I have learnt important insights about both myself as a practitioner and the motivations of both lecturers and students. Part of this involves a developing appreciation of the complexities of undertaking projects and the skills required in this. This involves not only recognising one's own strengths and weaknesses, but also the strengths of those that we work alongside in 'communities of practice'. It was important to recognize myself as a 'novice' in terms of my limited understanding and experience of working with mature non-traditional learners.

Most of my previous experience has been with working with students who have already been through an Access course or more traditional academic routes to HE. This experience has opened my eyes to the needs of non-traditional learners, and has given me a deeper understanding of the fragility of learner identities, particularly for those who have had negative previous experiences of education, or who have not considered themselves as someone who could study at university. This has stressed to me the importance of the culture of learning that such learners encounter, which can either embrace them in an inclusive way, or exclude them further by reinforcing to them that HE is not for them.

This project could not have taken place without the expertise and 'situated knowledge' of colleagues in FE about the needs of mature learners. However as someone employed in HE, I have had to overcome my own prejudices about FE, which included a view of FE as being inferior to HE, which have been reinforced by the 'institutional habitus' of the organization in which I work, and this is part of the reflexive process. I have developed a greater insight into how an HE view of the

world can 'downplay' the expertise of FE, and my involvement with this project has greatly increased my own appreciation of the skills of FE to offer an inclusive approach to education which accommodates the needs of different learners, in a way that I had not really experienced within HE.

A key outcome of the Mature Learners Summer School was its ability to engage students at the start of their learning journey. It enabled them to build their confidence and allowed them to see themselves as potential learners. It therefore helped them to challenge their negative learner identities, and began to allow them to see their future potential self as learner and 'knowledge worker'. These themes will be built upon in later chapters of my thesis where I explore the impact of class on learner identity and analyse the findings of the interviews undertaken with FD students.

The world of 'practice' is complex, and this is true across health, social care and education. There are many stakeholders, and in this small project I have highlighted the impact of macro, mezzo and micro aspects which influence my practice. On a macro level policy driven initiatives to widen participation are an important consideration, and as part of this macro picture is the role of HEFCE as funders of Aimhigher and the targeting criteria they have. At a mezzo level are the institutions involved, and this is particularly important in my own personal context where I am working across the traditional boundaries of FE and HE. But within this are also the expectations that my employing institution may have on me both as practitioner and student, and this in turn will influence the micro level of my own personal context. Part of this encompasses my relationship with colleagues both in HE and FE, but also with the students. It also links to my own, often unconscious, motivations and beliefs which influence the way I approach practice.

This type of practice development project brings into sharp focus the nature of the collaborative partnership and some of the challenges that can occur across traditional boundaries of FE and HE. One of the benefits of widening participation activities is the potential of new partnerships between FE colleges, HEIs and employers (Shaw et al. 2007). Despite the different cultures of learning across FE and HE, I was able to come together with colleagues in FE to create a community of practice concerning widening participation activity, and the development of a Mature Learners Summer School.

Institutional habitus (Thomas 2002) can be viewed as having an impact upon on the culture of both FE and HE, and the way in WP activity is embraced. This will influence the way in which each organisation operates internally and externally with other organisations. This will include the way in which academic staff view themselves, students and other organisations. It has been suggested that this process can be influenced by

‘the nature of an organisation’s boundaries which influence the ability of its members to exert an influence over other organisations or groups’ (Hernes 2004, p. 9)

Hernes (2004, p.10) suggests three ideas which influence the way that boundaries exert an influence over collaborative organizational working:

- boundaries are composite, i.e. organizations operate within multiple sets of co-existing boundaries;
- boundaries are central, not peripheral to organizations...boundary properties reflect the substance of the organization;
- boundaries are constantly subject to construction and reconstruction.

As described previously the DSW project which ran from 2001-2004, funded by (HEFCE), supported partnerships across HEIs and FECs in the region in terms of curriculum and infrastructure development (Last and Powell 2005). Previous Aimhigher activity had already brought the university and colleges together in terms of widening participation activities, so the co-existing boundaries between the FEC and university were already permeable in terms of collaborative working.

I have used a framework for interpreting boundaries proposed by Hernes (2004) to explore the FE/HE boundaries that exist within the Mature Learners Summer School community of practice and the questions that arise out of this process. See Figure 5. This explores how different types of boundaries such as mental, social and physical boundaries exert an influence on how groups or organizations work.

Figure 5 Framework for interpreting boundaries within the Mature Learners Summer School

	<i>Mental boundaries</i> (relate to core ideas and concepts that are central and particular to the organization or group)	<i>Social boundaries</i> (relate to identity and social bonding tying the group together)	<i>Physical boundaries</i> (relate to formal rules and physical structures regulating human action and interaction in the group or organization)
<i>Ordering</i> The extent to which boundaries regulate internal interaction	Both organizations have a commitment to WP. External funding mechanisms such as the DSW project, and the Aimhigher projects facilitate collaboration across institutional boundaries. The demands of the funding body sets out expectations.	‘Community of practice’ exists across Health and Social Care faculties of both institutions. Joint working across Aimhigher initiatives has led to a perception of an equal in partnership characterized by mutual respect	Regular joint meetings are facilitated by close proximity of FEC and HEI. The different levels of qualifications offered by each institution is complimentary rather than competitive, and this helps to regulate the work of the staff involved.
<i>Distinction</i> The extent to which boundaries constitute a clear demarcation between the external and the internal spheres	This Summer School Project took place with one particular FEC due to close proximity, previous well developed working relationships, and a belief that the FEC would deliver what was agreed	The working relationship within this community of practice was well established compared with relationships with staff in other FECs, where there was a perception that rapid staff turnover and resource problems caused difficulties.	The structure of the Mature Learners Summer School sets this ‘community of practice’ apart from others due to the diverse skills and experience contributed by the FEC and HE staff members who ran the project
<i>Threshold</i> The extent to which boundaries regulate the flow or	This type of project could be replicated with other FECS if sufficient funding	This project could be described as a ‘closed’ group. It ran as a time limited	It is the remit of each organization to provide staff with the expertise to take

movement between the external and the internal spheres	had been available. The ideal would be to run this type of project through several partner FECs	project across one particular FEC and HEI.	part in such in a project
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Both organizations had a commitment to developing learning opportunities for the local population, particularly in terms of providing transitions between FE and HE. Both organizations therefore already had institutional commitments to widen participation and it could be argued that their boundary properties reflected this through increased staff links and regular meeting across the health and social care faculty of both institutions.

The boundaries were therefore more permeable to change, and accommodating of the value of different cultures of learning. Finally, an illustration of the way in which boundaries are constantly subject to construction and reconstruction is the way in which Bournemouth University re-configured itself with regards to WP activity in 2007. This seems to have led to a ‘down-grading’ of the importance of widening participation activity across FE/HE boundaries which places WP on the periphery of HE activity. My perception of this ‘re-focusing’ of university activity away from partnerships with FE and WP activity, is that it has greatly damaged our standing with FE partner institutions, with which we have been working successfully with over a number of years

On a personal level, this is regrettable, as it has changed the focus of my work away from WP activity, and the collaborative partnerships that I had developed over the previous four years. However on an institutional level I believe it is short sighted, as we are failing to meet the local WP agenda, and encourage those from under-represented groups in our communities to come into HE. For WP activity to become sustainable within HE, it needs to become fully embedded within the HE culture, so that the culture itself is more accommodating of diversity and difference within the student body. This means that WP practice development needs higher education to embrace structural, cultural and pedagogic change to make HE fully inclusive (George and Gillon 2001).

It is not a sustainable position for WP to remain a tokenistic activity, undertaken as specific pieces of practice development, but needs to be moved away from being seen as a marginal activity to one that is integrated throughout institutional activity (Thomas 2002). It is also short sighted for institutions to turn their backs on the learning needs of their local communities, who may well come to them through FEC routes. I feel there is a paradox presented by this type of widening participation project. On the one hand such projects could be criticised for supporting an economic discourse of education that emphasises the importance of skills development, the commodification of learning and career progression, which have traditionally been typical of middle class experience. However, it could be argued that such projects do allow those who wouldn't normally consider HE, the opportunity to challenge their pre-conceptions about themselves and HE. Indeed the responses from the Mature Learners Summer School, run over three years, suggests that participants value the chance to increase their confidence and self-esteem, as well as finding out about future opportunities. In this way they are enabled to change their learner identities by considering that HE is a possibility for them.

A further paradox exists in the way in which empowering approaches to practice can focus on the individual and individual deficit rather than challenging oppressive social structures which maintain and reinforce inequality. As a result of this I will develop a deeper understanding of the impact of educational inequality within my thesis, and this is contained in the following chapter which explores the work of Bourdieu, class and educational opportunity. At the beginning of this part of my thesis I wondered whether practice development activity was 'chicken or egg'.

My reflections now are that perhaps it is more of an omelette – egg is not the only component, and it can be flavoured and filled with a wider variety of interesting and sometimes surprising ingredients. The process of cooking an omelette is a creative activity, as is the process of undertaking practice development, and the D.Prof has enabled me to have some space and time to consider a number of recipes and cookbooks as I prepared and cooked my own particular omelette. Yet for my practice development activity to have a major impact on institutional practice, it needs to become integrated into everyday WP activity within the institution, rather than being seen as a one-off project that happens once a year. It cannot be a diet fad that changes

practice for one or two weeks a year, but has to be a complete change in the lifestyle of the institution, so that it really becomes committed to 'inclusive' education.

Chapter 4 - An exploration of Bourdieu and the impact of class on educational opportunity

This chapter has arisen out of the themes that emerged as part of the comprehensive review of the widening participation literature in Chapter 2, and the issues that arose out of my practice development project in Chapter 3. It provides a bridge between these themes and the themes that emerge in later chapters of my thesis as a result of my research into a Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care. At the beginning of my thesis, I had not really come across the work of Pierre Bourdieu, but as I engaged with the literature related to widening participation and the development of Foundation Degrees, Bourdieu's work developed a particular resonance within my own study.

In my work as a widening participation practitioner I believe that I had simplistic notions about WP activity, which was influenced by a 'rights-based' approach to accessible education. However my research has allowed me to understand in greater depth structural inequality within current educational provision and how issues such as class, ethnicity and gender can greatly influence an individual's life chances and educational opportunities. Issues of class difference are central to an understanding of inequality and education and these links are highlighted by Adonis and Pollard (1997, p.19) who suggest that 'education, the meritocratic ideal and chronic equality underpin class divisions in modern Britain'. I have found Bourdieu's theoretical framework useful in understanding the complexities involved in educational inequality, the dominance of 'middle class' capital within higher education and the challenges this poses to widening participation activity.

Class and socio-economic status

Issues of 'class' and access to higher education are important to discuss as they are central to widening participation discourse and to Bourdieu's theoretical framework. The links between class and educational achievement were highlighted in a classic early sociological study by Willis (1977), that explored the educational failure of working class boys, and the impact of class on educational achievement has been a focus of the sociology of education. Class is one of those terms that means different things to different people, and this is summed up by Adonis and Pollard (1997, p.10) who suggest that 'class, like beauty, might seem to be in the eye of the beholder'.

The different meanings attached to ‘class’ suggests that rather than being a solid state it is better understood as ‘a relationship between different people and groups and divided along axes of power and privilege’ (Nesbit et al. 2006, p. 517). For some, notions of class are limited and historical in their application (Beck 2004), and for others class is still as relevant to-day in charting educational inequality as it was 100 years ago (Reay 2006).

Historically class has been defined by using criteria which identify structural positions. For example, occupational status of the family head, or the economic circumstances measured by total family income (Brown 1969). The traditional labels of ‘working’ and ‘middle’ class make less sense in the changing patterns of occupation, lifestyle and income which have changed radically over the past few years (Adonis and Pollard 1997). ‘Class’ is term avoided by HEFCE to target Aimhigher initiatives and instead a number of indicators are used which include socio-economic group status. The recent HEFCE guidance on targeting disadvantaged learners (2007) suggests that criteria should include:

- occupation of main wage earner in the learner’s household
- educational background of parents/carers, for example whether they have an HE qualification
- ethnicity, age and sex of the learner, and any disability they have
- the home postcode of the learner and the postcode of the school, college or training provider (HEFCE 2007, p.12)

These criteria are informed by the National Statistics Socio-Economic Clarification (NS-SEC 2000) which describe 8 socio-economic categories

Figure 6 National Socio-Economic Clarification (NS-SEC 2000)

Class	Occupation
1	Higher managerial and professional occupations
1.1	Large employers and higher managerial
1.2	Higher professional occupation
2.	Lower managerial and professional occupation
3	Intermediate occupations
4	Small employers and own account workers
5	Lower supervisory and technical occupations
6	Semi-routine occupations
7	Routine occupations
8	Never worked and long-term unemployed

Although socio-economic status is used in policy directives, 'class' can still be understood as implicit in the way that it is

encoded in people's sense of self worth and in their attitudes to and awareness of others – in how they carry themselves as individuals (Savage 2000, p. 107)

Individuals may therefore identify with a particular class, rather than a particular socio-economic group. For example, I might identify myself as middle class, but not as Class 1 within the NS-SEC (2000) classification. Bourdieu (1984) develops this further and suggests that class is more than socio-economic status and is also defined by

a whole set of subsidiary characteristics which may function, in the form of tacit requirements, as real principles of selection and exclusion without being formally stated (this is the case with ethnic origin and sex (1984, p.102).

The systematic beliefs that individuals hold about class relations, and specifically the conceptions of those charged with this task is central to this process (LiPuma 1993). This is linked to his idea of habitus and class habitus which both influence definitions of social class, and which will be explored more fully in the following section.

Within the sociology of education the cultural analysis of class and its impact on education and progression has highlighted the unacknowledged normality of the middle classes (Ball 2003; Reay et al. 2007), and the pathologisation of the working classes (Reay 2004; Lawler 2005). This approach is articulated in a paper by Reay (2004, p.294) who suggests that

regardless of what individual working-class males and females are able to negotiate and achieve for themselves within education, the collective patterns of working class trajectories remain sharply different from those of the middle classes

The class distinction in access to education is highlighted by recent figures for England that suggest that 72% of young full-time first degree students are from NS-SEC 1-3, and those from lower levels are less likely to progress on to higher

education (HESA Table 11a 2005). This suggests that despite much policy and rhetoric focused on widening access to HE, it remains the preserve for those whose parents work within professional or managerial positions. These individuals might have been traditionally depicted as the middle classes, rather than those from semi-skilled/unskilled or unemployed parental backgrounds, which traditionally might have been described as the working class.

Despite a great deal of government effort, the 'social mix' in HE has scarcely altered since 1980 (Greenaway and Haynes 2003, p.155). A number of potential obstacles have been found to influence the perceptions of students from lower social economic groups about higher education. Students from lower social economic groups have been found to experience lack of familiarity with HE (Forsyth and Furlong 2003) as well as being more fearful of debt (Callender 2003). Alongside these obstacles to widening participation, other researchers suggest that the perception of 'false uniqueness' amongst potential students from lower social economic groups may cause 'psychological self-exclusion from HE' (Thorpe et al. 2007, p.17).

This means that they see themselves as alien to an HE environment, and this perceived difference acts to exclude them from considering learning at a higher education level. This offers a challenge to any attempts to widen participation as this not only needs to challenge structural inequalities, but also needs to challenge the exclusionary self perceptions of students, as well as the entrenched cultural perceptions that may exist about class and HE. This suggests that a mix of internalized factors held by the student, alongside structural inequalities conspire together to present those from lower socio-economic groups from progressing into HE.

Bourdieu's General Theoretical Framework (1984)

Field

Bourdieu's General Theoretical Framework (1984) is a useful model for understanding why, despite much government policy directed at widening participation to HE, class still remains a major determinant of opportunity to progress into HE, as well as the type of university that students may enter. In his work *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) described how the concepts of social fields, capital, and habitus all work together to generate social action. A key element of

Bourdieu's work relates to his notion of social field, which he defines in the following way:

A field is a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies (Bourdieu 1998, p.40-41)

The field is the setting in which action takes place, and it is in this space that dominant and subordinate groups struggle for control over resources (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 29). Field is structured because it is where social relationships are played out. Individuals, institutions and class groups exist within a social space, and within this space each has some form of social relation with the other, in which some assume dominant positions and others find themselves in subordinate positions. We can understand the field of HE as consisting of the relations between students and staff, academics and managers, and the institutional structures and processes they study and work within. Indeed Maton (2005, p. 688) suggests that one of the main advantages of Bourdieu's theoretical framework is that it allows higher education to be seen as 'an object of study'.

Individuals will vie for position relative to the resources essential within the field. In terms of HE field, the system has been very much loaded in favour of middle class domination over resources and opportunity, and this was the position highlighted by The White Paper '*The Future of Higher Education*' (DFES 2003) which spoke of the social class gap in entry to higher education remaining unacceptably wide. For example, within this field class differences in educational experience and ability to access HE will exert an influence over individuals and institutions alike, and result in exclusionary forces which prevent individuals and institutions from seeing anything other than the dominant group frame of the world.

Bourdieu (1988) described French higher education as principally structured around two opposing groups. These are agents who possess 'scholastic capital' (intellectual renown) and those that possess 'academic capital' (institutional control over funding appointments etc). Therefore the struggles within this field are depicted as not only

being about trying to gain as much social capital as one can, but also a struggle over the debate about 'which form of capital should be the Gold Standard' (Maton 2005, p.690).

Fields are not autonomous from each other, and power relations within one field may affect an individual's position in another. Field boundaries are therefore dynamic and the product of changing social relations. Fields can exert pressures on another field and distort it (Bourdieu 1998). However, it has been suggested that Bourdieu's notion of field does not adequately deal with changes in social structures produced by policy implementation, where there may be temporary field effects (Rawolle 2005). Bourdieu's own studies of higher education took place when universities were insulated from wider political and economic pressures and could remain relatively autonomous institutions (Naidoo 2004).

However current UK higher education has been greatly influenced by the knowledge economy, academic entrepreneurialism and new managerialism (Deem 2001) which has eroded the autonomy of both the lecturer and institution itself. Alongside this, the massification of HE and new managerialism undermined academic professional autonomy and identity through increased management power (Parker and Jary 1995). This could be seen to highlight a struggle between vocationally focused outputs linked to the knowledge economy, and more traditional forms of academic output and pure research. These policies all influence and produce effects on fields and the social relations which take place within them, which may or may not be temporary in nature.

Alternatively it has been suggested that Bourdieu's work and specifically his central concepts of field, habitus and capitals can be used to understand the effects of globalization on policy processes in education (Lingard et al. 2005). Educational policy as a field is made up of multiple levels, one of which is global in character which reflects 'the growing global character of relations between national policy fields and international fields' (Lingard et al. 2005, p. 761).

Within my own study this can explain a move towards increased partnership activity with FE, and the development of work-based learning programmes such as FDs which are framed as meeting the needs of the knowledge economy. Widening participation discourse, along with its bed fellow life-long learning, are therefore

thrust into the HE arena to meet the needs of the globalizing 'knowledge economy. It appears that not all aspects of the HE field are influenced to the same degree by this policy.

My own research highlights a hierarchy within HE in which WP policy and practice are more keenly pursued by 'new' universities and FE. At the top of the hierarchy lies the elite HE institutions occupying the highest level of the hierarchy; below these are the Russell group of universities; following these are the post 1992 universities (the old polytechnics), and finally HE through FE at the bottom. Widening participation activities, and the development of Foundation degrees has become a policy direction for the bottom of the hierarchy, rather than the top, and this perhaps illustrates that certain segments of the HE field are able to retain their autonomy in the face of pressure from the field of educational policy. In his later writing Bourdieu explores the influence of globalization and the related neo-liberal policy directions of 1980s and 1990s which he argues aims to destroy the social state which

safeguards the interests of the dominated, the culturally and economically dispossessed, women, stigmatized ethnic groups etc. (Bourdieu 2003, p. 35).

Using Bourdieu's concepts we can begin to acknowledge the influence of the global knowledge economy field and the impact this has on the field of higher education.

The Habitus

The habitus is described by Bourdieu (1990a [1980], p. 64) as:

'a matrix generating responses adapted in advance to all objective conditions identical to or homologous with the (past) conditions of its production; it adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps to bring about because it reads it directly in the present of the presumed world, the only world it can ever know'

According to Bourdieu (1973) the development of habitus is influenced by one's place in the social structure, and is an internalised representation of early socialization. Thus a person's habitus is acquired in part through the family which structures their early educational experiences. The habitus highlights the ways in which structural arrangements become embedded within an individual's lived

experience and choices. The relation between social field and habitus is described by Bourdieu (1996, p. 213) when he noted that ‘social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and habitus, outside and inside of agents’.

The habitus will impact on how individual students perceive themselves in relation to different types of institutions, and also on how their social identity, previous educational experience, and family background prepares or prevents them from considering HE. If an individual grows up in a culture where HE is seen as alien, where educational expectations are low, this can greatly influence the individual’s self concept. The ‘self-exclusion’ and ‘false uniqueness’ identified by Thorpe (2007) can be seen as a consequence of ‘habitus’. These dispositions give us a sense of ‘things to do or not to do, things to say or not to say’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53).

It is difficult for us to think outside the formative experiences that formed our ‘habitus’ and therefore ‘the most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable’ (Bourdieu 1990, p. 54). Patterns of achievement and participation that are established in childhood are likely to be mirrored by levels of achievement and participation in adulthood – thus low levels of achievement at school are likely to be reflected in low levels of participation and achievement as an adult. Qualifications at age 16 are the key predictor of the likelihood of continuing education (Kennedy 1997). The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) survey found that 56% of those that left school at 16 had not participated in learning since completing their full-time education, whereas the figure for those that completed their education at 18+ was only 14% (Sargant et al. 1997). The habitus is in a process of on-going re-structuring throughout life, however this change is slow and tends to reproduce existing dispositions rather than transform them. As Reay et al. (2001:para.1.2) notes

habitus produces action, but because it confines possibilities to those feasible for the social groups the individual belongs to, much of the time those actions tend to be reproductive rather than transformative

Bourdieu (1997, p.166) illustrates this through the idea of ‘*doxa*’ which describes ‘that which taken for granted’ in a social system. He argues that some social arrangements are so entrenched that people accept them as facts of nature, or *doxa*. What this model offers is perhaps an indication of the complexity of why certain groups enter HE or not. Class or socio-economic background are complex predictors

of whether or not a person will progress into HE, and both the concepts of social capital and habitus can be seen useful concepts within this debate. In his book *The Logic of Practice* Bourdieu (1990) suggests that it is through the process of examining practice, and thereby the field and the habitus, that we can begin to understand a social group. As a result the habitus and the field are linked together and :

habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world; a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's energy' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.127)

Educational researchers have expanded the Bourdieuan concept of habitus to explore the impact of the organisation and institution on students' experiences and choices (McDonough 1996; Reay et al. 2001; Thomas 2002). The institutional habitus can be understood as 'the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organisation' (Reay et al. 2001 para.1.3). Institutional habitus can also be thought of as

more than the culture of the educational institution; it refers to relational issues and priorities, which are deeply embedded, and sub-consciously informing practice (Thomas 2002, p.431)

By using the concept of institutional habitus it is possible to explore the impact of the HE and FE institutions involved in WP work, and examine how the organisation affects both the students' and lecturers' views and practices. Both the university and the FE college are part of social fields within WP activity, and both can be seen as sub-fields as well. In the same way that schools have been seen as sub fields in which the game of secondary education is played out (Everett 2002), so universities and FE colleges are sub fields in which the game of WP is played out, and they will instil particular dispositions and views in the lecturing staff towards WP practice.

Cultural Capital

The processes described above are influenced by ‘cultural capital’, which is one of several forms of capital described by Bourdieu (1984), and which serves as a power resource, or the way in which certain groups remain dominant and preserve their status above other groups. Bourdieu (1987) describes how social powers are central to the social world stating :

These fundamental social powers are, according to my empirical investigations, firstly economic capital, in its various kinds; secondly cultural capital or better, informational capital, again in its different kinds; and thirdly two forms of resources based on connections and group membership, and symbolic capital, which is the form the different types of capital take once they are perceived and recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu 1987, p.4).

The concepts of educational capital and cultural capital are linked by Bourdieu (1984, p.13) as he describes

the very close relationship linking cultural practices (or the corresponding opinions) to educational capital (measured by qualifications) and secondly, to social origin (measured by father’s occupation)

Thus the cultural capital of the middle class becomes dominant within education institutions, and is reproduced by these systems. This can be seen in the way that the middle classes not only run educational systems within the UK, but perpetuate a system which valorises middle rather than working class cultural capital (Ball 2003). So the system excludes working class cultural capital and this in itself acts as an exclusionary force against those from other classes or lower social economic groups, from entering and competing equally within the educational field.

The manner in which inequalities are perpetuated through the domination of different forms of social and cultural capital poses a challenge to those wishing to widen participation into higher education. This is a complex picture and is not just about providing more opportunities to enter HE through new types of programmes, but involves challenging both the individual and class habitus of those who are currently excluded from higher education. This also includes challenging those who work within higher education who are (consciously or otherwise) perpetuating exclusion. As Savage (2000, p.108) suggests

What Bourdieu’s arguments point towards is the need to consider the nature of contemporary identities in ways which are not premised on simplistic

contrasts between either class collectivism on the one hand, or individualised identities on the other, but which are attentive to their inter-meshing

As discussed in the previous chapter, a key issue here is to consider how far the widening participation agenda itself is dominated by middle class 'capital'. Although the emphasis within the widening participation discourse is on 'inclusion', it is inclusion within an economic discourse of education, one that emphasises the importance of skills development and career progression, which have traditionally been very much part of middle class cultural capital. In other words the working class are being invited to play a middle class game, and on middle class terms.

Thus it could be suggested that the working class habitus adjusts itself to the demands of the middle class field, through being socialised to the concept of HE through widening participation activities in what Bourdieu (1990, p.66) would describe as a 'feel for the game'. One issue which is highlighted in recent policy is the importance of targeting widening participation and Aimhigher strategies on those that are truly under-represented, and this is a theme that is being developed by HEFCE (2007) who have undertaken work into more appropriate targeting of Aimhigher activity. Does it reach those that are excluded by class and socio-economic circumstance, or are the middle classes better able to negotiate systems and seize learning opportunities and then benefit more from such schemes?

The second important point is to explore how habitus can be influenced. Are there strategies that can be employed to change to aspirations of potential learners, and to challenge their self perceptions and learner identities from ones of educational failure to educational achiever, and from perceptions that university is not for them, to perceptions that university is a place that they can identify with?

Conclusions

Although Bourdieu's theoretical concept is exciting it is also problematic in the way in which his concepts of field, habitus and capital are inter-meshed and linked to one another (Collins 1993). For example the habitus acts as cultural capital by enabling the reception of particular types of symbolic goods whilst also acting as cultural capital 'enabling the production of symbolic goods' (Lash 1993, p.208). Similarly cultural capital needs to take place in the objective relations between systems of

production and the system producing the producers ‘which is itself constituted by the relationship between the educational system and the family’ (Bourdieu 1990a, p.124). This means that there are no simple answers to widening participation into HE as exclusionary forces operate at both individual and collective group identity levels, and the inter-meshing of the different aspects of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework can make it difficult to identify specific responses to deal with educational exclusion.

A further critique of Bourdieu’s framework is that it lacks ‘an appreciation of the role of contradiction in social processes and discursive action’ (Collins 1993, p.117). Such a contradiction is illustrated by the Summer School Project that focused on supporting learners to enter an educational field which has been influenced greatly by a global economic field. One aspect of this is the influence of the global economy and economic discourse of education emphasis on the importance of skills development, the commodification of learning and career progression, which have traditionally been typical of middle class experience. However, despite playing a middle class game on a field that is dominated by middle class capital, such projects do allow those who wouldn’t normally consider higher education, the opportunity to challenge their pre-conceptions about themselves and what higher education might mean to them.

As shown in the last chapter, the responses from the Mature Learners Summer School, run over three years, suggests that participants value the chance to increase their confidence and self-esteem, as well as finding out about future opportunities. In this way they are enabled to ‘change’ their learner identities by considering that HE is a possibility for them. Bourdieu’s approach stresses reproduction rather than social change, yet perhaps what the Summer School project illustrates is that transformations can occur which mean that despite entering a field dominated by middle class capital, non-traditional working class learners are able to challenge and change their habitus, and as a result change their learner trajectories. This theme will be developed later in this thesis as I consider the experiences of mature non-traditional learners accessing a Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care and the ways in which they perceive themselves as learners.

Despite these weaknesses in Bourdieu’s approach I believe there is a resonance between the theoretical framework of Bourdieu and the themes that emerged from

my practice development project. Practice development itself as an activity can be understood in terms of Bourdieu's writings. Practice is played out in terms of social field and the habitus of the agents that operate within that space. As such practice is dependent upon the habitus and is therefore largely unconscious rather than strategic (Lingard, et al. 2005).

Therefore there are aspects of my own habitus, informed by my own experiences of HE, my family, my previous professional roles etc, which will inform my practice, often on a subconscious level. As I was a first generation entrant into HE from my family, I think that I have tended to view HE as something that is 'open' and achievable, as I didn't perceive any particular barriers. This reflects my own experience more than the reality of most non-traditional learners, and I have had to challenge my own perceptions and take on board the complexities of inequalities which prevent many from progressing into higher education.

It is possible to sharpen an analysis and understanding of practice through 'socioanalysis' (Bourdieu 1990b, p.116) as individuals become aware of the structural determinants of their practice through reflexivity. I believe that I have become increasingly reflexive about my role as a practice developer, and have developed a deeper critical understanding of some of the tensions and paradoxes which punctuate widening participation practice. I believe this is more than a reproductive process, and one that can produce change in both the practitioner, and the practice through an appreciation of the role of contradictions in social action (Collins 1993, p.134).

This chapter has offered an analysis of Bourdieu's theoretical framework (1984) and provides a bridge between the themes identified in the first three chapters of my thesis and themes that will be identified in later chapters which offer an analysis my research with Foundation Degree staff and students. The framework does allow for an appreciation of how inequalities in education between non-traditional working class learners and the middle class are perpetuated by habitus, field and cultural capital. However I would suggest that the framework does not allow for an understanding of how social change can occur through education, and changes that result in individual and institutional habitus. This theme links to the importance of how learners make sense of themselves as learners through 'sensemaking' (Weick

1995), and how as a result change and transformation can occur. These issues will be explored in more depth in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Chapter 5 - Methodology

Background to Research

The focus of my research has emerged from my practice and some of the challenges I faced in terms of developing widening participation initiatives and Foundation Degree development. However at the beginning I had little clear idea of how this might be achieved. As I grappled with how best to investigate the objectives of my research, I began to read widely about research methodology. I also thought more critically about the merits and demerits of different approaches, aided by the taught research components of the D.Prof, and the rich dialogue contained within the group supervision sessions with my peers.

In the early stages of the research lectures, I would come away with an interest in the theme of the day. One week grounded theory, the next week phenomenology, and the following week narrative analysis and so on. After each session I would think how I could link these to my topic. These discussions also occupied a lot of the ‘dialogue’ within the group supervision sessions, and discovering more about why my fellow students were opting for particular methodologies also enriched my appreciation of epistemology and research methodology.

However on reflection this was a top-down rather than bottom up approach. Instead of looking at what method appealed to me as a researcher, or the chosen methods of my fellow students, I needed to look at what method or methods best suited the research issue. After further reading and investigation, I decided that my research was exploratory in nature, focusing on the FD Health and Social Care as a particular case study, and I therefore chose to adopt a case study design for my research. The case study would consider the experiences of part-time students on a Foundation degree in Health and Social Care, the FE lecturers who teach them, and the HE staff involved in developing and supporting FD development and partnerships with FE.

Case studies can take many different forms and directions, and it has been suggested that this can pose a conundrum for researchers (VanWynsberghe and Khan, 2007). Bassey (1999, p.12) offers some useful clarifications, which informed my use of a case study, by describing three different types of educational case study. These are theory seeking and theory testing; story telling and picture drawing; and finally,

evaluative. My study is broadly evaluative in nature, and has been informed by the work of Ellis (2003: 52) who highlights the importance of the ‘learning milieu’ as part of an illuminative case study design. I felt the learning milieu, in the terms of the complex interrelationships between cultural, social, psychological and organisational influences, was a central issue in the way in which learners and staff make sense of themselves in terms of their experiences of Foundation Degrees. This also fits with the theoretical framework of Bourdieu discussed in Chapter 4, which underpins my understanding of the complex inter-relationships between habitus, field and social capital on learner identity.

I had planned to explore the FD Health and Social Care as a case study across three different institutions. The Bournemouth FD Health and Social Care was planned and validated to operate across three partner institutions:

- College A – located in urban conurbation
- College B – located in large town serving wider rural surrounding area
- College C – coastal town serving wider rural surrounding area

However in the first year operational and resource issues at College C meant that the programme could not run, and never has. Recruitment at College B was low in year 1 (8 students), and a high drop out rate meant that by the end of the first year only one student remained. Recruitment at College A was more buoyant in year 1 (14 in total), although attrition rates meant that by year 3 of the programme only 4 students remained.

These disappointing recruitment and retention figures had an impact on the focus of my study at a very early stage. Whereas I had hoped to compare the three sites, in the end this became a case study of the FD Health and Social Care running from one site. I became interested in what issues caused such high attrition rates. Did students drop out of the programme due to something about the FD itself; was the high attrition rate due to the issues of delivering HE through FE or was it something to do with the nature of the student group and the needs of mature returners to study? This ‘pre-knowledge’ of the issues associated with delivering this programme and supporting students through it help to provide the eventual focus of my study.

The first stage of my research journey was to familiarize myself with the literature concerning FD developments and their role in widening participation. My pre-knowledge was therefore informed in part by my practice experience or ‘knowledge in action’ (Schon 1983) gained through my role in the developing the FD Health and Social Care, and in part by information gained from reviewing relevant literature. A key issue for me as a practitioner was to understand why students choose FDs, but then dropped out, and this would include developing an understanding of the context of delivering HE through FE, and what these new types of programme mean to both those who work on them and those who study on them.

Aims and objectives of study

The overall aim of this study was to broadly evaluate an FD in Health and Social Care, deepening understanding of how students, FE and HE staff make sense of them. A number of objectives were identified at the start of the study which fit with the overall aims of my thesis explored in Chapter 1.

- To offer an understanding from both the students, FE and HE staff’s perspectives, of what Foundation Degree study means.
- To identify issues associated with delivering HE in FE settings.
- To identify issues associated with access, retention and progression on Foundation Degree programmes.

Methodology

I decided to use an evaluative approach using a mixed methodology design. It appeared that this would be the best approach to enable me to explore a number of identified strands of interest. The use of a mixed methodology is an approach which to some may be controversial, and it is perhaps still an emergent approach to research which has been described as ‘unchartered territory’ (Cresswell 1994, p. 176), and ‘just entering its adolescence’ (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2003, p. 3). The focus of my study is evaluative in the broadest sense of the word and as Robson (1993, p. 171) suggests ‘evaluation is primarily concerned with describing and finding the effects of a particular approach, policy or programme’. The evaluation is set in the context of

my practice (up until September 2007), and Government policy that is focused on widening access and participation in Higher Education. The prologue to this thesis introduced some of the tensions that I experienced in my practice as a result of changing organisational emphasis towards widening participation, Foundation Degree development, and partnerships with local FE colleges.

However back in 2004 when I started my doctorate these themes were central to both my role and institutional policy. The study explores the experiences of students and staff involved in a FD in Health and Social Care, and their understandings of a work-based learning programme. Back in 2004 my hope for this research was that it would make a significant contribution to my own practice and feed into both organizational practice development and change. In four years, the institutional climate has changed, yet the findings from my research are important nonetheless in evaluating practice, and learning about the impact that new types of educational provision has on both staff and students.

Evaluations have many different methods and approaches and Patton (1981) lists over a hundred types of evaluation. I believe that my study meets all the features of evaluation as described by Robson (1993, p. 181). These are:

1. Utility – this research will be useful both to my own practice concerning the development of FDs but also to wider institutional understanding of the role of FDs and work-based learning.
2. Feasibility – this is a feasible study in terms cost-effectiveness and practicalities. The only costs involved my time, and email contact was used to cut down on postage costs.
3. Propriety – This research will be undertaken fairly and ethically. A full Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC) form was completed and submitted to the School Research Committee before engagement with fieldwork. Although this was not needed for ethical approval my D.Prof supervisor suggested that it would be good practice to complete the full ethics approval form.
4. Technical adequacy – the research will be undertaken with technical skill and sensitivity. This includes an awareness of ethical issues. This research was undertaken in line with the principles for ethical research proposed by Social Research Association (SRA 2003). Formal approval was sought from the Heads of the Academic Institutions involved in the study.

Evaluations focus on current practice and normally take place within the current 'policy space' (Berk and Rossi, 1990: 2). There is both a personal and political dimension to this research. On a personal level it directly relates to the FD Health and Social Care programme that I have helped to develop in the past, as well as my role of leading widening participation activities from 2004 until September 2007. This can be seen to link to Technologies of the Self (*pratiques de soi*) as described by Foucault (1986, p. 354), and a desire to develop my own practice, knowledge and understanding in terms of partnership working and foundation degree development. On a political level it focuses on current Government policy, which proposes the expansion of HE and the government target of increasing participation to 50% of those aged 18-30 by the end of the decade, 'mainly through two-year work-focused foundation degrees' (DfES 2003, p.7).

The method chosen utilised a Complementary Purposes Model (Robson 1993, p. 290) which 'rather than focusing on a single specific question....may be used to address different but complementary questions within a study'. Within a mixed methods study different data collection and analysis methods are utilized, with the aim of triangulating and increasing validity. The use of triangulation has been linked to achieving 'validity' in research by adopting a range of research strategies (MacDonald and Tipton 1993). In this study I used interviews with three different groups – HE staff, FE staff and FD students who would give their different perspectives on the reality of FDs. Denzin (1970) proposes four types of triangulation, one of which is methodological triangulation.

Data triangulation was used and involved interviews with students and staff involved in developing and delivering these programmes. The triangulation of data involves using several methods to reveal multiple aspects of a single empirical reality (Denzin, 1978). Qualitative research itself has been described as 'multi-method' in focus as it involves an interpretive approach which studies things in their natural settings by exploring the meanings people attach to their experiences (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p. 2). The multimethods of qualitative research have been described as 'a *bricolage*, and the researcher as a *bricoleur*' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p. 2).

It might be expected that an illuminative case study design would also explore other aspects of the educational provision as part of a multi-methods approach including

curricula design and delivery (Ellis, 2003; 2005). As part of this evaluative process I decided that I would focus my attention on the ways in which the work-based learning portfolios mapped onto the Intended Learning Outcomes of the programme and the particular units of study. I had planned to investigate the ways in which the students used their work-based learning documents to link into the overall programme and unit outcomes, to give an insight into how students made sense of the work-based elements of the Foundation Degree. However, four years into my study, all the students in the final year of the programme (n=4) had failed to complete any of the work-based portfolio work, and it became clear that I would not have this resource available as part of my research.

As a researcher using qualitative multi-method approaches I am using a set of approaches to explore my chosen area of study. As a *bricoleur*, I am aware that the research process is interactive. My choice of research and the focus of my research is shaped by who I am and what I do. This has been described as ‘personal stance’ (Savin-Baden 2004, p. 365) and is explored in more detail previously in Chapter 1. My personal stance includes my previous role as a social worker, my personal history, my past experiences, my present role, my values, my gender, and my social class which have all contributed to my choice of research subject and approach. I hope that my approach to research will be both reflective and reflexive.

The interviews used an interpretative methodology that explored the meanings that students and staff attribute to their situation (Guba and Lincoln 1989). The aim was to obtain participants’ perceptions of their world rather than impose the researcher’s view upon them. This is important as an ‘insider’ researcher. My role in developing and delivering WP initiatives meant that I had a subjective view of this world of practice. There is a strong link between identity and practice (Wenger 1998) and therefore my identity as professional scholar within the world of widening participation practice meant that my identity would implicitly and explicitly affect my research praxis. As a result, I needed to own and explore my role and power relationships within the research process (Foley 1998).

Organisational context and theoretical basis of study

Organisational context

Qualitative research cannot be viewed as a neutral or objective exercise as both the approach and application of the research is influenced by a range of factors including the researcher's role and status, the culture of the organization in which they work and their own gender and background. The focus of my case study was informed by my own 'pre-knowledge' (Kvale 1996), and this includes my own working knowledge of FDs, the experiences I had of delivering HE through FE, supporting Work-based Learning, and developing an awareness of problematic issues associated with recruitment and attrition rates. A key part of my role as Head of Widening Participation was to work with partner FE institutions to develop and support Foundation Degrees, and as such working in partnership with FE was a key element of my role.

The issue of working in partnership across HE/FE is a key objective within widening participation activity. Policy and funding initiatives have increased pressure on HE to collaborate with FE. HEFCE when outlining a broad funding strategy for WP highlighted key principles which included the need to

increase collaboration between HEIs and partners from other education sectors to improve progression routes to HE from underrepresented groups (HEFCE 1998,14.b).

Collaborative partnership between further education and higher education institutions is central in the development of Foundation degrees, providing a 'seamless web' of further and higher education which provide easy progression and transition pathways for students (Melville 1999). These types of partnership development through Foundation degrees link into widening participation activity by providing new types of vocationally focused HE provision which provide not only accessible but flexible routes (DfES 2003c, p.4). For HE staff, their own individual habitus and the 'institutional' habitus in which they work will both influence how they approach and work with Foundation degree development, and partnership with FE.

Traditionally the culture within FE and HE institutions has been different, although research suggests that cultural difference can be a strength of collaborative provision (Elliot and Gamble 2001). My assumptions, based on my own experiences of working with FE, were that the culture of FE would emerge as an important aspect within the students experience of Foundation Degrees, and it was therefore important to capture both the student and staff experience of this.

Among the drivers and benefits of WP activity highlighted in recent research across eight HEIs in the UK (Shaw et al. 2007, p.6), new partnerships are seen as potential benefits from the drive to develop new business opportunities. At the same time possible barriers due to costs of supporting such activity are also raised by the research. Both the FE and HE sector need to address issues associated with boundaries between the two sectors, which include issues of supporting an HE culture in FE and the student experience (Jones 2006). These findings echo my experiential knowledge gained through working in partnership across HE/FE boundaries, which gave me insight into issues of ensuring quality, supporting FE to deliver HE, and the thorny problem of recruitment and attrition.

The University has worked in partnership with a number of colleges and institutions, providing extended opportunities for study locally, often providing specialist programmes not widely available on a national basis. Other schools within the university have developed more experience in partnership working, through the delivery of HNC/D programmes, and more recently Foundation Degrees in the areas of business, design and computing, and media. However traditionally the School of Health and Social Care has not delivered such partnership programmes. Our first tentative steps were taken in 2003, when the FD Early Years was validated, and in 2004 when the FD Health and Social Care was validated, after I secured funding from the NHSU to develop it as one of five national pilot projects to develop FD programmes.

Part of the rationale within my own school for the development of FDs was an understanding that this was the only way to develop our undergraduate HEFCE student numbers. Another key factor alongside this was a belief that FDs would offer our local employers a route for their emerging Assistant Practitioner roles. However as we engaged with local health and social care employers through the development process, it soon became clear that employers did not have a clear sense of the what these new 'Assistant Practitioner' roles would be, and indeed whether NVQs or FDs would be the most suitable way to support them.

Foundation Degrees are HE level qualifications, which are validated and awarded by the university, but delivered mostly in FE colleges by FE staff. The government impetus to develop FDs had two main objectives: to develop higher order vocational

skills that enable the future workforce to compete in the global economy, and the aim to widen participation to learning (Doyle 2003). Although a qualification in their own right, all FDs should provide progression routes onto an honours degree as stated in the Foundation Degree benchmarks (QAA 2004). It is normal practice for Top-up honours degree programmes to be run in the university by HE staff.

Foundation degree students can be characterized as falling within two types; one is primarily male, under 25 years of age and predominantly studying full-time routes. The second group is pre-dominantly female, mature, studying part-time, employed and with a much more diverse and less standard entry routes (QAA 2005, para.16). The FD in Health and Social Care Programme at Bournemouth University is a part-time route, and one that is characterized by the second group of students described above, namely mature women who currently already work within the health and social care sectors, and have previously studied vocational qualifications such as NVQs.

Theoretical Basis of Study

As discussed in the previous chapter, the theoretical framework of Bourdieu (1984) has informed my understanding of the impact of class and inequality on the access of non-traditional learners into HE. This includes an understanding of the impact of field, habitus and cultural capital on higher education and widening participation activity. This provides a back-drop to my thesis, and as a result I have decided to explore emerging themes from across the HE lecturers, FE lecturers, and students separately as this fits with the earlier discussion of the role of 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1973) and institutional habitus (Reay et al. 2001).

As discussed in Chapter 4, 'habitus' is used by Bourdieu to refer to the norms and practices of particular groups or social classes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). The habitus refers to a group of dispositions which are shaped by socialization and the existing structures in which we exist. The habitus is in a process of ongoing change throughout our lives, yet according to Reay et al. (2001) for the most part these changes and actions are reproductive rather than transformative. In a recent review of research into widening participation Gorard et al. (2006, p. 23) conclude that the trajectory that people take in education 'is largely determined by the resources which they derive from their social background'. Therefore an individual's background,

including their parents' social class and educational experience are important determinants of participation in HE (Gorard et al. 2006, p. 24).

Different institutional organisations will have a different impact on those that work and study within them. HE and FE staff represent and embody the organisation in a direct way by the manner in which they personalize and mediate the HE culture towards FE. Institutional habitus not only affects the way the students are socialized within the institution, but also the staff that work within them. As Thomas (2002, p. 431) suggests

institutional habitus should be understood as more than the culture of the educational institution; it refers to relational issues and priorities, which are deeply embedded, and sub-consciously informing practice

The work of Bourdieu can therefore offer a conceptual framework within which to explore the influence of both social structure and agency on learning and identity of both staff and students (Warren and Webb 2007). The institutional habitus will influence the disposition of the organization and the practices it undertakes. The HE culture and institutional habitus will impact not only upon the student's experience but also the individual staff and their attitudes towards working in partnership with FE. The HE organization and the FE organization can be viewed as sub fields where the game of WP and the development of new intermediate qualifications (Foundation Degrees) are played out. Both the HE sub field and the FE sub-field instil values and their own collective habitus on their staff. Organisations, as social sub-fields, instil values and practices in their staff (Bourdieu 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This can be seen to link to the importance of the learning milieu within a case study approach as discussed previously (Ellis, 2003), in terms of the complex interrelationships between cultural, social, psychological and organisational influences on learners.

Recent research by Shaw et al. (2007), which was commissioned by the Higher Education Academy to look at the drivers, benefits and costs of embedding widening participation activity found that organisational structures have a direct influence on the ability of HE to embed WP activity. Although the report does not speak in terms of 'institutional habitus', it possible to relate this theoretical structure to the findings,

and this could include the ability of HE organizational culture to work collaboratively with FE. This report suggests that

the way in which WP was managed had the potential to cause structural barriers to embedding. The extent to which WP and diversity were championed at the most senior level had an impact on how they were perceived and valued within the institution, and therefore how embedded they were in the minds of the staff (Shaw et al 2007: 5).

The Foundation Degree sub-field could be seen as the space in which partnership arrangements are played out, and the space in which HE staff and FE staff come together to pursue a common goal. It is also the field in which learners make sense of their learning journeys and their identities as learners in HE. It is within the Bourdieusian notion of 'field' that individual learner agency is played out within the complex map of social relations and structures.

Learners within the FD sub-field make sense of their learning journeys and their identities as learners in HE. The learner 'habitus' is in a process of on-going restructuring throughout life, although this change can be slow and tends to reproduce existing dispositions rather than transformative (Reay et al. 2001). I was interested in why some individuals successfully 'transformed' themselves into learners on the FD Health and Social Care programme, whereas the majority encountered problems and left the course. Although Bourdieu's theoretical framework provides a back-drop to my thesis, a number of other theoretical perspectives have informed my understanding within this thesis and these will be explored in the following sections.

Sensemaking

The concept of 'sensemaking' (Weick 1995) can also be applied to this study. Sensemaking literally 'means the making of sense' (Weick 1995, p.4), and although originally based on organizational theory can equally be applied to the students and staff in this study who are making sense of their identities within the emergent domains of HE in FE, and within new types of qualifications. Sensemaking is an ongoing process in which individuals make retrospective sense of events, as well as prospective sense in that sense that is made retrospectively also affects future

sensemaking (Weick 1995; 2001), and in this sense it is similar to Bourdieu's habitus. It is grounded in both individual and social activity (Weick, 1995, p.6).

It provides a model to understand the ongoing interaction between the individual, be they student, FE lecturer or HE member of staff and the contexts they interact with and within. Individuals interpret the changes around them, and adjust their thinking and understanding of events accordingly. In relation to this study it may provide a useful model to understand how both students and staff make sense of a new FD Health and Social Care programme, which is being run for the first time in partnership between HE and FE. Sensemaking may allow us to develop an understanding of how FE and HE staff make sense of working collaboratively to deliver a FD over the HE/FE divide, and how individuals understand organizational pressures and demands. As Weick (1995, p.6) states

sensemaking is about such things as placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, readdressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning

Weick (1995, p.17) identified seven characteristics of sensemaking:

- grounded in identity production
- retrospective
- enactive of sensible environments
- social
- ongoing
- focused on and by extracted cues
- driven by plausibility rather than accuracy

Each of these characteristics has implications for how we understand the student and staff experience of FDs. For example sensemaking provides a method of conceptualising how students position themselves in relation to particular pre-existing discourses(e.g., those relating to lifelong learning, social exclusion, FE and HE), and the practices they enact such as the decision to join an FD Health and Social Care and remain on it until they complete the course. How a person makes sense of their situation is grounded in the identity they develop of themselves in relation to others (Weick 1995, p. 20). This model therefore complements and develops the Bourdieusian model and the impact of social processes on one's identity and sensemaking processes.

Critical Theory Paradigm

At the start of my research I felt that it was important to consider ontology and epistemology, before exploring the specific methodology to be employed. According to Guba (1990, p. 4) a paradigm represents ‘a patterned set of assumptions concerning reality (ontology), and the particular ways of knowing about that reality’. A choice of paradigm is influenced by the subject matter of the thesis, and alongside particular research aims, is also a personal choice by the researcher. I believe that critical theory has provided a backdrop to my research as it involves social structures and social processes. As described by Guba and Lincoln (1989) critical/ecological inquiry is one that focuses on the reality of domination of particular groups within society and of the unequal distribution of power. Critical theory, as described by Kincheloe and McLaren (2000, p. 281) is

concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways the economy, matters of race, class and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system

This links to the themes introduced within my practice development project and literature review which broadly set the scene for my research project. The background to this involves the impact of an ‘economic discourse’ of HE, the experience of ‘exclusion’ and ‘inclusion’ within education, and the impact of ‘class’ and ‘habitus’ on the progression of students on to Foundation Degrees. Broadly my practice development project and my research concerns social structures (e.g. class and age) and social processes such as ‘habitus’ on the perspectives of students and staff involved with Foundation Degrees. One of the aims of critical theory described by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000, p. 111) is

to increase our awareness of the political nature of social phenomena and to develop the ability of researchers to reflect upon those taken-for-granted realities which they are examining and which they are also- as members of society an inevitable part

At the time I secured funding from the NHSU to develop the FD Health and Social Care in 2003, I had some concerns at the pace of government policy directed at Foundation Degree development in FE colleges, and the lack of infrastructure to

support this. This was reinforced by the difficulties I encountered in getting employers

within health and social care to see Foundation degrees as worthwhile and relevant qualifications, as well as the confusion over the nomenclature. The word ‘foundation’ in their title did nothing to persuade both employers and students alike that this was equivalent to the first two years of a three years honours degree.

Alongside this was a concern that FDs, although widening access to HE for under-represented groups, achieved this by producing a two tier system which reinforced class difference. This could be seen to assert middle class dominance at traditional universities, whilst widening access for working class students on to new sub honours degree programmes, delivered outside of traditional HE environments. Applying Bourdieu’s General Theoretical Framework (1984) to this discussion, it could be argued that dominant middle class interests are preserved through creating new types of learning programmes that are delivered out in FE but that are ‘sold’ as HE. Therefore middle class cultural capital (Bourdieu 1997) is preserved, by the creation of new types of educational routes for the working class or those that experienced restricted opportunities when they were younger.

The expectations of students entering this arena, the expectations of HE institutions of their partnerships with FE, and the expectations of staff in FE who deliver these programmes could well be different. The economic discourse measures outputs from FD programmes in terms of increasing the skills of the workforce, yet for individual learners, there may well be different motivators and factors that impact upon their learning journeys.

The development of Foundation Degrees is a key element in the Government’s response to changing trends in the workforce and the need to equip the workforce with the necessary skills for the 21st century. The White Paper ‘*The Future of Higher Education*’ (2003) highlights making foundation degrees the main work-focused higher education qualification, and as a new emerging qualification it is a key area for research and evaluation, particularly as there may be tensions between the needs of various stakeholders and the needs of students.

The use of critical theory also sits comfortably with the elements of the D.Prof which require practice development and reflection and as Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000, p. 128) suggest

on the basis of critical theory, it would be reasonable to conduct research from an emancipatory cognitive interest which critically interprets various empirical phenomena, with the purpose of stimulating self reflection

Foundation degree Learner Identities

The distinction between the terms ‘further’ and ‘higher’ education and the types of institution they represent influence what might be referred to as ‘ideological and identity work’ (Young 2006, p. 3). They promote and sustain both learner and staff identities, as well as influencing the expectations of those that learn and work within particular institutions. When exploring the identities that mature foundation degree students construct about themselves, it is likely that a whole range of issues will influence their learning journeys and the ways in which they ‘make sense’ of their experiences. This may include their own ‘habitus’, the institutional habitus and the sensemaking activity they engage in. As Helms Mills (2003, p. 55) suggest

identity construction is at the root of sensemaking as it influences how other aspects, or properties of the sensemaking process are understood

In respect of the widening participation agenda which is central to the development of foundation degrees in mainly post ‘92 universities, learners through these routes are often constructed as qualitatively different to those students who have more traditional backgrounds and entry routes (Archer et al. 2003; Leathwood and O’Connell 2003).

HEFCE statistics on Foundation degrees suggest that women are more highly represented in part-time foundation degree study, and that there is an older age profile for these students. This report concludes that

mature part-time entrants are predominantly female, and ‘female mature part-time’ represents a large proportion, almost one in four, of all foundation degree entrant (HEFCE, 2007: 26).

The FD students interviewed as part of this study had developed their learner identity or ‘habitus’ as a result of their previous socialization, but also as a result of

'sensemaking' about their experience of being mature learners within the context of HE in FE. Their transition to becoming a mature student on a FD has taken place within the current political context of HE which focuses on widening participation and lifelong learning. Lifelong learning is proposed as an essential part of both our professional and personal lives (Evans 2003). These individuals were successfully able to challenge their self perceptions from educational failure to educational achiever and to re-position themselves as life-long learners which enabled them to remain on the programme. The following section explores the key themes arising from the student interviews, and identifies two overarching themes.

Sampling

This was a purposive sample of students and HE and FE staff as this gave access to 'information rich cases' (Patton 1987, p. 51). A purposive sampling strategy allows the researcher to satisfy the specific needs of the research project (Robson 1993). My sample therefore includes HE, FE and FD students in equal numbers. The sample was restricted in many ways by the potential participants in the local FE sector and University who have experience of FDs in Health and Social Care. As FD development was new in 2004, and the FD Health and Social Care was only validated to run in June 2004, the potential sample was limited. My sampling frame was designed as follows: university tutors - 6 participants, FE tutors - 6 participants, Students 6 - participants. Appendix 3 illustrates the progression of three cohorts through the programme from 2004-2007, and the highlights the high level of attrition before the final year of the programme. This greatly reduced the available sample for interview.

Sampling Strategy: Students

It was originally intended to focus the study on the students who were in their final year of the FD Health and Social Care as they would have at least two and a half years of the programme to reflect upon. As they were part-time students this was to be in their third year. However, the high level of attrition in this first cohort meant that by year three only four students remained. I therefore had to widen my sampling strategy by including students in year two of the programme in order to target six students in total. These students had completed the first eighteen months of the programme and had progressed onto the final year (a further eighteen months). A

letter was sent to all four students in the year three cohort and to all eight of the year two cohort, inviting them to participate in the study (See Appendix 4). This gave a potential pool of twelve participants. This initial letter was distributed to all students by the programme leader, and was followed up in September 2006 by a visit to the two cohorts during their evening sessions to discuss the project further. Six out of the twelve students approached agreed to take part in the project. Interviews were arranged to fit in with their schedules, and normally took place during the same evening they attended their programme in the FE college, either before or after their session.

Figure 7: FD Student Interviewees: Gender, current work role, age range and cohort

Sex	Current job role	Age range	Cohort
F	Housing project worker	Over 30	Year 3
F	HealthCare Assistant	Over 30	Year 3
F	Occupational Therapy Assistant	Over 30	Year 2
F	Trainer	Over 30	Year 2
F	Undertaking Voluntary Work	Under 30 but over 21	Year 2
M	Physiotherapy Assistant	Over 30	Year 2

Sampling Strategy: Staff

Interviews took place by appointment in work settings or colleges. These were exploratory in nature seeking to develop hypotheses rather than generate facts of figures (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The principle inclusion criteria were:

- 1) Being involved in the development or delivery of FDs in Health and Social Care in the FE sector OR
- 2) Being involved in the development and support of FDs in the HE sector OR
- 3) Being a part-time student on a FD Health and Social Care programme and employed in the health and social care sector

4) Willingness to participate.

The principle exclusion criteria were:

- 1) Not being involved in the development or delivery of a FD in Health and Social Care in the FE sector OR
- 2) Not being involved in the development or support of FDs in Health and Social Care in the HE sector OR
- 3) For students – not attending a part-time FD in Health and Social Care and not being employed in the Health and Social Care Sector
- 4) Unwillingness to participate.

FE Staff

The criterion for the FE staff interview sample selection was that participants should either teach on the FdA Health and Social Care Programme and/or have been involved in its development. This was to increase the likelihood of the interviewees having a good knowledge of the programme and of issues that had arisen for students. The sample consequently comprised of five lecturers and one senior manager who had been heavily involved in the development of the programme, and who also taught the occasional session. All the lecturers were requested to participate either by letter or email. All six agreed to participate.

Figure 8: FE Staff Interviewees: Gender and role

Sex	Job Role
F	Involved in development of programme
M	Involved in development of programme and occasional lecturer on FD
F	Lecturer on FD
M	Lecturer on FD
F	FD Programme Leader and Lecturer on FD
M	Lecturer on FD

University staff

The criterion for the HE staff interview sample selection was that participants should either be involved with Foundation Degree programmes as link tutor, or be involved in the development and support of FD programmes. The sample consequently comprised two link tutors and four members of staff either involved in FD course development or support. In total 6 members of staff were approached by letter, and all six agreed to participate.

Figure 9: HE Staff Interviewees: Gender and role

Sex	Job Role
F	Link Tutor
F	Link Tutor
M	Lecturer involved in developing units and supporting them
F	Lecturer involved in developing units and supporting them
M	Involved in development process and monitoring quality
M	Involved in development process, and oversight of new educational developments

The consent form was mailed to participants (either by post or electronically) at least one week before the interview. A signed copy was handed back to the interviewer at the outset of the interview before any data was collected. The Consent Forms were sent out to all participants accompanied by a Participant Information Sheet and a covering letter (Appendix 5). The participants had at least one week from the initial contact of the researcher to decide whether or not to take part in the research.

Reflective framework

My understanding of my research has been informed by O'Connor (2007, p. 258) who suggests the following framework to encourage reflection on 'scholarly role-taking' within research praxis.

- Temporal: located within time and social space
- Dialogic: evolving through communication with others
- Subjective: individually negotiated
- Reflexive: shaped by reflections on experience

Temporality

As mentioned earlier in my thesis, at the start of my research BU as an institution had a particular stance towards WP which encouraged collaboration with partner FE colleges, including the development of Foundation Degrees. Partnership with FE was high on the agenda as the university embraced a range of widening participation activities under the Aimhigher umbrella. The staff interviewed both in HE and FE would have been influenced by these policies and practices, and therefore my results are ‘embedded in and affected by the time and space in which they are conducted’ (O’Connor 2007, p.263). For example, partnership across HE and FE is therefore a core practice and one that is reflected upon by both HE and FE staff. Indeed as HE lecturer 5 interviewed in June 2006 observed

I remember going to a meeting with (.....)college about 18 months ago where at the end of the meeting one of the guys from (.....) college said how nice it was to work with our department because we weren’t patronizing, and treated them as equals, and that was very reassuring and comforting that someone saw us in that way, and that to me gave the impression of partnership..... so when partnership works well, I think there is a feeling that we’re in this together

Similarly FE lecturer 1 interviewed in June 2006 spoke of the experience of partnership from an FE perspective

I mean HSC and our faculty over the last couple of years have been wanting to establish these links, because it’s all about with FE an almost seamless transition into HE and bringing down some of these barriers

Therefore the institutional ethos of embracing WP and working in partnerships certainly ‘coloured’ the experiences of both HE and FE lecturers alike at this time. Another aspect of temporality is where interviews took place and the impact this may have had on participant experience of the interview (See Figure 10).

Figure 10 Interview Schedule

Identity	Date of Interview	Location
HE Lecturer 1	03/05/06	Office at BU
HE Lecturer 2	16/05/06	Office at BU
HE Lecturer 3	12/05/06	Office at BU
HE Lecturer 4	25/05/06	Office at BU
HE Lecturer 5	22/06/06	Office at BU
HE Lecturer 6	11/10/06	Office at BU
FE Lecturer 1	12/06/06	Office at FE College
FE Lecturer 2	19/09/06	Office at FE College
FE Lecturer 3	28/06/06	Office at FE College
FE Lecturer 4	27/06/06	Office at FE College
FE Lecturer 5	27/06/06	Office at FE College
FE Lecturer 6	01/12/06	Office at FE College
FD Student 1	27/09/06	Room at BU
FD Student 2	27/09/06	Room at BU
FD Student 3	15/11/06	Office at BU
FD Student 4	29/11/06	Office at BU
FD Student 5	29/11/06	Room at FE College
FD Student 6	24/01/07	Office at BU

All HE lecturers were interviewed in the university, and all FE lecturers were interviewed in the FE college. For the most part this was a pragmatic decision as it would have been particularly difficult to arrange interviews with FE lecturers if I had expected them to travel to the university. The FD students had a choice as to where they wished to be interviewed, and for the most part this was scheduled to fit in with their evening attendance at the college.

Some interviews took place in the evening either before or after their taught sessions in the college, whilst two students said that they preferred to come into the university to be interviewed. As the university, and part of the college campus are located in close proximity, some interviews took place in university rooms, if students wanted to visit the university that evening, and some took place in a room in the college. All student interviews were arranged to best suit the students' needs.

Dialogicality

In the prologue to my thesis I have introduced the importance of dialogue within my own experience of group supervision. However dialogue is also a fundamental

element of research and O'Connor's (2007, p. 263) model of scholarly role-taking suggests that researchers need to 'recognise how their own ideas and responses to participants influence the type of data that is gathered during research interactions'.

Although a semi-structured interview schedule was constructed for individual interviews (Appendix 6), I found myself taking part in a conversation with the participants from time to time, and this in itself would influence and shape the responses of participants. My 'role' in these dialogues was informed in part by my multiple identities – the scholar/researcher 'me', the professional academic 'me', the organisational 'me' and the personal 'me'.

I feel that both *temporality* and *dialogicality* can be linked to my earlier discussion of 'habitus' and the work of Bourdieu (1984), and an appreciation of how the conduct and practices of an organisation can influence both staff and student experience. As Thomas (2002, p. 431) describes

institutional habitus should be understood as more than the culture of the educational institution; it refers to relational issues and priorities which are deeply embedded and sub-consciously informing practice

In relation to my own study, recognition and reflection on the importance of institutional habitus on both student and staff experience is central. Within a particular 'field', students, FE lecturers, HE lecturers and their institutions exist in structural relations to each other and 'thus the relations between staff and students are key to understanding the institutional habitus' (Thomas 2002, p. 432). As I am exploring programmes that are HE awards but delivered in FE, a further dimension relates to staff to staff relationships across institutions. This also links to 'subjectivity' and 'reflexivity' which are the last two dimensions in O'Connor's framework (2007).

Subjectivity and Reflexivity

Issues of subjectivity and reflexivity are linked to my personal stance towards my research and thesis (Savin-Baden 2004, p.365), and my own individually negotiated approach. Maintaining a reflective stance promotes self-awareness during the research process and flags up how my approach or thoughts have changed during the research. For example how has my role and identity as 'researching professional' influenced my research? What are the implications of undertaking research in an

institution that is also your employer? How has my work role as developer of FDs influenced my research on evaluating them?

As explored in my prologue, I have used a reflective diary (although not on a daily basis) to promote self-awareness, encourage consciousness raising and to explore feelings about issues when encountered. This became particularly relevant during the interview stage, and later on in my research when my job role changed. Such a reflective process encouraged the development of insight into factors that influenced 'me' as the researcher, and this is particularly important where there may be a danger of over-rapport, which may damage the researcher's objectivity (Holloway and Wheeler 1996). For example when interviewing fellow lecturers, it was important to try to put thoughts of our professional relationships and work to one side as I interviewed them as research participants. The use of the researcher's personal views and insights about the phenomenon explored, through a reflective diary, has also been highlighted as one method for enhancing credibility for qualitative research (Chiovatti and Piran 2003)

Ethical Considerations

In order to satisfy the ethical questions raised by the research, a formal ethics approval form was completed, using the NHS REC format which was submitted to the School of Health and Social Care Research Committee for approval. This was reviewed by the Committee, and approved in 2005. This was felt to be particularly important in light of the context of this study, in terms of 'insider' research across both HE and FE settings. This raised particular issues in terms of ensuring confidentiality within an institution in which I was located as both lecturer/practitioner and researcher.

My role as an 'insider' may have influenced the FE and HE lecturers to respond positively to my request to take part in my study, as they already knew me. In contrast, I approached the student participants as an unknown researcher, and the response rate was only 50%. Therefore due to the 'insider' context of this study, in terms of research across both HE and FE settings it was important for an awareness of myself as a researcher from an HE institution and the power involved in this position. This is particularly relevant when working across institutions where partnership arrangements are in place, and has been referred to as of the 'politics of positionality'

(Soobrayan 2003, p.108). In light of this, it was important to remain reflective about the influence I exerted as a peer interviewing colleagues in both HE and FE.

One of my reflections at the time was the difference in response rate from the staff and student groups. Out of a potential 12 students across the two cohorts, 6 agreed to be interviewed, and this represents a 50% response rate. Out of a potential 12 staff participants across HE and FE, 12 agreed to be interviewed which was a 100% response rate, which in many ways is a surprising response rate. When reflecting on what may have caused this disparity I have to consider the impact of 'me' as a fellow academic and colleague, and the impact this had on participants' agreement to take part in the study.

An awareness of the issues of 'informed consent' within one's own institutions is also a key consideration in terms of being non-coercive (Malone 2003). Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity was assured through the Participant Information and Consent Forms. The general ethical principles of the Social Research Association (2003) were adhered to, particularly in terms of obligations to research participants. Principles of Non-Maleficence and Beneficence were adhered to, as was the principle of Respecting Autonomy. This meant obtaining 'informed consent' from research participants. All participants had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any stage, and all information kept will be confidential.

All prospective participants in the study were sent a letter outlining the purpose of the research, and a form to complete with their name and contact phone number if they were interested in taking part. Any names and phone numbers were secured following university Research Ethics Guidelines. As the student participants may have been supported by their employers financially, they may have feel pressurised in saying only good things about their experiences. Four measures were used to counteract this based on the work of Glaze (2001).

1. Participation was entirely voluntary
2. Participants could withdraw at any stage
3. Participants were ensured that there are no right or wrong answers
4. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured

The transcription of individual interviews was made anonymous by the allocation of a reference code known only to the researcher.

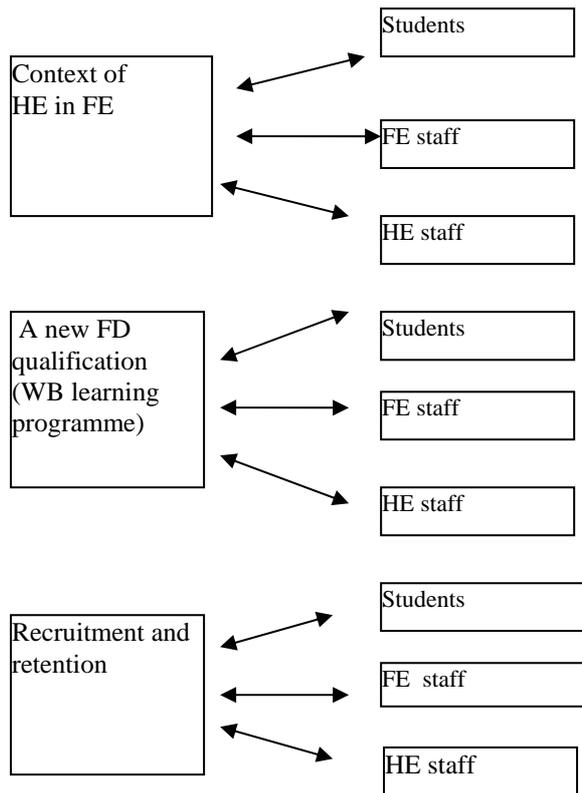
Data Collection Framework

Thematizing

Kvale (1996, p.88) describes the process of ‘thematizing’ which encompasses the *why* and *what* of the study. A similar process is identified by Miles and Huberman (1994) who describe building a conceptual framework which explains the main things to be studied, including the key factors and possible relationships amongst them. At the outset I hoped that my study would be inductive, and that the themes would arise from the data, rather than having pre-arranged categories. However as Miles and Huberman (1994, p.18) explain ‘any researcher, no matter how inductive in approach, knows which bins are likely to be in play in the study and what is likely to be in them’.

Therefore my own pre-knowledge provided a conceptual framework for the focus of my study. At the back of my mind were concerns regarding *why* there were problems recruiting students and then retaining them on this particular programme, and *what* actions might be learnt from both the student and staff experience on the programme that could be used to improve these. The main crux of my study was therefore to understand what these new types of qualifications meant to those developing and delivering them, as well as those studying on them. *Why* would a student choose such and programme and *what* would it offer them? This would include gaining a better understanding of the issues of delivering HE through FE, and supporting a WBL programme across a wide range of potential employment areas. I started by trying to draw together a conceptual framework to illustrate these ‘bins’ and the possible inter-relationships between them.

Figure 11 Conceptual Framework for Case Study of FD Health and Social Care



The four areas identified in my objectives provided the focus of my study and were used to generate scripted questions which were read out during the interviews.

The following examples illustrate some of the questions used to explore HE staff, FE staff and student experiences of FDs across these 4 focus areas:

‘Can you describe your involvement with FDs?’

‘From your involvement in FDs, what does study on a foundation degree mean to you?’

‘Why did you choose to study for a FD?’ and

‘What does study on a foundation degree mean to you, what had your experience been?’

What is your understanding of work-based learning?

What is your experience and understanding of work-based learning within Foundation Degrees?

What does partnership working between HE and FE mean to you?

What is your experience of working in partnership in terms of FD delivery?

From your experience what issues have there been for you by undertaking your FD within a college environment?

Were there any issues that either encouraged or discouraged you from considering FD study?

From your experience are there issues related to retention of students on FD programmes and their progression within these programmes?

Unstructured questions were also used such as 'are there any other issues that you feel would be useful for me to hear'.

Data Analysis and Transcription

The data I obtained from the interviews was transcribed by me following the interviews. My supervisor suggested that it was important to immerse myself in the data as soon as possible, and transcription is a first stage of this process. As Kvale (1996, p.163) describes transcripts are an artificial creation that move from an oral to written mode of communication, and as a result 'every transcription from one context to another involves a series of judgements and decisions'.

Transcripts are therefore 'de-contextualised conversations' (Kvale 1996, p.165). As a transcription is de-contextualised, I found it useful to listen to the tapes whilst I read through the transcriptions during the first phase of my data analysis. By both reading the text and listening to the words, I found myself transported back to the original interview and this triggered memories concerning the temporal and dialogic (O'Connor 2007, p.258) elements of the interviews.

I found the process of transcription a very time consuming process as I listened to the tapes, transcribed, and then re-listened to check that my first take was correct. Often it was incorrect, and it became necessary to re-listen to the tapes several times. I also decided to analyse the data manually rather than relying on a computer package, as I believed this would bring me closer to the raw data and enable a deeper understanding of it. Data collection and analysis took place concurrently between May 2006 and January 2007 (see Figure 10).

Data Analysis Model

Thematic analysis and codes were used to analyse the data. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 56) ‘codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study’.

As I was undertaking an inductive approach to my research I did not have a provisional start list of codes before I commenced my data analysis, but allowed the codes to emerge from within the context of the data. However, as mentioned earlier, my own pre-knowledge (Miles and Huberman 1994) will influence the type of labels and categories which emerged.

As Boyatzis (1998, p. 31) describes, a good thematic code should have 5 elements:

1. A label (i.e., a name)
2. A definition of what the theme concerns (i.e., the characteristic or issue constituting a theme)
3. A description of how to know when the theme occurs (ie. indicators on how to ‘flag’ the theme)
4. A description of any qualifications or exclusions to the identification of the theme
5. Examples, both positive and negative, to eliminate possible confusion when looking for a theme

Rather than adopting a particular model of coding I drew on the work of Miles and Huberman (1994, p.65) who offer the following rule of thumb

assign the single most appropriate (“better,” more encompassing) code among those related to a given research question

The approach I adopted was also informed by Boyatzis (1998, p. 44) who describes an inductive or data driven approach to thematic analysis. I developed the following ‘simple’ working model for my analysis.

1. Read through the transcripts as sub groups (HE lecturers, FE Lecturers and students) whilst listening to the tapes, and begin to highlight key recurring themes within the sub groups of text.

2. Group together recurring themes within the sub groups
3. Group together themes that run across the sub group

As discussed previously, I had hoped to undertake documentary analysis of the Work-based learning portfolios as part of the evaluative methodology. By undertaking this I hoped to how students used the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for the work-based learning unit, and so develop a deeper insight into the meaning of work-based learning for students. However when I commenced my interviews with the student participants in September 2006, none of them had completed their portfolio, and some had not even started to compile their evidence. After discussion with my supervisors it was decided that as this data was not readily available within my planned timescales, and as my interviews were generating much rich data, analysis of the WBL portfolios was not required.

The data analysis method used cross-case analysis within the three sub-groups interviewed as followed:

- Students on the FD Health and Social Care (N=6)
- FE staff teaching on the FD Health and Social Care (N=6)
- HE staff involved in supporting the FD Health and Social Care (N=6)

The first phase of identifying a label used a colour code derived from reading and re-reading all six transcripts within a sub-group. These colour codes were used to identify a number of emerging sub themes within a sub-group. For example, one sub-theme which emerged across all student interviews concerned descriptions of their prior learning experiences or schooling and how this had influenced their choice of studying on a Foundation Degree. These were colour coded bright blue on the transcripts, and I labelled references to these experiences as 'I didn't do very well at school'. This included any reference made to compulsory schooling, but excluded reference to other forms of post-compulsory learning or later work-based learning. This theme can be linked to the habitus of the learner, and alongside this theme, two others emerged which all influenced the individual self-esteem or self-perception of learners, and therefore individual learner habitus.

The next theme concerned motivational factors which I labelled as 'fit with life style' and 'proving to myself'. This included reference to the need to prove to self, but

excluded reference to the need to prove to others. I also highlighted external or public motivators which I labelled ‘employability’ factors and this included reference to factors which linked to their current or future employment prospects, but excluded reference to past employment. The final sub-theme identified concerned perceptions of learning needs which I interpreted as ‘need for support and direction’, and this included their personal perceptions about their learning needs but excluded the perceptions of others. These three sub-themes were then merged into an over-arching theme which I interpreted as the experience of the ‘second chance learner’.

The following gives an example of how the ‘I didn’t do well at school’ sub-theme was developed. It identifies descriptions which were included and excluded, and how interpretation was developed as I moved beyond the descriptive labels (See Figure 12: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria).

Figure 12 Data Analysis Example – Inclusion Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
School experience	Post-compulsory learning
Under-achievement in compulsory education	Under-achievement in post-compulsory or work-based learning
Perceived lack of opportunity in compulsory education	
Lack of qualifications associated with compulsory education	

= Interpreted as ‘I didn’t do well at school’ sub-theme

The following offers two examples of coding from interviews undertaken with student 2 and student 3 depict how motivational factors were highlighted as an important sub-theme in the student interviews.

Student 2 : ‘this FD when I started it really was to get me into the grade 4 position so that I, you know because I did work a lot unsupervised, I done a lot of the trained nurses role without actually getting paid or recognized for it, so um... it was really...the hospital looked at it as if you got this new degree you would go in for these newly formed posts, so that’s originally why I done it, I also done it really just to prove to my self I could do it, because I mean I left school at 15 with no qualifications, when I was at school girls weren’t encouraged to, you know if you aspired to go to Marks and Spencer you were, you know, one of the clever ones’.

Student 3: I think...well...personally my siblings have all got their degrees and things like that and I needed to prove to myself that I’m able to do it as well, but I think also I’m aware that at the end of this course it can be used as a stepping stone to do an Occupational Therapy degree and um....or I might chose to go on and get a BA, a top-up, um or I might chose to go in a different direction, I’m quite open to that really.

Two sub themes emerge from these segments. Both concern the ‘motivation’ for joining the programme: the first is concerned with ‘qualifications and employability’. Student 2 alludes to the ‘qualifications and employability’ theme in her description of her current role and progression into a new post, whilst Student 3 describes how the course could be a ‘stepping stone’ into a new direction or qualified post. The second theme is around ‘proving to myself’. Student 2 describes the FD as a way of proving to herself that she could study, and Student 3 uses similar language to describe needing to ‘prove to myself that I’m able to do it as well’.

These could be seen as descriptive codes that involve little interpretation. However another way of coding this segment could include a more interpretative approach to the overlying theme of motivation with ‘qualifications and employability’ being coded as ‘public motivation’ and ‘proving to myself’ as ‘private motivation’. As the thematic analysis developed through reading and re-reading the transcripts, the themes that emerge from the research participants stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience. Sub-themes have been collapsed and merged with other themes to produce key over-arching themes, through a process of moving from description to interpretation.

This chapter has explored the theoretical basis of my research, and the methodological focus I chose in order to explore the student and staff experience of Foundation Degrees. The importance of the theoretical framework of Bourdieu within my thesis, and the links made to ‘sensemaking’ (Weick, 1995) explored in this chapter, and will be developed further in later discussion and conclusion chapters.

The following chapter explores the findings from the three groups interviewed as part of my sample. I will present the findings for the students, FE lecturers and HE lecturers separately within the findings section, and then will analyse key themes that occur across the three groups within the discussion chapter.

Chapter 6 - Themes arising from interviews

Student Interviews

The ‘second chance learner’

A number of sub themes emerged early in the analysis of student interviews which seemed to inform the identities of the students and the ways in which they make sense of themselves as learners on foundation degrees. These sub-themes were merged together within an over-arching theme that I interpreted as the ‘**second chance learner**’. This theme concerns how the student’s identity is based on their past learning experiences, their habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), and their current experiences within the ‘institutional habitus’ of HE in FE. The students’ identity as a second chance learner is made up of a number of sub-themes and characteristics which include motivational factors and self perceptions, all of which merge together to inform their identity as ‘second chance learners’. The following sub-themes were merged to form the ‘second chance learner’ theme:

- the previous learning history of the learner which I labelled as ‘**I didn’t do very well at school**’;
- motivational factors which encompassed personal motivation (‘**Fit with lifestyle**’, and ‘**proving to myself**’) and public motivation (**employability**).
- their current perceptions of their learning needs which I interpreted as ‘**need for support and direction**’.

I will explore each sub-theme and discuss how it is played out in the Bourdieusian framework to influence the agency of the FD students.

‘I didn’t do very well at school’- sub-theme

All of the students interviewed depict themselves as having difficult early educational experiences, which included perceptions of under-achievement, limited opportunity and not realizing their potential. They appeared to make sense of their learning journeys by reflecting on the failures of their earlier educational experiences, and the structural educational disadvantage that they experienced. Experience of educational

disadvantage during the early years of compulsory education is likely to have a long standing impact on later participation in education, 'especially those whose initial education has failed to equip them with adequate literacy and numeracy skills' (Taylor and Cameron 2002, p.3).

The students appeared to make sense of their choice of further study as a way of getting a second bite at the apple. This is similar to research findings by Green and Webb (1997) where mature learners described their early school experiences as one that left their potential as 'untapped' or 'wasted. In a similar vein Britton and Baxter (1999) describe the 'unfulfilled potential' of the mature learners within their study. Issues of lack of opportunity or lost opportunity therefore colour this sub-theme. This is illustrated by the following passages that helped to inform the 'I didn't do very well at school' sub theme:

I never got the opportunity to do it when I was younger. I had the kind of father who said 'well girls only get married anyway so what's the point of going to college and getting a degree - Student 3

I didn't actually learn to read and write until I was 12 anyway, because of things that happened at home, and we moved around a lot, and so I left school barely reading or writing anyway - Student 2

I didn't do very well at school because um.... I wasn't happy so I didn't come out with the grades that I should of basically, and I sort of just weeded through life since then - Student 4

I went to a lot of state schools which are absolutely useless and then a massive gap in my education so it is not until I have come out of full-time education and gone to college and I have gradually built up my confidence and got qualifications that way - Student 6

In these accounts of early educational failure, the students are retrospectively identifying issues which have influenced their earlier learning careers, and making sense of their past experience and it's influence on their current choices. This includes reflection on how these early educational experiences have led them on a path to study later in life. In many ways these stories depict the failure of compulsory education to equip these individuals with the learning opportunities and support that they needed early on to enable them to gain the qualifications for future study.

Research suggests that a negative early experience of education can have the effect of putting the individual off further study regardless of their potential or ability to benefit from it (Marks 2000). Taylor and Cameron (2002, p. 19) conclude that

the long-term effects of school success or failure demonstrate that how we are taught and assessed or examined early on has a potent and lasting influence

It is interesting that despite difficult educational beginnings, these learners sought out a second chance to study, and it would appear that both personal and public motivational factors encouraged them in this decision. Their entry into HE has therefore come later in life as mature learners, who have developed their learner identities through part-time study, often work-based vocationally focused routes. What sets them apart from those who joined and then left the programme is an ability to remain motivated and committed to their studies. This has been described by Davis and Henry (1997, p.2) as the 'conative domain', which refers to both the motivation and volition to learn and study, and helps to give meaning to why some non traditional learners are more successful than others. It can also be linked to self-efficacy (Bandura 1977) and the way in which these students perceive that they are able to achieve a desired goal or outcome.

Within a Bourdeusian framework, this would suggest that the habitus is in a process of ongoing change throughout our lives, and that individuals can change the trajectory that early life experience and socialization set them on. This would seem to contradict Reay et al.'s (2001) assertion that for the most part the changes in habitus are reproductive rather than transformative. The individuals in my study have made sense of their earlier educational disadvantage, and have actively sought out opportunities to engage in lifelong learning, and transform their own learner identities. Through this it appears that they have bought into the economic discourse of education which frames life long learning as essential for both individual and wider societal economic prosperity (DfES 2003a). However, as the following sub-themes illustrate, personal motivational factors are central to this discussion.

Motivational factors

Personal motivation was a key sub-theme to emerge from the student interviews, and this sub-theme itself is made up of two sub-categories: **fit with lifestyle** and **proving**

to myself. The choice of a programme, and a mode of study, that ‘fits’ with the demands of a busy lifestyle can be viewed as a key motivating factor for mature students. Most mature students are workers and parents first and students second, and it therefore important that any opportunities for study ‘fits’ with these other competing demands. Lowe and Gayle (2007) found in a study of HE students in Scottish FE colleges, that students negotiate opportunities and options open to them to enable them to balance work and study commitments. For some this results in excessively long working hours, whilst half the students in the study achieved a good work/life/study balance.

The opportunity for part-time study which can take place alongside the demands of work and family appeared to be a key issue for all of the students interviewed in my research. Local provision within the context of an FE college appeared more ‘accessible’ to them, even though the university was located in close proximity to the college. Accessibility may therefore mean more than just locality, but may also be linked into the perceptions that the students have about themselves as ‘second chance learners’, their own abilities and needs, and the types of provision that is suitable for them. FE may be perceived as more ‘accessible’ because the students own ‘habitus’ allows them to perceive college as an option, whereas university may be a step too far at the present time.

Research suggests that positive learning experiences in familiar local environments can motivate learners on to a path of continued post-compulsory education (McGivney 1998, 1999). Some of those who came onto the FD Health and Social Care programme, had previously been studying level 3 qualifications at the same college, and naturally progressed onto the FD from these routes. It was a familiar and non-threatening environment, and one in which they could visualize future study as they already had experience of the college culture.

Several of the students capture the ease, and quickness of the transition onto the FD programme with such comments as ‘it happened so quick I didn’t really take on board the amount of work there was’, and ‘I think it happened so quickly that I didn’t have any expectations’. Above all, the programme was a practical option for them, allowing them to study part-time, whilst continuing with their full-time employment.

Practically speaking it enabled me to carry on with my part-time work, and it didn't impact upon my family income too much,um...I suppose it was something I could achieve practically more than anything else - Student 1

We've all, you know the girls and the boys that originally started have all got full-time jobs, as you know yourself it's extremely hard, if you've got children, I work shifts as well - Student 2

I think that is something that I can combine with work, I mean the Health and Social Care side of it is not completely the course which I originally wanted to do but it is still relevant to my work, it is still health care, I can still apply things to it - Student 6

This suggests that these types of part-time FD programmes do have a role to play in providing progression routes for those already within the workforce who wish to combine learning alongside their working lives. The flexibility of part-time study, offered through 'accessible' FE colleges seems to be a formula that allows non-traditional learners to consider higher level study, in a non-threatening environment. This seems to support the assertion that 'FE is the key to widening participation' (Kennedy 1997, p.28).

'Proving to myself'

All of the students interviewed expressed strong personal motivation to study which was linked to the need to 'prove' to themselves that they could do it. Proving to themselves appeared to be rooted in the need to see themselves as successful learners, and therefore linked to their previous learner identities constructed during their compulsory school education which were characterized by failed potential and lost opportunity. Being able to prove themselves as successful learners has been found to be linked to improved retention in other studies of mature learners (Thomas 2002; Tinto 1993). By proving themselves as successful learners on the FD, these students make sense of their learner identities in relation to others on the course, but also by challenging their previous negative experiences of learning. Therefore internal motivation to challenge and change previous perceptions of ability are important within this student group as they all recount the importance of 'doing it for themselves'.

To me it's one step forward, I thought if I don't go on, if I don't do something now, I'll never going to do it - Student 4

I also done it really just to prove to my self I could do it, because I mean I left school at 15 with no qualifications - Student 2

But then as I've got older I've kind of thought 'well maybe when I retire I'll do a degree', and some of this was about well maybe this is a way of getting a bit of a foundation for that - Student 3

I had just the year before finished my NVQ 3 which I found very tedious and I wasn't learning anything, I was just proving what I was doing at work, but felt that I might actually like to study and personally I wanted to prove to myself that I could achieve a qualification - Student 1

This finding is similar to other research with FD Health and Social Care students in the South East of England which concluded that students' who attend the programme for themselves, rather than as a pre-requisite for work, are highly internally motivated (Thurgate et al.2007). Other research suggests that students' decisions' to return to study is a form of private investment (Davies and Williams 2001). As the students reflected on what the FD meant to them, some spoke of 'proving' to themselves that they could achieve academically. This need for self-proof is summed up by student 1 who concluded that 'I'm proving things to myself which is good'.

The students are making sense of themselves as learners by proving that they can indeed study and achieve, and in this way they appear to be able to challenge previous identities of themselves which were constructed as a result of experiences within the school system. It is also interesting that they are able to envisage themselves as learners on academically focused degrees, whilst working in health and social care cultures that value NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) as 'the badge of excellence' (Thurgate et al. 2007, p.220). They are therefore able to challenge the institutional habitus of the agencies in which they work which promote NVQ routes over FDs at the present time, and transform themselves into academic educational achievers, and not just vocational educational achievers.

Public Motivation

Employability

Alongside the strong personal motivation to 'prove' that they could study on an academic course at a higher level, career development, or the chance to change career appears to be another key factor in motivating these individuals back into study. FDs are aimed at attracting new participants back into learning, particularly those who are

already in the workforce and want to develop their careers by updating their skills. As HEFCE (2000b, p.5) suggests

‘we anticipate that a high proportion of applicants will be employees seeking to open up new career horizons by enhancing their education and skills and wanting provision that enables them to both ‘earn and learn’.

Part of the motivation to engage in further study appears to come from students trying to make sense of their career choices and options. These students depicted themselves as agents in their own careers, and this is a key factor identified in other research into sensemaking in career development (Canary and Canary 2007). Adult learners may have a better understanding of their life chances and career options, and may consequently have ‘a more intrinsic motivation to learn’ (McNair 1998, p. 164). An evaluation of FDs by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2003 cited by Wilson et al. 2006) suggested that some learners feel that their skills had been overlooked by employers, resulting in career blocks which could be overcome by achieving a FD qualification. They were therefore motivated to study for a FD due to a perception that it would enhance their career prospects, and this appears similar to the findings in my study.

Also what appealed to me really, because although I enjoy my job um...I am open to the thought of perhaps changing my career and perhaps seeing what other people are doing, you know expand my knowledge on what they are doing , I might decide to do something other than OT - Student 1

To sort of progress myself, I had done my B-Tech and the natural progression is to do a foundation degree and progress my career basically - Student 6

It’s my intention to go onto the social work degree because I knew I definitely wouldn’t go, wouldn’t get a place if I wanted to apply straight onto a social worker degree, so this is why I’m doing this one, and then next year hopefully I’ll go onto the social worker degree course - Student 4

These findings are consistent with other research that explored factors motivating care workers and managers to academic study (Forrester-Jones & Hatzidimitriadou 2006). This found that the reasons most students’ attended a Diploma and BA Degree in Health and Social Care is related to either employment or personal development. Mature students have been found to think strategically about what course to study, because their key aim is to earn more money and have better career prospects to support themselves and their families (Bowl 2003). Other research exploring the aspirations of students in transition from FE to HE within the hospitality industry

describes the 'imagined futures' of these students (Goodlad and Thompson 2007). These 'imagined futures include 'climbing up the career ladder' and gaining qualifications which allow students to fulfil their career dreams (Goodlad and Thompson, 2007, p.5).

Yet it is likely that the habitus of students from disadvantaged backgrounds means that they do less well in certain sectors of the labour market (Thomas and Jones 2007) as they do not have the required 'social' education for employment in elite employment areas (Brown and Hesketh 2003, p.7). Class therefore acts as a powerful exclusionary force which has been described as the 'class ceiling' (Brine and Waller 2004). Alongside class, other factors such as ethnicity, gender, disability and sexuality may also exert an exclusionary effect on certain individuals. For example, gender can act as a further exclusionary element in the lives of working class women, and this has been described as 'the structures and processes that prevent working class women from getting out of the cellar' (Brine 1999, p.2).

This is confirmed by research into working class women on an Access to HE course which concludes that although all the women bought into an 'aspirant discourse', none entered an old university (Brine and Waller 2004). They suggest that widening participation for these women has meant in practice access to new universities. This might indicate that the 'habitus' of working class women not only excludes them from 'elite' HE institutions, but also from elite employment areas as suggested by Brown and Hesketh (2003). Other researchers suggest that learning at a post-compulsory level is a means of generating 'social capital' because it impacts upon relationships that learners have with networks and can lead to more involvement and trust in social groups (Baron et al. 2000).

As discussed previously in the literature review, the system has been very much loaded in favour of middle class domination over resources and opportunity (DFES 2003), and this includes a traditional dominance of middle class networks and social capital. However recent research suggests that exclusion can be challenged by a positive post-compulsory learning experience which can change confidence, learner identity and social capital by 'causing adults to think and act differently (Tett and Maclachlan 2007, p. 164).

The students who took part in my study do seem to confirm this assertion as their reflections appear to confirm a ‘transformative’ aspect to the learning experience. Student 1 describes the impact that the FD has had and concludes that ‘my colleagues have said and I’ve become far more assertive and confident’. Student 4 confirms this in her reflections ‘I must admit the course has really sort of enlightened me on lots of aspects of my job, and it’s made me a lot more confident’. This would seem to support Tett and Maclachlan’s (2007) suggestion that a positive learning experience can change confidence, identity and social capital. However, it is unlikely that the individuals in my study will progress into so called ‘elite’ employment areas such as medicine, although some may well progress into ‘professionally qualified’ areas in subjects allied to medicine such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy and social work.

‘Need for support and direction’

The above sub-theme can be seen to be inter-related to a sub-theme which emerged in the ‘Identity -split’ theme, which is discussed in detail in the following section. This relates to the way in which students make sense of their choice of a FD by viewing it as less than a degree. It therefore becomes something they can achieve as it is not seen as an HE qualification. The fact that it is run through FE also appears to make it a more attractive choice as students perceive FE colleges as more supportive of their need extra support. As Student 2 explained:

I don’t really know too much about uni, but I don’t know would I have got the help that I have received through the uni, I don’t know whereas they’ve been wonderful in the college, so that’s suited me fine

Non-traditional learners may have less confidence in their learning ability compared to traditional HE students (University of Teeside 2005), and the point of transition when they join the FD may be a time when they are more vulnerable as they cope with both personal, social and academic changes within their lives.

This finding is consistent with research that suggests that students from non-traditional backgrounds experience anxiety and alienation in their transition to HE (Reay 2001; Thomas, 2002; Archer et al. 2003). Studies have found that mature learners express doubts about their abilities, even when provided with formal

feedback about their own success and ability (Burns et al.1993; Pascall and Cox 1993).

Most of the students interviewed felt that they needed extra support, and this seemed to indicate their low levels of confidence about engaging in learning and fear of failure. This is echoed by Shanahan (2000, p.154) who suggests that many of the mature students who seek support at Oxford Brookes University 'express low levels of confidence in their academic abilities, despite meeting the university's entry standards'. There was certainly a perception amongst the students interviewed that a loss of confidence and finding the FD overwhelming contributed to the high attrition rates in the first year. This is summed up in the interview with Student 3 who suggested:

I think the reason they left was because it was too much for them, it was overwhelming, they felt the level was too high, they weren't taught in the way they thought they were going to be taught, those kinds of reasons, and if you like they lost their confidence

This student reflects that the culture shock of the level expected and new ways of learning was too much for many students, who as a result lost their confidence and left the course. However other research suggests that it is more likely that external pressures and life circumstances will push mature students into withdrawing from their course, compared to younger students (Ozga and Sukhnandan 1998). Other students interviewed in my research highlighted a 'need to be shown', and perhaps found the emphasis on student managed learning rather than didactic teaching approaches challenging.

It is interesting the fact that it has been a lot of self taught learning basically. I was expecting it to be a bit more support and finding that there isn't so much support on the course, it is a big jump up from what I have done before - Student 6

I'm 44 years old so I just need to be shown, I don't come from an academic background, I haven't got children old enough yet that have been through college or university, to sort of say oh Mum, you know, this is how you do it now sort of business, um....and I don't know how you can honestly be expected just to come into these things without being shown, and that, you know that....because the drop out rate was horrendous. We started off with 12 or 16 or something and we're down to 4 - Student 2

I was probably expecting a totally the wrong thing to what I actually got
I think more direction, more sort of um... I wouldn't say more information but
for somebody that hadn't been in education for like 20 years, which I hadn't
been... but I just feel like I wasn't pushed in the right direction and given
enough information on what I needed, you know, to get me going on certain
subjects - Student 4

I just didn't know what to expect really. Because it happened so quick I didn't
really take on board the amount of work there was, balancing it with home and
everything else I didn't realize, they say 10 hours a week private study but you
think oh I can do a couple of hours a night or whatever, but it never works out
like that when you've got a family and you've got kids, you know it's just, but
I find it quite hard really - Student 1

At the outset students perceive themselves as different due to their mature learner
status, and as they have been outside formal learning environments for some time
they perceive themselves as requiring more support. However they also appear to
view their transition to becoming a learner on an FD as one that will be met best by
the FE learning environment, which is perceived to be more supportive.

Research by the University of Teeside Retention Team (2005) identify a number of
issues associated with the supporting mature learners including the need for learner
support facilities, timetabling and providing feedback. Feedback helps to guide the
student through their course, and is key to maintaining self-confidence. Fear of failure
seems to influence students concerns that they need extra support. Research into the
risks of delivering an FD in Health and Social Care concludes that whilst students on
these types of programmes have a high fear of failure, they do not have low
achievement motivation, and 'a number of students are highly motivated to succeed
which can increase their stress' (Thurgate et al. 2007, p.220).

A perceived lack of preparation about the demands of the FD seems to have increased
the fear and stress that the students experienced. Several students highlighted a lack of
awareness and preparation before joining the FD Health and Social Care, and this
links into their perceptions that they required more support than was in fact offered.

I don't think we were adequately prepared for how hard it was going to be
personally, um.....and how high the standard is.....no I don't think any of us
were really prepared for the amount of work that was involved - Student 1

Well I know that it probably would be a harder course than I did before but as
it turns out now I'm a bit disappointed that actually they didn't tell us and
didn't make us more aware of things...that it would be so different - Student 5

I just feel like I wasn't pushed in the right direction and given enough information on what I needed -Student 4

This mis-match between student expectations and the reality of their HE experience is not unusual. Research into both mature students and younger students' expectations of teaching and learning in HE has found that student expectations were often based on their previous experiences of learning in school, characterized by formal didactic teaching rather than independent learning (Merrill 2001: Richardson 2003). There appears to be a culture shock when students are faced with the realities of learning at HE level, and the emphasis on student managed learning. Perhaps this is greater for the students in my sample who had perceived an FD as 'not really a degree', a taster of learning for a degree, or an in-between qualification between college when they enjoyed the course. A poor match between a student's expectation of a course and the reality of the experience has been found to be a common reason for withdrawal from a course (Musselbrook and Dean 2003). In my research this can be linked to whether students made informed choices about coming onto a FD, or whether as many of them described 'it just sort of happened'. As Harvey et al. (2006, p.46) conclude 'Ill informed choices can lead to a chain reaction of unmet expectations, dissatisfaction and de-motivation'.

Identity-split

The second major theme to emerge in the student interviews was again made up of a number of sub-themes which influenced their identity as learners on an FD programme. I merged a number of sub-themes which I interpreted as '**identity split**', which described the confusion that surrounded the ways in which they perceive themselves as learners. The main sub-themes within this concern the way in which student's manage and make sense of their 'learner identities' within the context of HE delivered in FE. It is within FE that the government has envisaged that most FD development will occur as a collaborative effort between HE and FE, and as a result many FD students find themselves studying for HE qualifications within FE settings.

A major influence in their learner identities appears to be the confusion they have about the nature of FD qualifications themselves. FDs were introduced as 'new two year qualifications with a focus on supplying the skills employers need' by the Higher

Education Funding Council (HEFCEa 2000). They were marketed as qualifications in their own right, with clear transition arrangements to honours degree level (HEFCEb 2000). However despite this, there appears to be confusion amongst the student group as to the nature of the qualification. The students interviewed in my study had very little awareness of what FDs were and whether they were FE or HE qualifications.

One of the factors motivating students to join the FD Health and Social Care was a perception or perhaps a misconception that foundation degrees are not really degree qualifications. This confusion of what HE in FE means has also been reported in research by HEFCE (2003) which reinforced concerns about the nature of the HE learning experience in FE and the need to provide an HE student experience. This report suggests that

not all HE students, particularly in colleges with limited provision, will have a well- developed sense of how an HE experience should 'feel'. Some, particularly those on vocational courses, may not be aware that they are studying at HE level (HEFCE 2003, p.46)

Most students in my study saw it as a route to getting a taste of HE, rather than realizing that it actually was an HE qualification in its own right. **'Denying FDs as HE'** therefore became an important category within the sub-theme of 'identity split'. By denying that the FD is an HE qualification, students appear to be able to consider it as something open to them. It is as though they have already assumed that university is not for them but that FDs are an option because they are not really an HE qualification. The consideration of undertaking a full honours degree appears a step too far for them at this stage in their learning journey, whereas an FD is not as threatening. They did however have longer term aspirations to go to university.

Well I think my impression of a FD, before I did it was just getting a taster of what a degree might be, sort of sticking my toe in the water um... and I've since learnt that's probably not the case at all - Student 1

I think when I first came my vision was that I'm at the college, I'm not going to have to work quite so hard as I would on a university course..... the college up the road is going to be a lot easier, so in my head I think I kind of got a bit of a shock really - Student 3

I think it is a good idea because it's like in between isn't it and it doesn't scare people off so much, if someone said do a degree in health and social care I'd go no, probably, but do a FD I'd think Oh I might manage that - Student 4

I hadn't heard of this course before, it's a new course, and then my expectations have been quite different because it's at a college, so I think people get mixed messages - Student 5

I was aware that it was a Higher Education Qualification but it is the way sometimes when you say a degree and then you say Foundation Degree, it seems to be a lot less than a Degree - Student 6

These comments seem to confirm the lack of knowledge and understanding that students have about the nature of FDs. The mis-perception that FDs are not degrees however does allow the students to see FDs as something they could manage, and an option that was open to them. By denying FDs the status of a university qualification, they allow themselves to see FDs as something that is 'accessible' to them, and the fact that they are offered through FE adds to this perception of accessibility.

Two issues arise out of this. Firstly, the lack of understanding of what FDs are, whether they are HE or FE qualifications, might suggest that these non-traditional learners have lower resources of cultural capital, which may mean that transition to learning at HE level is more problematic (Thomas and Jones 2003). Research suggests that the majority of FD students had not considered HE nor did they come from families or communities where this was an expectation (Rowley 2005). Secondly, the students' perception that FDs are not HE qualifications, allow them to make sense of 'FDs' as a route that is 'open to them'. This is interesting in light of other research which suggests that non-traditional students can feel isolated in traditional university settings which reinforces the perception they have that university is not for them (Bowl 2003).

This perhaps also links into their perception of college as a place that would better meet their needs as mature learners. Traditionally FE colleges have offered mature learners a route into HE via Access to HE courses that have offered supportive learning environments. As Parry suggests (1996, p.11) these types of Access programmes are aimed at those 'excluded, disadvantaged, delayed or otherwise deterred by a need to qualify for 'university' in more conventional ways'. As FD students commence their learning journey, they are involved in changing their learner identity, a process that for some may also 'challenge their class identity' (Brine & Waller, 2004: 98). The first sub-theme that emerged was labelled '**You just feel split**', and it concerns the ways in which the students see themselves as having split or dual identities.

You just feel split, you don't know sort of, I know it's got to be obviously because it's a degree that it's got to go through the university, but its sort of run by the college - Student 4

I always say I'm going to college, and then they go have you got college tonight and I say no uni, it's really because you're in the college and I use the college facilities and um...the support is from the college, but then when people do ask me I go no Bournemouth Uni - Student 2

Probably I do feel more that it is a college course than a university course Student 5

I think it's been made reasonably clear to us all the way along that we straddle both really, and I kind of thought when I joined the course, oh the college bit is going to make it easier, actually it isn't, I know other people who are doing degrees, it's no different level to what people are doing in university, but because you're going to college, there's kind of this feeling, and I think that's why a lot of people fell out in the early stages, that it's going to be a bit easier - Student 3

There appears to be some confusion as to whether the students see themselves as college or university students, or indeed as some sort of hybrid that straddles both. In a study of non-traditional students there was some evidence that they are likely to feel isolated, especially in a traditional university where they are likely to be in a minority, and this can reinforce mature learners' perception that HE is not for them (Bowl 2003). Therefore the 'fit' between the students' own identity and their perception of a successful student may be an important factor in student retention (Thomas 2002).

There certainly seems to be a perception, as expressed in the student interviews, that the culture of learning in FE would be 'easier', and this seems to suggest that their expectations of an 'easier' FE Learning environment influenced the students perceptions about where and what they are studying. These perceptions are explained by Young (2006, p.3), who suggests that the terms further and higher education

sustain identities and boundaries for both student and teachers and at the same time limit as well as enhance people's expectations and possibilities

Therefore those students that remain on the FD Health and Social Care programme may feel more comfortable about learning in a college environment, as they believe this is a learning environment which will better meet their needs. As a result they have a split identity as they strongly identify with the FE college, at the same time as being aware that it is an HE qualification.

Themes arising from FE lecturer interviews

‘More of the same’

A number of sub themes emerged early in the analysis of FE lecturer interviews which seemed to inform the identities of the lecturers and the ways in which they make sense of themselves as lecturers who deliver HE within an FE environment. A striking feature is that there appears to be a lack of distinction between the approach to FE and HE teaching taken by the lecturers, and that the needs of FD students are seen as very similar to other non-traditional learners within the college. This would seem to downplay the uniqueness of the FD student experience, and the expectation that they would receive a higher education learning experience. A number of sub-themes were merged together within an over-arching theme which I interpreted as **‘more of the same’**. This theme concerns the blurring of boundaries between the pedagogical approaches taken by the lecturers across FE and HE, the lack of distinction which is attributed by the college to their roles as HE lecturers, and the way in which FD students are seen as similar to other non-traditional students within the college.

This reflects how the identity of lecturers is grounded in the perception they develop of themselves in relation to others involved in the context of FDs including the students, other FE staff and the HE institution, as well as what FDs mean within the FE context (Weick 1995, p.20). The following sub-themes were merged to form the **‘more of the same’** theme:

- their perceptions of themselves as HE lecturers in FE which I interpreted as **‘ a slight change of role;**
- the perception that student coming onto the FD programme are **‘not ready for real HE’**
- the experience of the FE culture towards supporting HE which I interpreted as **‘Lack of parity’**.

There appeared to be a consensus amongst the lecturers interviewed that teaching at HE level on the FD was an extension of what they already did on other lower level programmes within the college. They therefore ‘make sense’ of themselves as

lecturers on FD Health and Social Care by seeing it as a '**slight change of role**' rather than a qualitatively different approach. This seems to suggest that they see little difference in their pedagogic approaches towards FE and HE. This is interesting in light of the Higher Education Qualifications Committee's (1993) description of the dichotomy between the traditions of 'scholarship in HE' as opposed to the traditional of 'interpretation of knowledge in FE'. FE staff are therefore seen as interpreters rather than originators of new knowledge. Few FE lecturers are involved in research activity, although similar comparisons could be made to many post-92 universities. Lecturer responses suggest that they don't see a real difference between what they deliver to FE students on health and social care programmes, and what they deliver to the FD Health and Social Care students. This is illustrated by the following comments:

I don't see a huge difference in the approach that I take...I mean I may obviously go into a bit more detail and the content is designed to stretch a little more than teaching at level 3 - FE lecturer 1

Personally I don't find it difficult from a delivery point of view, I find it quite easy to adapt to whatever level, from my perspective I don't find it too much of a challenge. With a lower level, start with the basics and kind of stay there. With the higher level start with the basics and then progress and expand - FE Lecturer 2

I've done quite a lot of HE work there, it's a sort of slight change of hat isn't it, and you look at things in more depth and um...you give a slightly different perspective to what you are teaching. The idea is to encourage a lot more ...ur...sort of learning, in FE units that they've been doing there has been quite a bit of spoon feeding, compared to the degree - FE Lecturer 4

Most of our FE and HE lecturers do both so there isn't a divide - FE Lecturer

5

These responses suggest that the lecturers continue to be interpreters of subject matter at HE level rather than originators of knowledge. This might lead to the conclusion that the observations made by the Higher Education Qualifications Committee (1993) about the differences between an FE and HE culture of learning are still pertinent today. However this might be similar for many lecturers who teach within post 1992 universities, where traditionally the emphasis has been on teaching rather than research and enterprise. There is now a push for 'new' universities to compete with 'traditional' universities for research and enterprise income, and this is placing a demand on lecturers to re-configure themselves as researchers as well as teachers

(Sikes 2006). Similarly the delivery of HE within FE has placed demands on FE lecturers to re-configure themselves as HE lecturers, alongside the expectations that they will not only deliver higher level programmes, but engage in scholarship necessary to support this.

By adopting the view that delivering HE within FE is not that different or that little distinction between the two are visible, these lecturers appear to have assimilated the 'institutional habitus' of FE in which an FE culture of learning predominates. The organizational context of FE therefore makes it difficult to offer anything different. This is explained by one of the lecturers:

Our work conditions are quite markedly different, and in that sense, you know you could argue that there's a possibility that the quality of provision, the focus might be harder to achieve for those working in the FE sector having to work within the teaching hours and marking times that we have in FE as opposed to universities
- FE lecturer 1

Another lecturer describes how this leads FE lecturers to see themselves as second class compared to their HE colleagues who experience better pay and conditions:

I think if I'm absolutely honest, yes, I think they do feel like second class citizens really, almost like, you know, they are getting this on the cheap, um...to a certain degree, I think yes it's the money,we need to do some negotiating on if you're teaching on an HE programme you do need more time for prep and research, because we just don't get that time, so you are really relying on the altruism if you like of the staff to do it in their own time - FE lecturer 3

This is linked to the second sub-theme which concerns the lecturers views that many of the FD students are '**not ready for real HE**'. This grew out of comments that the students coming onto the FD programme chose this route as they are not yet ready to consider a full-time HE programme at university. This is illustrated by the comments of two of the lecturers:

Some students are scared of HE and even if they've been with us at college on an Access course for example.....that jump from FE to full-time HE is almost a step too much - FE Lecturer 4

I've seen students who what ever their academic developments, I don't feel would be right to move on to degree level, but taking this smaller step from what we do to FD, might be right for them, they might be able to develop and progress in small incremental step -FE lecturer 2

This suggests that these lecturers believe that some non-traditional students could not cope with HE within a university environment, but that higher education through FDs might be a more supportive route. This suggests that FDs are somehow not as demanding as real HE, or that HE within FE is somehow a very different experience. The experience of supporting non-traditional learners across a range of programmes within FE can inform the approach that lecturers take towards FD students.

The emphasis appears to be on providing a supportive culture of learning in order to support learners to become more autonomous. Non-traditional learners coming onto FE programmes are seen as needing to be nurtured to cope with the demands of learning. It is as if they are seen as requiring some sort of remedial support to enable them to cope with the demands of study. This type of nurturing environment is described by the following comments:

I think what the students benefits from is the fact that we're used to working in a much more nurturing way, you could argue on the flip side that we can be a bit more sort of um... not spoon feeding students, but we're certainly aware of their needs in terms of basic academic and study skills, and that's because we're used to working in that environment, then we're much more focused on that - FE Lecturer 1

it's that reassurance, that encouragement, the extra bit of encouragement, the...um daring them to feel that they are autonomous learners but very subtly, encouraging them in ways of doing that, sort of helping them, helping them to learn to learn, because a lot of them haven't had that experience at any level - FE Lecturer 4.

It's very much on a sort of pastoral care, the support constantly of the student, sort of in your face, support always there, where it seems to me that when they go to HE they are a bit more independent - FE lecturer 6

Providing this type of nurturing and supportive environment has found to be particularly important for mature learners who may have less confidence in their learning ability compared to traditional HE students (University of Teeside 2005). Indeed Lecturer 5 gave some insight into this by concluding that 'the students on the first year are going to need every bit as much help as you would expect an Access level 3 student'. Therefore the lecturers adopt an approach which provides a supportive learning environment which they believe best meets the needs of the

learner. Bamber (2005, p.29) suggests this means providing 'teacher-intensive and sustained support throughout the course'.

The FE lecturers appear to assume that FD students need to be nurtured and sustained through their learning journeys in a very similar way to Access to HE students. They are therefore not seen as students who are ready to study on a higher education level programme, but rather as students who are on some sort of transition programme to HE. The lecturers therefore view the FD as a stepping stone which allows students to build their confidence, thereby enabling them to consider further learning within a university context at a later date. The understanding of the role of FDs as a bridge to university is summed up by one particular lecturer:

My understanding of the FD is it was an attempt to bridge the gap between what colleges can provide and what universities provide, my understanding is that it is to give just something in between, it was felt that the leap from one the other can be a bit wide, some people don't want to make that leap, some people may want to stay just where they might be, so my understanding is that FDs are an attempt to bridge that gap - FE lecturer 2

The supportive learning environment provided by the college allows the students to reconstruct their learner identities from those of low confidence/ failure to those of high confidence/achiever. Through this the lecturers demonstrate an appreciation of the learning needs of non-traditional learners who may have experienced 'unfulfilled potential' in their earlier learning experiences (Britton and Baxter 1999). They also recognize that providing a supportive learning environment can create a positive learning experience which can develop confidence levels and the identity of non-traditional learners (Tett and Maclachlan 2007).

Improving the confidence of FD students can have a transformative effect on their identities as learners, and it appears that for some of the students on the FD Health and Social Care this means leaving the FD without completing the qualification, as they feel ready to step-up to HE within a university environment. This has been described as movement from peripheral participation to fuller engagement in communities of practice (Gallacher et al.2002). One lecturer interviewed attributed the high attrition rate in part to the growing confidence of the learners, who then leave before the end of the programme in order to take up other learning opportunities at university:

We have a significant number of students leaving to then go on to university to a full-time programme and what it seems is that we've given them the confidence to be able to do that - FE Lecturer 4.

The non-traditional students coming onto FD programmes are perceived by the FE lecturer as being needy and requiring high levels of support. These perceptions appear to be supported by the students' own reflections of their learning needs as discussed in the previous chapter, as well as by a number of studies which have found that non-traditional learners may have less confidence in their learning ability compared to traditional HE students (Burns et al.1993; Pascall and Cox 1993;University of Teeside 2005).

Whilst the lecturers perceive FD students as being '**not ready for real HE**', they believe that FE colleges are the most appropriate setting in which to support these learners because of their expertise and experience in this area. The QAA (2004b) has endorsed the expertise of FE colleges in supporting the needs of non-traditional learners, in particular highlighting the quality of student support within the college environment. This expertise is acknowledged by the comments of two of the FE lecturers I interviewed.

Our boast is that being an FE college that we have an understanding of adult learners, and we say that we are different from the university because we actually offer more support - FE lecturer 5

I think what the students benefit from is the fact that we're used to working in a much more nurturing way, you could argue on the flip side that we can be a bit more sort of um... not spoon feeding students, but we're certainly aware of their needs in terms of basic academic and study skills - FE Lecturer 1

Both these comments reinforce the distinction between FE and HE, with FE being portrayed as being more supportive of learners' needs, or offering more remedial support. The way that FE lecturers approach non-traditional learners is responsive to the needs of the learners, so as to build confidence to re-engage them in formal learning (Wojecki 2007). Comparisons are made with the more 'remedial needs' of Access to HE students, and this can be seen to contribute to a blurring of boundaries between the differences in the two programmes. This is evident in the responses of lecturers in my study:

The kind of issues part-time FDs students have are exactly the same kind of issues, I would guess, having seen and talked to some of them, that our Access students have, the traditional problem of trying to

balance work and home life, and people coming in with poor initial experiences of education, and needing to be nurtured, needing to be helped - FE lecturer 5

I think the biggest thing that they need when they first come in is studies skills, some help with studies skills - FE lecturer 3

Some of them haven't really done that much recently, I know they are supposed to have done, but some of them because they've done odd bits and pieces really, they do struggle with it, and they do need a lot of hand holding to begin with, they are basically very scared of it all which is fair enough - FE Lecturer 4

I do think with the mature learners we tend to nurture them a little bit too much and then they go to HE and it is a little bit of a shock in a way - FE Lecturer 6

This approach will be reinforced by the institutional habitus within FE which promotes a culture of teacher led support, whilst downplaying the autonomy of the lecturers to pursue scholarship and research. This is linked to the final sub-theme which identifies the 'lack of parity' that FE lecturers experience compared to their HE counterparts.

Lack of parity

Related to the two previous sub-themes is the issue of lack of parity that the FE lecturers perceive in relation to lecturing staff in HE. This lack of parity is perceived as a difference in terms and conditions of employment, pay levels and opportunities for scholarship. There is certainly a recognition on behalf of the FE lecturers in my sample that they are teaching HE, but do not share a parity of experience with HE lecturers who work within HEIs.

Well we still only get the hour and a half for each hour we teach, so we get an extra half an hour on top of the teaching which is not really enough for HE. I feel that there should be some differentiation of remission - FE Lecturer 4

As FE lecturers the hours we teach per week are a lot more, the turn around in terms of marking times a lot shorter, so you know there is a huge difference in teachers whose contracts are teaching predominately in FE and those that teach in university because our work conditions are quite markedly different - FE Lecturer 1

You are teaching across lots of different programmes, and you're teaching 23.5 hours a week, so that can be a bit of an issue really - FE Lecturer 3

These concerns are supported by other research conducted in the South West of England in which FE lecturers reported that they had neither the time nor the 'permission' to engage in scholarship (Harwood and Harwood 2004).

The lack of time and resources available to support scholarship in HE will have consequences for the 'quality' of the HE experience available to FD students, and certainly two of the lecturers within my sample were aware of the possible negative consequences of this on the student experience:

Perhaps the quality of what we deliver it should be more fully researched and more cutting edge, and perhaps time ought to be made available - FE lecturer 2

In that sense, you know you could argue that there's a possibility that the quality of provision, the focus might be harder to achieve for those working in the FE sector having to work within the teaching hours and marking times that we have in FE as opposed to universities - FE Lecturer 1

There are also consequences for the lecturers themselves as they acknowledge the lack of parity in their working conditions, and this can influence the way in which they make sense of themselves as HE lecturers within the context of FE. This view is summed up by one of the lecturers who concluded that:

I think if I'm absolutely honest, yes, I think they do feel like second class citizens really, almost like, you know, they are getting um this on the cheap - FE Lecturer 3

There is recognition of this lack of parity, and HEFCE (2006) have recently stressed that there is a need to ensure that staff involved in HE provision have opportunities for scholarly activity and are supported by adequate learning resources. This may be particularly important for those lecturers who are teaching across a range of FE programmes, alongside their HE teaching commitments, and have the challenge to switch between 'suitable pedagogies' (Jones 2006, p.24).

Despite these differences between FE and HE in terms of the culture of scholarship and the ways in which the lecturers perceive themselves as being different to HE lecturers, it has also been argued that changes in the culture of FE have simultaneously led to new re-professionalizing opportunities (Leathwood 2005). An opportunity to teach at HE level on Foundation Degree programmes could be viewed as one such re-professionalizing process. Research suggests that despite the

limited resources to support the development of higher education provision in FE, that staff demonstrate a remarkable enthusiasm for HE teaching (Young 2002).

This poses a contradiction, because although FE lecturer responses suggest that they see little difference between what they do on the FD and other FE teaching, some of their comments suggest that they do perceive some difference in what they do, and the level of challenge associated with it. Staff appeared to acknowledge that the FD allowed opportunities for teaching different types of students and at a different level. This is summed up by the comments from a couple of the lecturers, who spoke enthusiastically about their experiences of teaching on the FD Health and Social Care.

Staff found it as a refreshing change to the level and stuff that we normally do
FE lecturer' 2

They are delivering HE when they're doing FDs and I think that a lot of them
welcome that, and they like to do that FE Lecturer 6

This might suggest that although there is a recognition of the different challenges that teaching on Foundation Degrees offers, this is downplayed for the most part as the 'similarities' to other non-traditional students, and other programmes is made. The three sub-themes suggest that FE lecturers make sense of FDs by seeing them as more or less what they do already. The distinction between what they do as FE lecturers and HE lecturers is therefore blurred, and they make sense of what they do as '**more of the same**'. A major influence on this theme is the context of HE in FE, and the way that for the most part a culture of HE tends to be marginalized within the FE environment. This means that students on the FD have a different student experience compared to FD students who may be accessing programmes directly through HEIs.

Ambiguities of partnership working

The context of working in partnership with HEIs and employers contributes to the second major theme to emerge in the FE lecturer interviews. Partnership working is central to FD development and is '*vital in providing programmes that are relevant, valid, and responsive to the needs of learners and employers*' (QAA 2004, p. 7). A number of sub-themes emerged in the analysis of the FE lecturer interviews which were related to partnership working. This influenced the way in which the FE lecturers perceive the FD itself as a qualification, as well as the value they place on

themselves as colleagues within a collaborative arrangement. I merged a number of sub-themes which I interpreted as '**the ambiguities of partnership working**'.

The main sub-themes within this concern the way in which FE lecturers manage and make sense of collaborative partnerships, and in particular the experience of working collaboratively with HEIs and employers. The institutional habitus within stakeholder organizations will influence the way in which FDs are perceived and the value that is placed upon them by health and social care employers. In turn this will reinforce the way in which FDs are perceived within the college environment by the FE staff.

The following sub-themes were merged to form 'the **ambiguities of partnership working**' sub- theme:

- their experiences of working collaboratively with HE which I interpreted as '**the importance of team work**';
- the perception that employers do not understand FDs or what they might offer in terms of workforce development which I interpreted as '**difficulties in engaging employers**'.

One of the potential benefits of widening participation activities is the potential of new partnerships between FE colleges, HEIs and employers (Shaw et al. 2007). This provides potential progression routes for students, particularly non-traditional learners who may not have previously considered study at HE level. Melville (1999) describes this as a 'seamless web' of further and higher education that provides easy progression and transition pathways for students. This notion of a 'seamless' web of education was acknowledged by one lecturer who commented:

I think it is a really useful partnership, and I think any connections we can make between different tiers of education has got to be positive for students -
FE Lecturer 1

Despite recognition of the value of partnerships between FE and HE in providing seamless transitions for students, it was also acknowledged by FE staff that culture in HE is different. This has led to some challenges for staff in terms of meeting the academic culture of the HEI. This is explained by two of the FE lecturers:

I get a sense that the sort of culture within which the universities work is markedly different in the sense that there is much more of a focus on academic in terms of actually what you do - FE Lecturer 1

I've found the standards and culture quite different than what I'm used to and that seems far more scrutinized and far greater note taken about the way work has been referenced than the culture I'm used to - FE Lecturer 2

Support to cope with the challenges of meeting the requirements of HE in terms of quality and standards is offered to FE lecturers at a variety of levels across the partnership. Partnerships occur at different levels within and across institutions and consist of 'layers of collaboration' (Dhillon 2005, p.214). At a strategic level, an organizational approach to supporting partnerships across HE/FE boundaries encourages FE lecturers to attend staff development sessions within the university, which offers information and support concerning issues such as assessment, exam boards, and quality. The nature of the collaborative partnership at a strategic level across FE/HE has therefore attempted to support FE staff to cope with the challenges of delivering HE in FE, particularly through staff development. However as discussed in the previous theme 'More of the same', it became apparent that FE staff have difficulty accessing such staff development and scholarship opportunities due to their high teaching loads, and this is supported by other research which suggest that FE staff neither have the time or the 'permission' to engage in scholarship (Harwood and Harwood 2004).

This suggests that the more powerful element in supporting FE staff to deliver HE comes from local team work, specifically the work of HE link tutors in supporting the FE team deliver the programme. This includes supporting them to work within university requirements in terms of quality, assessment and exam boards. This informs the first sub-theme which I interpreted as '**the importance of team work**'. This is summed up by the response of one lecturer in particular who concluded that:

I mean the bottom line is the FD Health and Social Care has got to conform to the standards of a BU degree, it's your degree, we offer it but it's your degree, it's not Band P College's degree, it's Bournemouth University's degree so the bottom line is we have to satisfy that it is as good as any other BU degree offered by BU. Now from what I've heard from J, she's had a great deal of help from the link tutor...and I think that is an example of partnership at a very local level, just ensuring that our FD meets your standards and is working very well, and if there are problems they are ironed locally quickly..... - FE Lecturer 5

This sub-theme demonstrates the importance of the social aspects of partnership and team work, which has been described as the glue that holds people together, and thus sustains partnerships (Dhillon 2005, p.215). When this is related to my study, what becomes apparent is the importance placed by FE lecturers on local collaboration with HE colleagues. This is particularly evident in the positive responses concerning the nature of support from the university based link tutors, who are seen as central components to successful collaborative working.

They think of us as equals in the college - FE lecturer 5

The importance of positive teamwork, which supports an 'equal partnership' through 'commitment' and regular communication at a local level, was perceived as a key ingredient in the successful teamwork between the FE and HE staff. The following passages illustrate the role that communication has in reinforcing good partnership working.

I think from my own perspective it is working fantastically well, but I think to be absolutely honest that is down to the team, I'm talking about the university team and the college team I think we were all very committed at the beginning to the partnership...we saw it as a true partnership of sharing ideas, of sharing resources, of sharing knowledge - HE Lecturer 3

I have to say that regular contact is the big thing, we are regularly in contact with each other all the time, and I think that is very important, we know that we are there for each other - FE Lecturer 3

I've been along to a couple of the meetings that they have, the liaison meetings, and those have been very useful because everybody gets to have their say about what they are feeling about things - FE Lecturer 4

Communication is identified as being central to this process, and positive communication which values the contributions of both FE and HE staff is viewed as a key ingredients in a successful working partnership between FE and HE. The working relationship between lecturers in HE and FE was one in which there were open and honest in their dealings, and this approach is supported by research which suggests that open and honest communication is a major influence on successful inter agency working (Barrett et al. 2005). The support offered by link tutors to FE staff who are grappling not only with the demands of delivering an HE level programme, but also the aspects of quality assurance that the HEI demands, was seen as central to the success of the partnership. There appeared to be an FD 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998) that developed across the HE/FE boundaries, in which new

knowledge and understanding of working on the FD was created through joint enterprise.

This was a learning curve not only for FE staff, but for the HE staff supporting the college to deliver the FD, and it appears that within the 'FD community of practice', staff were able to learn about each other and the organizational context in which they work. This model of a 'community of practice' could be seen to be built on the foundations of earlier work undertaken within the Dorset, South Somerset and South Wiltshire Higher Education Partnership (DSW) which worked to develop links between HEIs and FE by supporting the sharing of good practice, and to use FEC networks to widen participation (Last and Powell 2005). This assisted in building links from the university to partner FE colleges, and enabled a supportive culture to become established in the local region.

A different picture of partnership working with employers emerges from the interviews with FE staff. Although FDs were marketed as qualifications in their own right, with clear transition arrangements to honours degree level (HEFCEb 2000), the analysis of student interviews in the previous section highlighted that students coming onto FDs have little understanding of what these qualifications actually are. Similarly, FE lecturers believe that employers have little understanding of the FD qualification route, and what it might mean for them in terms of their own workforce development. FE lecturer responses suggest that they perceive the strength of the FD as being its links to employment and work-based learning, although health and social care employers are perceived as having little understanding of FDs and what they might mean in terms of workforce development. This informed the second sub-theme to emerge in the '**ambiguities of partnership**' theme and I interpreted this as '**difficulties in engaging employers**'.

The FE lecturers identify the strength of the FD being rooted in its link to practice and work-based learning. Therefore the role of learning relevant for employment is a key theme.

I think the profile of the whole FD approach needs to be raised, and employers certainly are not as aware as they should be. But I think there are parallels between NVQs as well years and years ago, it took many years really before NVQ became recognized, and then again that was driven by the Government training schemes, by TOPSS and so forth - FE Lecturer 1

While social care employers are expressing this ambivalence, and this is what students are saying, then I think there will be difficulties in recruitment - FE Lecturer 4

I think it is lack of understanding by employers, but also as far as I understand it a lack of clarity at this point as to where FDs, a FD qualification might be located in the whole range of posts that might be available in any occupation in the NHS particularly, this needs to be clarified - FE Lecturer 5

I'm hearing of adults from the tutor group myself that sometimes the employers aren't really understanding what it's all about, and then when it gets hard at work or heavy at work, with work loads and so on, and they tend to back off and drop off and say well why I am doing it any way, what can I do, other employers don't seem to recognize it so why I am here - FE Lecturer 6

This is not the same for all health related FDs, and models have developed across the country that have more specifically been mapped onto local demand for workforce development and new emerging roles. For example in Greater Manchester the FD Assistant Practitioner in Health (a collaboration between The University of Bolton, Manchester Metropolitan University and the Greater Manchester Strategic Health Authority), has seen over 700 trainee assistant practitioners come onto the programme (Doyle and O'Doherty 2006).

This perhaps provides an example of ground up approach that is driven by local employer need. It was imagined when the Bournemouth University FD Health and Social Care was developed that new emergent assistant practitioners roles would fit comfortably within this FD framework, and that local healthcare partners would be keen to develop such awards. However in practice, assistant practitioner roles were still very embryonic locally. Although the potential of the FD was recognized, there was an absence of a commitment from local health sector employers to send their employees onto the programme in significant numbers, and a lack of clarity from employers about their long-term workforce development needs.

Similarly, within the local social care sector, although there was an engagement with the development of the degree, employers appeared to be wedded to the idea of NVQs being the qualification of choice within social care sectors, and although a few employees were supported on the programme, these were not in significant numbers. As a result, most students coming onto the FD programme were self-funding and self-motivated, and did so without the direct support of their employers.

A few came onto the programme without the knowledge of their employers, and in fact did not want their employer to know that they were studying for the qualification. This posed significant problems when completing the WBL learning portfolio, as the college mentor could not visit the employer in these instances, as the student did not want their employer to know about the FD. This issue was picked up by one particular FE lecturer who suggested that

I've heard anecdotally that some students do not want their employers to know that they are doing the degree, because they might give them a hard time if they think the student might want to leave - FE lecturer 5

The FE lecturers report a great variability in the student experience of employer involvement on the FD. For one or two students this has been positive, and there has been a good level of input and support from employers. Others have experienced a more variable level of support. This is highlighted by the following comments:

I've got a couple of students who work as assistant practitioners – one in physio and one in OT, and they are actually very well supported by their employers who encourage them to relate a lot of what they are doing in college to their workplace...conversely we have employers who say 'I don't know why you're doing that it's a waste of time - FE Lecturer 3

I think there are very varied experiences within the workplace as to how much support they are getting. The thing is it's not like an NVQ where the employers can see the instant result, they can see competencies that are happening there, because it's a more academic relationship, it's not an obvious improvement in their performance in a particular way -FE Lecturer 4.

The variability of employer involvement with FDs was noted in a report by PricewaterhouseCoopers (2002) that noted differences in both employer involvement and student/employee experience. This report suggests that some employees were funded or given time-off work whilst undertaking FDs, whilst others received no support. The two sub-themes discussed have informed my interpretation concerning **the ambiguities of partnership working** that FE lecturers' experience. In part this is informed by the importance that they place on team work at a local level with HE colleagues, but also by the difficulties of engaging employers into working in partnership to support students. Partnership working is therefore ambiguous, as it varies across the partnership with HE and employers.

FE lecturers appear to feel positive about their partnership with HE, and local team work is a powerful element in supporting FE staff to deliver HE. However at the present time this type of supportive relationship is not evident between FE and employers, and this can have an adverse experience on students, particularly within the work-based learning elements of the programme. Expectations about how employers can become engaged with FD development and support remains a particular tension for HEIs and FE colleges, and the conundrum of how employer engagement can be incentivised or enforced is particularly problematic (Edmond et al. 2007). Lack of support from employers can have a negative impact on learners on FD programmes, and this may be particularly pertinent for learners with low self confidence (Cunningham 2004).

In summary, the two major themes arising out of FE staff interviews highlight the challenge of delivering Foundations Degrees in FE. Part of this challenge arises out of the way in which lecturers perceive what they do as being **‘more of the same’**, blurring the distinction between FE and HE level programmes. The other theme concerns the ambiguities involved in delivering FDs in partnership between HE, FE and employers, and the challenge of developing equality in the partnership across all three.

For FDs to be embraced as new types of WBL programmes which provide progression routes for employees to develop the necessary skills for new emerging assistant practitioner roles, it is important for the uniqueness of these new awards to be acknowledged by all concerned. Foundation degree development stresses partnership across the board, not only with employers but also between the further education (FE) sector and HE sector (DfESc 2003). However the themes emerging from FE lecturing staff interviews highlight the ongoing challenges to this. The lecturers themselves seem to ‘down play’ the uniqueness of the FD award as being something new and different, and this may be reinforced by the ambiguous levels of support that the award tends to receive from employers. This may have the impact of reinforcing the FD as something that is not valued by those that it was meant to serve, namely the employers.

HE Staff Interviews

The themes arising from HE staff interviews represent the final part of my findings chapter. The findings from students and FE staff illustrate the way in which individuals develop their understanding of what FDs are, and what they mean to them as either learners or lecturers. Due to the nature of the partnership and the fact that FDs are delivered in FE colleges, staff that work in HEIs have a different understanding and experience of FDs, either in their roles as developers of FDs or supporters of partnerships between FE and HE. Their experience is therefore more 'distanced' than the students who are learning on the programmes, or the FE lecturing staff who are delivering the learning. Their sense of FDs is therefore influenced by their wider perspectives on how the partnership between FE and HE works.

There appears to be a perception from all HE staff interviewed that Foundation Degrees have an important role to play in widening participation to higher education. This includes perceptions about the nature of the FD qualification itself; perceptions about the needs of non-traditional students that come onto the FD programme; and the appropriateness of FE environments to best suit the support needs of such non-traditional learners. HE lecturers therefore make sense of FDs as something different and distinct to the type of programmes and students that they normally come into contact with. In particular the way in which learners can gain access onto FDs with limited previous academic experience helps to inform the way in which HE staff perceive FD students. There appears to be a belief that FD students have more remedial support needs than typical HE students, and that FE colleges have the expertise to best support these types of non-traditional students.

This informs the first theme to emerge from the HE lecturers interviews which I interpreted as '**FDs as distinct and different**'. This is made up of a number of sub-themes:

- An understanding that FDs contribute to offering progression routes to higher education for non-traditional learners which I interpreted as '**FDs are a tool to widen participation**'.
- The belief that FD students require a more supportive learning environment than traditional HE provides which I interpreted as '**FD students as 'outsiders**'
- The understanding that FE has the expertise to support such non-traditional learners which I interpreted as '**FD students needs are best met in FE**'.

The first sub-theme concerns the belief as expressed by the HE staff that **'FDs are a tool to widen participation'**. This is linked to recognition from staff in HE that FDs serve to meet the learning needs of a segment of the local population that wouldn't traditionally enter HE provision. FDs therefore allow a previously untapped segment of the population to consider learning at a higher education level. This is explained by one HE lecturer who suggests:

The majority I guess, particularly when you look at our FDs, are people who hadn't considered the possibility of going to university, but can see how they can go to the local college, and then they get interested enough to realize that perhaps they are eligible to go on to a FD and they see a whole lot of new opportunities opening -HE Lecturer 6

For some of the HE staff interviewed, this appeared to be linked to a view of widening participation as an aspect of social justice, and the right of all individuals to be able to engage in education. This is a theme picked up in the HEFCE Strategic Plan (2006) which stresses the importance of strengthening HE in FE to improve local access to higher level learning. The following quotes from lecturers highlight their positive view of FDs and the role they have in supporting WP activity.

I suppose the success of FDs would be based on the extent to which they attract people into study who would not previously have done so....So I think there are quite complex issues about getting in a lot earlier than you do with traditional HE students, getting into communities and allowing people to aspire to HE in a way that they might not necessarily see themselves ever being able to - HE Lecturer 5

I suppose my own experience says to me that we need to be doing much more of that rather than much less of that, just because of the sense, that I guess it's a personal perspective, but the sense that everybody has a right to engage in some form of education - HE Lecturer 4

I'm a great supporter of FDs because, it does give....it is giving access to HE for a lot of people who might never have engaged in it...and um... I'm a great believer in HE and how it...um...stretches you, and how it develops you, and how it makes you more self aware, and more analytical and empowers you...and I see that as a...as...a ... very positive step for many people - HE Lecturer 1

I think already that they are a very, very valuable means of opening up to perhaps people who hadn't thought about developing themselves academically, I think they are very good way of doing that - HE Lecturer 2

A particular issue illustrated by these comments is the belief that FDs allow non-traditional learners to access HE locally as they are provided through FE colleges.

FDs are seen as a way of providing an opportunity to study at HE level to a group of learners, who wouldn't normally consider accessing HE education through traditional universities and three years full-time degree programmes. This is similar to themes raised in other research that suggest that positive learning experiences in familiar local environments can motivate learners onto a path of continued post-compulsory education (McGivney 1998, 1999). This links to the diversification of provision that has seen higher education opened up to non-traditional learners through new types of courses, such as FDs, and through new providers of HE such as FE colleges (Schuetze and Slowey 2002). This is endorsed by the QAA (2004a, p.3) that stresses the key role FE has in 'creating flexible educational opportunities for a range of students who have not traditionally been able to benefit from HE'.

By attracting new kinds of learners to higher level learning, FDs can be viewed as an important tool to combat social exclusion by allowing non-traditional learners to access HE through local FE colleges. However, as discussed earlier in the literature review, this is a controversial area of debate and one where alternative views suggest that FDs actually sustain rather than challenge social exclusion. Gibbs (2002, p.202) suggests that policy

is using higher education institutions as agents to deliver and accredit distinctive forms of prescribed higher education for the masses (though productivity-driven national occupational standards) whilst reserving elite provision for those who have an approved and distinctive way of relating to the world

In a similar vein Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) conclude that FDs create a two tier system made up of a new mass system of education which runs alongside the old elite system. FD students therefore remain 'outsiders' as they are denied access to so-called elite universities. This is an interesting paradox, as whilst the lecturers in my sample appreciate the benefits of FDs as a tool to widen participation, they also perceive the FD students as 'outsiders' and different to traditional HE students.

Widening participation is therefore at arms length, through the FE colleges, and only once the students have proved themselves within this context are they allowed into the HEI via a top-up degree programme. This may be attributed to the way in which Foundation Degrees represent a 'de-traditionalisation' of HE, as they represent new forms of learning provision that challenge the traditional culture of HE (Brain et al.

2004). This can impact upon the way in which FD students' are perceived by the HE lecturers. The social and cultural factors embodied in HE can mean that students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds, such as those on FDs, are often disadvantaged by the HE institutional culture that places them as 'other' (Tett 2000; Read et al. 2003).

A way to combat this 'otherness' would be for HEIs to embrace widening participation philosophy, by 'responding appropriately to the social circumstances, background and requirements of non-traditional entrants by developing new types of curricula' (Bamber, 2005, p.29). This challenge is also described in research into the transition from FD to top-up programme by Greenbank (2007), who comments on the reluctance of HE to accommodate the needs of a more diversified student body by making changes to the approaches to teaching and learning. He describes a resistance from the HEI towards this, and suggests that

changes, such as making the content of the degree more vocational, reducing the number of lectures and increasing the use of alternative forms of assessment would undermine the academic credibility of the degree (Greenbank 2007, p.98).

The challenge posed to HE by the diversification of students contributes to the 'otherness' attributed to FD students, and this is represented in the second theme that arose in the interviews with HE staff. This is interesting in light of the fact that the HE lecturers themselves come from post 1992 universities, and therefore are 'other' themselves when compared to staff in the old 'elite' universities. This suggests that there is not only the distinction between the mass and elite institutions, but indeed a distinction within the mass educational system between university provision provided by HEIs and the new types of qualifications such as FDs which are provided through FE. This might suggest a three tier system.

The second theme builds on this distinction and concerns their impressions of what FDs are and the types of students that come onto them which I have interpreted as '**FD students as 'outsiders'**'. The perception that students coming into FDs require more support than traditional HE students maybe attributed to concerns about the more flexible entry routes onto FDs, which means that some FD students have little formal academic learning. This concern that FD students require more support is explained by one lecturer:

They don't have necessarily any formal education, they are coming through on a competency based criteria such as NVQ, it really is quite a cultural shock and quite overwhelming for some of them when they look at producing a piece of academic work - HE lecturer 2

The flexible entry routes have led to fears of a 'dumbing down' of education and opening access up to more students who may need remedial support to cope with the demands of learning at HE level. Therefore students are perceived as requiring more support because they may have limited previous academic experience, which influence their own levels of confidence and self-belief, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The perception that FD students require more support is not just a belief of the HE lecturers in my sample, but is supported by other research which suggests that mature students themselves express low levels of confidence despite meeting the university's entry standards (Shanahan 2000). The responses of the HE lecturers describe their beliefs that FD students are 'outside' their normal range of experience of students in HE, and require extra support to cope with the demands of learning at HE level:

I think they need far more support, and far more bridging to get them over the hurdle of the first year of study especially, it's often quite a step up now - HE Lecturer 5

I think that the age range the ...um... the experiences that they bring are potentially very different , I think that their confidence levels may be very different to the normal 18 to 21 year old group - HE Lecturer 4

The Health and Social Care students are more likely to have more study skill needs, be slightly older and be slightly less confident about their ability to work again in an academic world, but be quite well versed in the practice area - HE Lecturer 6

Therefore, not only is there a perception that FD students may have remedial support needs due to their previous lack of academic experience, but that the impact on individual students is to lower their confidence, which reinforces their needs for extra support to cope with the demands of HE learning. Other literature has drawn links between extra support and lowering standards, and the concern expressed in some HE circles that widening participation risks lowering standards due to the support needs of non-traditional students (Hudson 2005).

The concerns about the support needs of non-traditional learners is linked to the final sub-theme that is informed by HE lecturers belief that FE colleges are the most

appropriate setting to support such non-traditional students. The final sub-theme therefore concerns the way in which '**FE best meets the needs of FD students**'. The HE lecturers interviewed believe that FE offers the most suitable environment to support non-traditional learners. This appears to be based on their assumptions about the expertise that FE staff have in supporting non-traditional students, and maybe based on their direct experience of working with students who have come through the Access to HE route. Through these Access programmes HE staff have gained a working knowledge of the type of teaching and support that Access to HE students gain from the college.

Access programmes have been seen as a way to redress educational exclusion amongst low participating groups (Parry 1996). This is also illustrated by HEFCE (2003) who commended FE on particular features of their provision that enables non-traditional learners to build their confidence within a supportive environment. This includes small teaching groups and friendly supportive staff. The following comments from HE lecturers illustrate the positive perceptions that HE staff have about the ability of FE to engage non-traditional learners:

In FE you can really see the benefits for mature entrants, for people who've not come through the traditional routes, the people who work, the people who are embedded within a locality of going to their local college to study, I think are the really positives things about studying HE through and FE environment - HE Lecturer 5

I think the (*FE*) staff are tremendously supportive of what we are doing, I think they really believe in it, and I think that's receptive in some of the student experiences of feeling that they've been well supported by the staff, both pedagogically and technically and that's helped them through the down times as well as the up times - HE Lecturer 4

Probably in terms of caring for the students it's probably better than HE, I'd say, just in terms of wanting the students to get on and being prepared to sit down with them.... they know that their market of students coming in requires them to be a lot more sort of...caring - HE Lecturer 3

The HE lecturers in my sample appear to view FE as the expert environment to support non-traditional learners. This appears to echo the approach taken by the QAA (2004b) which endorsed the expertise of FE colleges in supporting the needs of non-traditional learners, in particular highlighting the quality of student support within the college environment. The view that FE is the most appropriate setting to support FD

students seems to reinforce the distinction that FD students are ‘other’, and require something different from what is normally provided to HE students. There are echoes with the themes raised in the student and FE lecturer interviews, and this will be discussed in more depth in the discussion section.

The second major theme to emerge in the HE lecturers interviews was again made up of a number of sub-themes which influenced their understanding of working in collaboration with FE. I merged a number of sub-themes which I interpreted as ‘**HE ambivalence towards FE**’. The main sub-themes within this concern the way in which HE make sense of their collaborative relationship with FE, and in particular the tensions which exist in such collaborative educational partnerships. This is illustrated by the potential of opportunities and new ways of working, but also tempered by the risks and challenges involved in working with different institutionalized cultures. Despite the recognition given by HE lecturers to the value of FDs in widening participation, and the strengths of FE in supporting non-traditional learners, HE staff appear to be concerned about the risks involved in working in partnership with FECs. Concerns about the level of support needed and the risks involved in running HE programmes through FE inform this theme. This was made up of two sub-themes

- The first sub-theme concerned the perceptions that HE has to drive the partnership by supporting FE which I interpreted as ‘**parenting the FE child**’.
- The second sub-theme concerns the perceived challenge of supporting FDs in FE which I interpreted as ‘**opportunities and risks**’.

It was interesting that different perceptions arose regarding the nature of partnership working, depending on whether the lecturers had a direct role in working with FE colleagues such as link tutor duties, or had a more strategic overview of the management of such partnerships. For the link tutors who work closely with the lecturers in FE colleges, supporting them in the delivery and quality overview of the FD, the experience of partnership working identifies the micro operational issues of working across HE/FE boundaries. The role appears to demand a very supportive relationship from the link tutors, and one in which they appear to be nurturing their FE colleagues. The need to provide a nurturing environment for FE staff who have not engaged in teaching HE before, or have not worked within the demands of an HE culture of practice, was described as one of the major challenges in supporting FE, and this is clearly described by one link tutor:

Some staff who had never engaged in teaching HE and were very frightened of doing it, and needed a lot of support, so one of the challenges there is to make sure there are...the partnerships are well developed and that you can actually support the staff - HE Lecturer 1

This informs the first sub-theme which I interpreted as **'parenting the FE child'**. The link tutors describe relationships that require support and understanding which is described as akin to a counselling relationship.

There is a lot of informal, almost counselling that's going on to support people within that context and I think it has to happen - HE Lecturer 2

I've tried to be facilitative with and try to engender a helping working relationship which is very open and honest - HE Lecturer 1

There appears to be a power differential described in these scenarios, and although describing a partnership arrangement, the descriptions are almost 'parent-child' nurturing terms, and one in which HE is in the driving seat. Although HE staff recognize the expertise of FE in supporting the learning needs of non-traditional learners, it appears that the HE staff are in a more powerful position vis a` vis the collaborative partnership. This appears to be determined by the control of the HEI over the validated programme, and the quality assurance mechanisms required which ensure that the programme is fit for purpose.

The FEC and its staff have to deliver an HE programme, and rely heavily on the HEI to support them in this endeavour. HE staff, and link tutors in particular appear to feel a responsibility to support FE colleagues, in a similar way to parental responsibility towards a child. The challenges of this are clearly explained by one link tutor who describes the need to repeat on a continual basis the information and advice given to FE staff:

In the beginning it was um.... a huge mountain to climb for everybody, um...and...um... in some respects you would think that being the partnerships tutor was a job that would get easier, but there is always a change of staff so there is always a need for support... I haven't tried to change the culture I've tried to get them to appreciate what HE culture is, but it is very difficult to get people to change the way they do things, because some of our rules and regs are much tougher than some of their rules and regs, and its...its having to constantly repeat the message because things seem to get forgotten or some people slip back into ways of doing things that relate to how they do in FE - HE Lecturer 1

This highlights the concerns of HE staff about the difficulties created by different organizational cultures of learning within FE. This is supported by research which suggests that there are difficulties for FE lecturers in meeting the demands of HE within a culture of FE where there are higher levels of teaching, and little time for scholarship (Young 2002). The relationship appears to be one in which the HE staff nurture their FE colleagues, in a similar way to how the FE staff are described nurturing the FD students. A challenge for FE staff in adapting to new systems of work is identified by one link tutor, who suggests that the role demands supporting FE to cope with the organizational culture of HE:

The people that I have been working with in the colleges have little if no knowledge of the university working systems, and therefore it is about being able to answer all their questions - HE Lecturer 2

It is not just a process of supporting FE staff to cope with the demands of HE systems of learning and quality assurance, but also in building their confidence to become involved in the development and support of learning on the FD programme. These concerns are depicted by one HE lecturer as producing a one-sided relationship in which HE has to meet the deficits in the FE organization and structure:

If I said honestly I would say that HE takes the majority of the work and FE is um... not able to provide this because of the limitations of budgets and their staffing, which would seem to be more of a problem than it does at university level um... the emphasis is more on the university to drive it, to produce it and host to it um... rather than the university actually taking a more of a role in that, so I wouldn't say it was strictly partnership working, its more of one partner actually doing more of the graft than the other partner - HE Lecturer 3

This highlights some of the tensions in the collaborative partnership between FE and HE, and issues of power and control. This not only includes the responsibility for monitoring standards, but also in leading the development and support for the delivery of particular e-based units. The roles described suggest that HE staff take on a lot of work to support FE in delivering the HE programmes, from nurturing and supportive relationships on a micro level, to the development of units and support of e-learning at a mezzo level. These challenges link into the second sub-theme which I interpreted as '**opportunities and risks**'. It is one that on an individual level offered the challenge of a 'learning curve' to certain individuals, as well as the opportunity to develop collaborative work with FE colleagues.

I knew nothing about FDs so it was a huge learning curve, and actually it was a learning curve not just for me but for my colleagues in the colleges as well - HE Lecturer 1)

I think it has been a learning curve on both sides. Not only from the point of view of working on FDs but also working with others. Work within a different context and a different environment so there has been a whole raft of things there. My experience of FDs was very limited when I came into it, so again I'm still learning about that - HE Lecturer 2

It also provided the opportunity to develop their own practice to include partnership working and opportunities for teamwork across traditional HE/FE boundaries:

When partnership works well, I think there is a feeling that we're in this together and that we are a team doing this and so therefore if something fails then it's our responsibility, OK it may be located in your organization, but what can we do about it, so describing a partnership that works well, there is that sense of permeability of the walls of the different organizations, that this is teamwork, we are doing this together and not that the rival organizations, or organizations that sit alongside each other uneasily, so yeah, I think there is a shared approach to problem solving, quality improvement, those sorts of things - HE lecturer5

This acknowledges the social aspects of partnership and team work which are essential to sustain partnerships (Dhillon 2005). For the front line staff working collaboratively with FE meant bringing together two different communities of practice, and learning through this process. A community of practice can be understood as 'an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretative support necessary for making sense of its heritage (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.98). There is resonance here with the earlier discussion of 'institutional habitus' (Reay et al.2001) and the impact this has on influencing the action and practices of those that work within organizations. The crux of the collaboration between FE and HE is a clash of two different 'institutional habitus'. The challenge for HE link tutors and other staff is to support FE staff who are used to an FE institutional habitus, to adapt their practice to fit within an HE culture of practice.

An example of HE 'institutional habitus' towards FE was suggested by one of the link tutors who described a culture within HE that 'looks down' on FE as being inferior, despite their expertise in supporting non-traditional learners. This comment also sums

up the challenge of supporting staff in FE where some may be well qualified to teach HE, and others may have little confidence or experience.

Reflecting on back here of colleagues in HE a lot of the judgements that they were making about how you teach HE at FE, they're not qualified to do it, in fact out there are some very highly qualified, well motivated people doing it, but there were also some staff who had never engaged in teaching HE and were very frightened of doing it, and needed a lot of support - HE Lecturer 1

It is interesting that HE staff who had more of a strategic overview of FD developments had a perception of HE in FE being riskier. This may be because they take a wider strategic overview of the risks to the HE institution if the FEC fails to deliver a quality product. Their assumptions appear to be based an organizational approach to risk, which views the outcomes of WP activities such as FD development being linked to costs and quality issues.

This is similar to the findings of research by Shaw (2007, p.7) that found that there were notable 'stakeholder' differences in the way that WP activities are perceived across institutions. Doyle (2002) also noted differences in organization and culture across HE and FE institutions, which can act as a barrier to collaborative partnerships at strategic levels. The way that HE staff perceive the FE learning environment can mean that judgements are made based on comparisons with HEIs as the 'gold standard'. However this fails to consider the different resources available to FECs to support an HE culture of learning, and suggests a lack of understanding of the challenges that FE encounters when trying to deliver HE programmes. This is illustrated by the comments of one HE manager who suggests that:

It's not unusual to find libraries closed because of a shortage of staff, to find sudden changes in the way organizations operate which is distinctive of an FE set-up but not necessarily of an HE set up where there is more continuity and there is an expectation that people will have some sort of 24 hour access to study when it suits them, it's that culture isn't really yet typical of an FE college -HE Lecturer 5

There is a general perception amongst the two managers interviewed of the risks involved in delivering HE through FE, particularly in terms of the resources available. The managers saw this to be due to the volatility of staffing and resources in the FE environment.

I am aware that there are problems in the FE culture and the way it operates, we don't have the permanence of staff, we don't have the continuity, things suddenly change in FE, resources will suddenly change or disappear, staff change very quickly, it's a much more volatile environment to conduct the process of education over two years or three -HE Lecturer 5

HE and FE is quite a difficult world, I think on a number of occasions I've found quite good evidence that FE colleges aren't really making their FDs, indeed their HE provision, a priority. They don't understand it properly and therefore they don't support it appropriately, so they don't give their lecturing staff the right time to do the sorts of things you might expect of an HE lecturer, and that impacts on the programme, so they don't have time for preparation and marking, they have contact hours that are really excessive in the world of HE, and of course a lot of the lecturers are only working in HE for one or two days a week, and the other three or four they're doing in FE, so the balance is really quite difficult - HE Lecturer 6

Another HE staff lecturer involved in the development of the programme also perceived difficulties in the partnership between FE and HE that pose a risk to the quality of learning offered

I don't think we're fully there yet. First of all there is quite a lot of change in personnel, and one of the ones I know more about because there are more problems there, the changes of personnel don't make things easy, it is helpful if there is stability and continuity of personnel because they learn to work together - HE lecturer 4

Therefore the 'institutional habitus' of HE managers can act as a barrier to FD development, in a similar way that the FE managers approaches to HE delivery in FE were noted as creating obstacles in the previous section. This might suggest that there is a need to develop mutual understanding both within the HE staff group as well as across the collaborative partnership, and as Fullan (2000) suggests successful cross-sector collaboration requires the development of mutual empathy and relationships across diverse groups. This is also supported by research by Doyle (2002) into FE/HE partnerships that highlighted a need to develop mutual understanding.

The findings in my interviews are similar to other research that suggests that the development of FDs has been perceived as a risky activity for HE (Johnson 2003). A number of challenges have been identified that include

accepting, accommodating and working with diverse types of student, changing culture and curriculum, being pilloried for offering 'Mickey Mouse' degrees, not to mention the vagaries and distortions of government funding (Johnson 2003, p.5)

Although this paints a jaundiced view of the risks inherent in change, it does highlight that new ways of collaborative working can pose particular risks to the institution.

In particular, risks are posed by the lack of recognition of the time and resources required to support partnership and FD development. The HE staff perception appears to be that there is a different culture in FE which does not recognize that lecturers require more time to develop HE teaching, and this itself contributes to the risk of FD failure

I think it's hugely underestimated both in terms of time and the effort and the energy it takes to develop these kinds of programmes, and I think there is a lack of awareness, and it's not through a want of trying but until you actually have to sit down and design and deliver such programmes, particularly with regard to E learning, I don't think people do understand - HE Lecturer 4

I needed to develop my knowledge of what pressures the staff were under at the FE colleges, and how they were going to cope with HE especially as they weren't paid to teach HE and they didn't have the hours for preparation and so they were.... they are still in many respects, um... being required to teach at HE level but not having the time to prepare... or having a huge teaching load on top of it, so that was a challenge and still is -HE Lecturer 1

Therefore the HE lecturers have a mixed reaction towards FD development. There is some recognition of the benefit of FDs with regards to WP activity, and the expertise of FE in this type of activity. However there appears to be an ambivalence towards FDs, due in part to an HE 'institutional habitus' which depicts FDs as risky, and FD students as 'outsiders' to HE.

The next chapter will offer a discussion of the findings from the students, FE and HE staff interviews in terms of the themes that have emerged across the three groups. Consideration will be given to how the themes interact in terms of sense-making activities and the influence of habitus and institutional habitus.

Chapter 7 Discussion

Introduction

The findings chapter has identified a number of themes that arose in the student, FE staff and HE staff interviews. Broadly the themes that emerged from my empirical research concern 3 major areas: firstly the way that the FD qualification is perceived itself; secondly, the way in which that students coming onto such programmes are perceived; and finally the way in which FE as a location for HE is viewed. These three major areas can be seen to link to the overall themes for my thesis which were highlighted in Chapter 1. These were to acknowledge the contradictions in widening participation practice and the uncertainty, ambiguity and complexities which result from these contradictions; to understand the implications of collaborative partnerships and the delivery of HE through FE; and finally, to explore how non-traditional learner identity and sense-making processes are influenced by the culture of learning experienced.

A key concept linking all three themes is that of ‘otherness’ or difference. FD students are seen as ‘other’ compared to traditional HE students; FD qualifications are seen as ‘other’ compared to traditional HE qualifications; and finally, FD delivery through FE is seen as ‘other’ by HE staff. These perceptions reinforce the divide between FDs and FD students from mainstream higher education. Issues of exclusion are central within this discussion, and can be seen in the way that FD students make sense of their learner identity by viewing FDs as being open to them, but only because they do not consider them to be real HE. This exclusion is reinforced by both FE and HE lecturers who perceive the needs of such learners as being different to traditional HE students supported by the perception that they are not ready for real HE. Issues raised through FE being a location for HE, and the cultures of learning offered within an FE environment also suggest that working collaboratively across traditional FE/HE boundaries is fraught with challenges.

This suggests that widening participation is not a straight forward activity but is seasoned with many ambiguities and challenges. Despite striving to increase the participation of under-represented groups within HE, this is often achieved by offering a further tier of HE through FECS, and through new types of qualifications which are often misunderstood and devalued. These issues will be discussed further in

the following sections, alongside consideration of the key theoretical concepts employed within this study. This chapter is divided in four sections which will consider the following:

1. the key themes to emerge across the three groups interviewed;
2. the value of the key theoretical concepts employed within this study and the links to the emerging themes;
3. the explanatory power of the theoretical models presented in Chapter Six;
4. The importance of identity and the development of a Chair of Learner Identity which highlights key influences on the identity of mature learners

Key themes

The six major themes emerging from the empirical research are as follows:

‘Second chance learner’

‘Identity split’

‘More of the same’

‘The ambiguities of partnership working’

‘FDs as distinct and different’

‘HE ambivalence towards FE’

These themes interact with one another to produce an overall understanding of the FD as being ‘not quite higher education’, and this is reproduced in both student, FE staff and HE staff interviews. This is interesting in light of the way in which FDs are sold by the government as new types of HE qualifications which open up life-long learning and higher education to the masses. Much has been invested in these new types of qualifications as the government intends that the bulk of future growth in HE will be achieved through Foundation Degrees (HEFCE 2000, p.6). A paradox exists between the rhetoric behind FDs and the ways in which they are perceived and valued at grass roots level. Students coming onto the FD Health and Social Care, along with FE and HE staff involved in the programme, do not really see the FD as ‘HE’, but as

something ‘other’, and outside normal HE experience. This suggests that the influence of both individual habitus and institutional habitus is persuasive in influencing the ways in which students make sense of themselves as learners, as well as the way that FE and HE staff interpret what FDs mean in terms of the learning culture and nature of scholarship.

At the beginning of my thesis, I had a naïve appreciation of FDs and what they represented for students and staff. My understanding was very much influenced by my own role in developing the FD Health and Social Care, the rhetoric coming from the NHSu about their role in workforce development, and my other widening participation activities. When the FD Health and Social care was developed at Bournemouth University, I felt that there was no question of the FD being seen as anything other than higher education. This belief was reinforced by the validation processes, and quality assurance procedures that ensured that the programme was fit for purpose in terms of QQA benchmarks, and the University’s own quality assurance mechanisms. However my research has deepened my understanding of the complexities of FDs, from an awareness of the policy that drives them, through to an understanding of the various critiques of them as a tool to widen participation. My empirical findings have also helped me to develop an appreciation of complexities involved in WP activity, and working across FE/HE boundaries.

The reflective narrative and component of the Professional Doctorate has been key in this process of self-realisation and reflection (Barnett 1997). Part of this has involved me developing my understanding of the complexities inherent in FD development, and has encouraged me to challenge notions of ‘certainty’ by unsettling pre-conceived ideas and previously taken for granted thinking.

‘Otherness’

My research has highlighted some key issues, which I believe develop the widening participation debate further. A major surprise for me was the emerging theme that arose across the three groups that depict FDs as not being real HE. This suggests that the FD qualification is seen as ‘other’ compared to traditional HE programmes, and the reality that most of these new types of qualifications are delivered through FE rather than universities could be seen to support this view. It appears that both students, FE staff and HE staff make sense of FDs as something ‘other’ than higher

education, and each group has different motivational factors for doing so. These factors may be conscious or unconscious and are linked to both the individual habitus of the students and staff and the institutional habitus in which they work. This has an impact not only on the value placed on the FD qualification by the students themselves, but the wider message about their value to employers and the wider world.

The students make sense of themselves as ‘second chance learners’, and the learning needs they highlight reinforce them as ‘other’ from traditional HE students. This includes their reflections on past learning experiences which describe a picture of limited opportunity and under-achievement. They make sense of their choice of further study as a way of getting a second bite at the apple, and these findings are similar to other research with mature learners (Green and Webb 1997; Britton and Baxter1999). Their internal personal motivation is a key factor in this, and this is similar to findings from other research into FDs (Thurgate et al.2007).

A key issue related to this is whether their ‘otherness’ is reproductive of their class or non-traditional learner positions or transformative? It could be argued that it enables them to access learning in an appropriate supportive learning environment (FE) which could be seen as personally transformative. Alternatively, it could be seen as reinforcing the divide between traditional and non-traditional students, where traditional students enter ‘proper’ universities, and non-traditional students are relegated to learning via FE. This interpretation depicts WP as doing little to transform structural inequalities in access to HE.

This can be linked to the notion of a class ceiling (Brine and Waller 2004), where the previous social experiences and deficits of ‘cultural capital’ (Bourdieu 1997), interact to produce exclusionary forces that act against certain segments of the population. Parallels can be made to the world of employment through the work of Brown and Hesketh (2003) who suggest that a similar process operates to exclude the working class from elite employment areas. However this is not just confined to ‘self exclusion’, but is inherent in the policies of governments and institutions which continue to serve the interests of the dominant ‘middle class’, at the expense of other groups. An illustration of this is a recent Guardian report which highlights the way in which ‘elite’ universities are cutting their widening participation budgets. Curtis

(Guardian 06/03/08, p.14) suggests that whilst the budget to widen participation has gone up £15 million to a total of £364 million since last year

millions of pounds earmarked for tackling elitism in higher education is being switched from leading research-intensive universities to former polytechnics

As FDs are run through partner FE institutions, it reinforces the view that FDs are not real HE, and this is related to the students' perception of college as a place that would best meet their needs as mature learners. The students believe that the culture of learning in FE would be 'easier', and offer the most appropriate level of support to them. Most of the students depict themselves as needing extra support, and this seemed to indicate their low levels of confidence about engaging in learning and fear of failure. Again this can be linked to their lower levels of social and cultural capital, and the way in which considering something like HE which is 'outside' of the psychosocial net, can challenge their confidence further. This view is echoed in research by Shanahan (2000) who found that mature learners express lower levels of confidence despite meeting the university entry standards.

These student views are played out in a wider arena, and one in which the attitudes and beliefs of both FE and HE staff can act to reinforce their views of 'otherness'. The FD learners coming onto FD programmes are seen by FE staff as needing to be nurtured to cope with the demands of learning in a manner that is reminiscent of the remedial support offered to Access to HE students. This type of support is depicted as teacher-intensive (Bamber 2005), and one that enables non traditional learners to build confidence to re-engage them in formal learning (Wojecki 2007). This supportive approach is typical within an FE environment and is one of the elements of FE that is praised by both the QAA (2004b) and HEFCE (2003).

The supportive culture of FE is also recognized by the HE lecturers within my sample who think positively about the qualities that FE colleges employ in their support of non-traditional learners. FD students are seen by HE as having remedial support needs due to their previous lack of academic experience, this reinforces their view of FD students as being 'outsiders' to HE, and a concern about the risk of lowering standards due to the fact that many of the students coming onto them are from non-traditional educational routes (Hudson 2005). The attitudes of HE staff can therefore be seen as reinforcing the distinction between traditional and non-traditional learners,

and results in keeping non-traditional learners 'outside' of HE. This could be described as the 'ethos' of the HE institution, and it is the way in which notions of habitus are communicated through to communities of practice (Smith 2003). In this way the ethos of the HEI can act to disadvantage the FD students further as it reinforces a view of them as 'other' within the FD community of practice (Tett 2000; Read et al. 2003).

It could be suggested that the institutional ethos of HE is one that not only reinforces the values of traditional middle class students as being the 'proper' HE student, but could also be argued that it depicts the FEC as being 'outside' proper HE provision, as the experience of the college lies in offering a wide range of education and training provision to the community (Norton Grubb 2005). This reinforces a position where HE continues to draw distinctions between 'us' and 'them', or the acceptable and unacceptable face of HE. These distinctions and 'otherness' are perpetuated through symbolic boundaries (Lamont,2001) which make it difficult to move towards a seamless web of education across further and higher education are university based HE is still held up as the gold standard.

There are many complexities and nuances in the way HE perceive FE and vice versa. The HE lecturers interviewed in this research believe that FE offers the most suitable environment to support non-traditional learners, and this appears to reinforce the distinction between FE and HE cultures of learning. They make sense of the collaborative partnership by recognizing the expertness of FE in support non-traditional learners, yet view the type of HE delivered there as 'not real HE'. To understand why this happens, it is useful to apply the model of 'perceptual schemas' to the different cultures that exists across FE/HE boundaries.

When they look at FE, the HE staff interpret its institutions and customs using their own lenses and schema, however 'cultural myopia and lack of experience prevent them from seeing all the nuances of another culture' (Osland and Bird 2000, p. 67). Their judgements about FE are therefore based on an HE worldview, and this goes some way to explain the negative views expressed about the deficits in resources available such as 'it's a much more volatile environment to conduct the process of education over two or three years' HE Lecturer 5. This has also been found in other research where HE staff fears about lowering standards has been suggested as a barrier to WP activity (Hudson 2005).

Others have suggested that the introduction of FDs for the masses, which are largely run through FE, preserves a two tier system between mass education and the old elite system (Gibbs, 2002; Leathwood and O'Connell 2003). Bournemouth University, as one of the post 1992 new universities, could itself be described as part of this 'massification' of HE, and sits well outside of the older elite institutions. It is therefore interesting that the staff within this type of new university draw further distinctions between what they offer and 'other' FD provision which runs through partner FECs. This might suggest that what exists is a three tier system, in which differences are apparent between the learning cultures within the mass system that spans the new universities and higher education provision run from FECs.

There also appears to be a tension within the HE staff responses concerning widening participation. This could be produced through their own beliefs about the value of WP, which values diversity and the right of all individuals to be able to engage in education, and the ethos of the HE institution in which they work, which tempers this by depicting non-traditional students as 'other'. This is evident in the HE staff responses which suggest 'we need to be doing much more' and 'I'm a great supporter of FDs because,...it is giving access to HE for a lot of people who might never have engaged in it'. These responses, which appear to embrace the notion of widening participation, can be compared to their views of FD students which reinforce the 'otherness' of the student. For example 'I think they need far more support' and 'it really is quite a cultural shock and quite overwhelming for some of them'. This might point towards a position whereby both individual and institutional beliefs about WP are in a state of flux and change, and that there are collision points between the two that can produce transformations in practice.

In my sample, the HE staff appear to be in a more powerful position vis a` vis the collaborative partnership, and this can be linked to their own personal positions as 'academics' within HE, as well as the strategic power of the university in terms of quality assurance and validation. However there are tensions within this system. The way in which FE is now being pushed by government to provide the 'massification' of HE' challenges the traditional status quo. New types of work-based programmes such as FDs not only move the focus away from the HEI to the FEC, but they also move the locus of knowledge from the university to the practitioner or community of practice (Lester 2002). This challenges traditional HE control over the production of

knowledge and also requires the involvement of practice partners in supporting the development of such programmes in the form of a 'coalition of equal partners' (Johnson 2005, p.90).

There is a challenge to the existing structures of higher education through the 'massification' of HE, and a central component of this challenge is to become more responsive to the needs of an increasingly diverse group of learners. This has been heralded as the 'heterogenization' of HE as those traditionally excluded come to participate in HE in growing numbers (Schuetze and Slowey 2002, p.312). This puts into sharp focus new ways of offering HE learning to the masses, and in particular how new types of HE qualifications such as FDs are perceived. The question raised is whether this actually widens participation across all HE, or merely funnels those traditionally excluded into institutions and qualification routes which continue to be perceived as 'different' and this 'inferior'.

Theoretical concepts

In this section I will consider the literature that has informed this study in light of my empirical research findings. Firstly, I will consider the value of the Bourdiesian cultural framework that has been used within my study, and then consider the value of the concepts of institutional habitus and learning cultures to my study. Secondly, I will consider the value of sense-making to understanding learner identity, and finally, I will consider the impact of cultures of learning on student and staff experience of FDs.

The concept of habitus was useful within this study as it enabled a connection to be made between how the individual students make sense of the FD as an award by 'denying' that FDs are HE', and the role of their gendered and class social positions. The concept of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) allows an understanding of how previous social experiences and structural educational disadvantage influence academic success and choice later in life. The habitus can therefore be seen as a preconscious set of acquired and embodied dispositions which develop through personal experience and socialisation. Links can be made to the impact of early educational disadvantage and later participation in education (Taylor and Cameron 2002) which might lead to lower resources of cultural capital (Thomas and Jones 2003).

The students interviewed in my study had very little awareness of what FDs were and whether they were FE or HE qualifications. Most students in my study saw it as a route to getting a taste of HE, rather than realizing that it actually was an HE qualification in its own right. This could be linked to their lower resources of cultural capital which mean that they have a lack of familiarity with HE and the range of qualification routes on offer (Forsyth and Furlong 2003), compared to their middleclass counterparts. This is a complex picture as not only are the students unfamiliar with HE, but they also assume that they are not good enough to access it. Exclusion can therefore be seen to operate on multiple levels, by preventing access to knowledge about the world of HE, and by undermining the confidence of non-traditional students to consider it as an option.

Accessibility may therefore mean more than just locality, but may also be linked into the perceptions that the students have about themselves as 'second chance learners', their own abilities and needs, and their access to knowledge about the range of HE that might be open to them. FE may be perceived as more 'accessible' because the students own 'habitus' allows them to perceive college as an option, whereas university may be a step too far at the present time. They are excluded from understanding the nature of HE by social boundaries (Madanipour et al. 1998), which depict HE in terms of middle class social capital. It is not something that is familiar in their family backgrounds, and is not something that their earlier schooling encouraged them to aspire to. This can be compared to a middle class child where other family members have gone to university, and there is both a familial and school expectation that they will also attend university. Therefore although WP activity targets non-traditional learners from working class backgrounds, they are being invited into an educational space which is defined by middle class traditional student capital and experience.

A key issue within this debate is how far the widening participation agenda itself is dominated by middle class 'capital', through the discourse of lifelong learning and skills development. FD students are being invited to play a traditionally middle class game, and on middle class terms as they buy into notions of career development by studying on FDs. This occurs through a process that Bourdieu (1990, p.66) describes as a 'feel for the game'. These students depict themselves as agents in their own

careers, and this is a key factor identified in other research into sensemaking in career development (Canary and Canary 2007). Their motivation to study can be linked to the aim of earning more money and improving their career prospects (Bowl, 2003). This is linked to their 'imagined futures' (Goodlad and Thompson 2007).

The individual student habitus influences their self perceptions about their own learning abilities, and what choices are open to them. A feeling of 'false uniqueness' amongst potential students from lower social economic groups has been found to cause 'psychological self-exclusion from HE' (Thorpe et al. 2007, p.17). The students' socio-structural positions therefore strongly influence the sense they make of the educational options open to them. They appear to have ruled out 'higher education' as being an available route for them at this stage, but FDs are seen as an option because they are not seen as an HE qualification. Similarities can be made with research undertaken with school age children in which Tranter (2005, 7) suggests that

University is not part of the lived experience of the students, parents, their communities, themselves. It is not part of their taken-for-granted way of being in the world- their habitus- and they know it

Habitus therefore has a central impact on students ruling themselves out of HE, if only temporarily at this stage in their careers, and provides an explanation as to why the majority of FD students had not considered HE nor did they come from families or communities where this was an expectation (Rowley 2005). Bourdieu's notion of habitus therefore enables this study to view the FD Health and Social Care students as individuals whose previous learning experiences and social experiences at home have influenced the way in which they make sense of themselves as learners, and the qualification routes open to them. These experiences, and the way in which students make sense of themselves as 'second chance learners', have interacted with the institutional habitus encountered at the case study FE institution.

FE staff responses reinforce the students views of themselves as 'not being ready for real HE' and this can be seen to be influenced by the culture of learning and institutional habitus of the FE college itself. This represents more than just the culture of the FE institution, but also relates to issues and priorities which are '*deeply embedded and sub-consciously informing practice*' (Thomas 2002, p. 431). The FE lecturer responses depict the FD students as being similar to other non-traditional

learners within the college environment who need to be nurtured through the learning process. The FE culture is supportive and FE staff have expertise in supporting the needs of non-traditional learners (QAA 2004b) through a teacher-intensive culture of learning (Bamber 2005). This suggests that FDs are perceived as somehow not as demanding as real HE, or that HE within FE is somehow a very different experience.

The model of institutional habitus (Reay et al. 2001) can also be applied to the relationship between FECs and HEIs that occur within the 'field' of collaborative provision. This can be seen as a clash of two different 'institutional habitus'; the former revolves around a supportive FE culture of learning that seeks to engage non-traditional learners, and the latter concerns the traditional academic culture of learning within HE where the habitus of traditional HE students is viewed as the 'proper' habitus (Thomas 2002). The institutional habitus therefore helps to determine how the organization, and the staff employed within it, deal with diverse student groups.

Research in to experiences of FD Health and Social Care students in the South East of England concluded that students' who attend the programme for themselves, rather than as a pre-requisite for work, are highly internally motivated (Thurgate et al. 2007).

It is interesting that they are able to envisage themselves as learners on academically focused degrees, whilst working in health and social care cultures that value NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) as 'the badge of excellence' (Thurgate et al. 2007, p.220). It could therefore be suggested that the FD allows them to challenge the institutional habitus of the agencies in which they work which promote NVQ routes over FDs at the present time. FD study therefore allows them to move from purely vocational qualification to more academically focused work-based learning that encourages them to transform themselves into academic educational achievers, and not just vocational educational achievers.

Habitus and institutional habitus can also be linked to 'cultures of learning'. The culture of learning in FE is perceived by the FD students to be more accessible and more supportive, and one in which their own habitus is accommodated. They perceive it as a culture that will better meet their learning needs, and the fact that it is run through an FEC rather than an HEI means that they see it as being an 'easier' route.

This is summed up by Student 3 who explains ‘the college up the road is going to be a lot easier’. This could be described as a ‘fit’ between the institutional habitus of the college that serves to support non-traditional learners, and the habitus of the non-traditional students that excludes itself from certain learning environments.

At the same time it is possible to critique the application of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework (1984), as it does not accommodate some of the nuances and contradictions that occur in social life (Collins 1993). These learners have challenged their learner identities by engaging in higher educational learning, be that in a further education environment, and this could be interpreted as a ‘transformation’ of their learner identities. It might be suggested that this transformation is ‘limited’ by their habitus and that of the institutional habitus in which they study. Thus, although they re-engage with learning, they only allow themselves (and are only allowed by others) to do this within the confines of an FD programme run in FE.

However, it is interesting to note that a small number of students can use the process of re-engaging back in education as a spring board on which to gain access to three year honours degrees. This is evidenced in Appendix 2 where three out of the 41 students who have enrolled on the FD Health and Social Care between 2004 and 2007 left the programme to join professionally qualifying degree programmes in Occupational Therapy and Social Work. In the research studies cited, the FD programmes built the confidence of these learners leading to a transformation in which they could envisage themselves as learners on three year full-time degrees. In these circumstances attrition can be seen as a success rather than a failure as it opens another door on their learning journey.

Sense-making and Identity

An important dimension emerging within my thesis concerns ‘identity’ and how learners and staff make sense of themselves within the changing context of work and education. Weick (1995, p.17) identified one of the seven characteristics of sense-making as being grounded in identity and its production. In relation to the way we

perceive ourselves as learners, our past familial experiences related to learning and our family culture of learning are major influences. This includes the way we are socialized, and structural factors that may limit the opportunities open to us. This has provide a useful model in which to understand how non-traditional learners make sense of their learning journeys, and also allows links between sense making and habitus to be made.

Similarities can be drawn with the role of ‘habitus’ and Bourdieu’s General Theoretical Framework (1984) that describes how individuals, institutions and class groups exist within a social space. Within this space each has some form of social relation with the other, in which some assume dominant positions and other find themselves in subordinate positions. The environment and culture in which we grow-up, our class, gender, ethnicity, age, and the schooling we experience as children will influence the way in which we make sense of ourselves as adult learners. Sense making is therefore retrospective, social, ongoing, and focused on and by extracted cues in our social environment (Weick 1995).

As ‘learner identity’ became a key theme within my research, I became increasingly aware of the impact of socialization as part of this. The students’ perceptions of themselves as needing extra support and the FE lecturers’ descriptions of themselves as ‘nurturing’ the students made me think of a model of identity that I had come across years ago when teaching about bereavement and grief in children. This model had proposed a ‘Chair of Identity’ (Lake undated cited Waskett 1995), which seemed a pertinent model to develop and apply to the identity of non-traditional adult learners.

This links into the impact of early socialisation, the support that individuals receive from attachment figures, and the way in which this influences self-concept and identity.

The original model depicted a chair with four legs that related to the following:

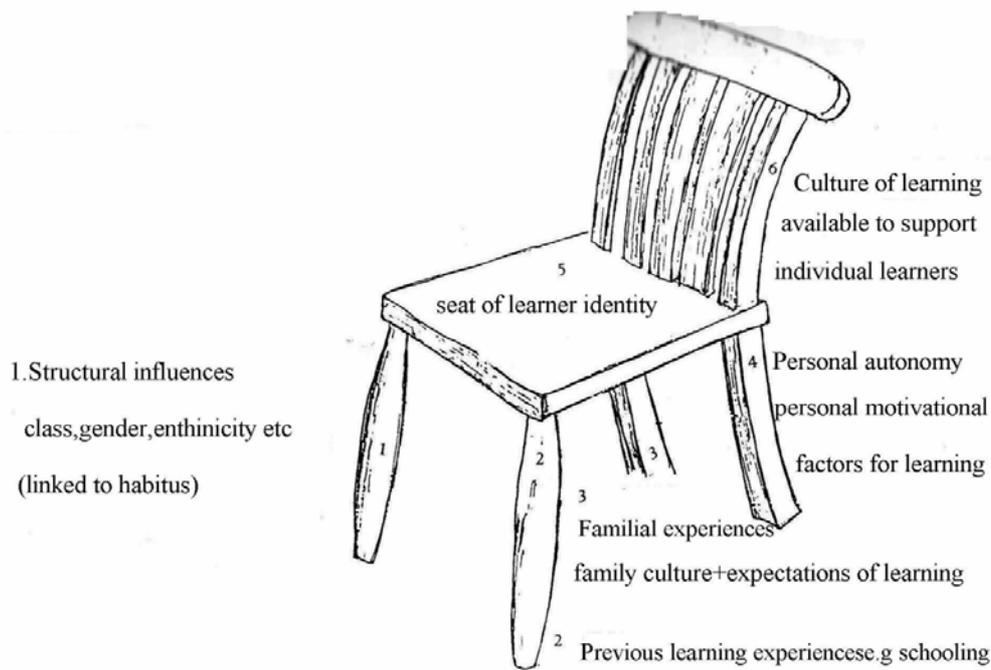
- 1) Basic Trust - related to the experience of attachment with adults in the child’s life
- 2) Autonomy - the power to stand on one’s own feet and manage independently

- 3) Initiative - the independence in making relationships that we need to proceed with in life
- 4) Industry - our abilities to progress in our chosen careers (Waskett, 1995, p.50).

A critique of this model is that it focuses too much on individual 'psychological' experience and response without locating the individual within their wider social experience that includes their class, gender and ethnicity etc. All of these factors relate to structural inequalities that can influence their access to resources, their 'habitus' and their location in the 'field'. I therefore felt the model could be developed further to incorporate these elements, but still utilising the pictorial representation of a chair that I feel provides a powerful image. In an ideal world, individuals would have equal access to resources/schooling, equal life chances, and equal levels of support and encouragement from their carers to access learning. In this ideal scenario the 'Chair of Learner Identity' would have four legs of equal length that provide a solid and secure basis for the seat of future learning. However, the impact of poor previous learning experiences, social factors such as class, gender and ethnicity, the role of familial experience/views of education, and personal autonomy all influence the structure of the chair of learning for the learners in my study.

This can be related to the concept of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and allows us to understand how previous social experiences and structural educational disadvantage influence academic success and choice later in life. For example, in my research the students depict themselves as having difficult early educational experiences, which included perceptions of under-achievement, limited opportunity and not realizing their potential. Therefore their 'Chair of Learner Identity', for the non-traditional learners in my sample, has legs of unequal length and their learner identity is undermined by their sense of having lack of opportunity, self-doubt and lack of confidence. Figure 13 depicts the Chair of Learner Identity.

Figure 13 Chair of Learner Identity



As can be seen from Figure 13, the height and strength of the back of chair and how it supports the learner is related to the culture of learning available to support them, and in relation to FD students this relates to the culture of learning within FE. In my study the Chair of Learner Identity can be related to the student responses in the following ways:

1. Structural inequalities – class, gender, ethnicity etc. This links into their descriptions of limited opportunities, poor schools, and gendered expectations for the women. This means that this leg may be shorted in comparison to middle class children who have had access to greater educational resources, and who enter a ‘field’ that is loaded in their favour.
2. Previous Learning Experience – this links to their descriptions that they didn’t do very well at school, and perceptions that they had limited opportunities. This also relates to how the individual student makes sense of their past learning experience. This leg may be shorter as the ‘institutional habitus’ of the schools they attended did not encourage or support their educational achievement.

3. Familial support and expectations of learning- this links into their perceptions of limited expectation placed on them with regards to learning and achievement, and relates to their own 'habitus'.
4. Personal Autonomy- this includes their personal motivation to learn and need to prove to themselves that they can achieve academically. It also includes public motivation such as employability factors. This leg may be secure for those with high levels of motivation to succeed, such as those students who remained on the programme. However high levels of attrition may be related to lower levels of motivation in those students who leave.
5. Seat of Learner Identity – the students in my sample provide a depiction of identity for mature non-traditional learners. All of them make sense of themselves as learners who have little confidence and particular support needs, and as a result they have a wobbly seat which is placed on uneven legs.
6. The back of the chair supporting the learners is linked to the culture of learning and support available within FE to support non-traditional learners. It is teacher-intensive (Bamber 2005), and enables non traditional learners to build confidence to re-engage them in formal learning (Wojecki 2007). This is a key feature in enabling the students to remain seated, providing the support they need to counter-act the unstable foundations of their seat of learner identity.

As the model depicting the Chair of Learner Identity suggests there will be subtle differences in each individual learner's chair. The construction of individual identity is therefore a complex process and

identities are never unified.....multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions (Hall, 1996, p.4).

A vital element in the Chair of Learner Identity is the impact of how the students make sense of themselves as learners, and the culture of learning and support that the student experience. For the FD students, this is related to the culture of support within FE and the expertise of FE in working in inclusive ways with non-traditional learners. As such it is important to recognize and to accept FECs that offer FD programmes as 'special types of institution... rather than wannabe universities' (Norton-Grubb 2005,

p. 27). The following section will explore the notion of a culture of learning, and how this can influence the habitus of the student, as well as embodying the institutional habitus of the college and university.

Cultures of learning

One of the ways in which there have traditionally been differences between HE and FE has been through the learning culture and the role of scholarship. Scholarship itself is open to interpretation, but the definition offered by Jones (2006, p.22) offers some clarification through suggesting it is

the means by which staff keep abreast of academic developments in their fields, and develop capabilities that may enable them to undertake their own research

The degree to which scholarship is used to inform teaching will contribute to the ethos of the HE culture within FE. Alongside the institutional ethos towards scholarship, it is likely that individual lecturers will approach scholarship and teaching practice differently. Research has identified seven filters to teaching practice within HE (Fanghanel 2007, p.7):

Macro level: the institution, external factors, academic labour and the research-teaching nexus.

Mezzo level – department and discipline

Micro- pedagogical beliefs

When applying this to the context of delivering HE in FE, this relates to both the ‘institutional habitus’ of the FE college as well as the impact of the HE institution in relation to its expectations for the FD programme. External factors can be seen to be linked to the requirements of the Foundation Degree qualification benchmark (QAA 2004a, p.8). This stipulates that holders of Foundation Degrees should be able to demonstrate

knowledge and critical understanding of well established principles in their field of study and the way in which those principles have developed’. Learners are also expected to ‘evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in their field of study (ibid, p.8).

This can be linked to the notion of FE staff as interpreters of knowledge rather than originators of knowledge. This is similar to ways in which the FE lecturers within my sample are ‘making sense’ of themselves within the ‘institutional habitus’ of the FE colleges in which they work. Their own approach to supporting HE learning will therefore be influenced by their ‘own’ habitus and experiences of learning, which has been described by Fanghanel (2007) as the micro pedagogical aspects, as well as the macro and mezzo influences explored previously. These will be played out within the culture of HE that the colleges employ. The way in which they are socialized within this particular culture will have a major impact upon the ways they see themselves and make sense of HE programmes. The culture within FE could be seen as one that rejects scholarship in favour of a more managerial ethos of education. The way the lecturers make sense of themselves as lecturers who deliver HE in FE is therefore tempered by this anti-academic culture. As Young (2002,p.285) concludes

the managerial ethos has squashed academic culture and created an environment, then perpetuated by staff as well as management, in which ‘scholarship is the word that dare not speak its name

The culture of learning within FE which supports HE emerged as a theme within my findings. The FE lecturers perceive little difference between what they do on FE programmes and what they do on HE programmes. This emerged in the ‘**more of the same**’ theme, and raises questions about the ethos of scholarship employed in FE to support HE programmes. As described above, the expectations for learning on FDs include both knowledge and critical understanding of the subject. The ability to be critical has been described as one of higher education’s central goals (Bamber 2005), and as such may be expected to be one of the pedagogical influences on the FE lecturers approach to delivering Foundation Degrees. A large body of research exists in this area but as Fanghanel (2007, p.5) concludes

a pattern has emerged ranging from ‘transmissive’ conceptions, where teaching is seen as imparting information, to ‘facilitative’ conceptions where the lecturer is concerned with promoting conceptual change in students

With this in mind it is interesting that the lecturers in my sample see little difference in the approach they take across FE and HE which could question the nature of the HE experience that students’ have access to on the FD Health and Social Care. This includes consideration of whether they are supported to become critically reflective autonomous learners, as would be expected in HE, and their exposure to a culture of

scholarship and research. The responses from the lecturers within my sample seem to indicate that their approach to teaching HE in FE could be construed as a slight change in approach rather than the adoption of a different pedagogic approach.

The way in which FE lecturers in my study see themselves as ‘teachers’ who adopt a similar approach across FE and HE, could be seen as providing a more supportive learning environment for non-traditional learners. This might suggest that on an individual level they are more in tune with the needs of non-traditional learners, alongside an FE institutional habitus which provides a culture of learning that is more suitable to the learning needs of non-traditional students. It does not necessarily mean that the FD students are not being supported to develop skills of critical thinking, or being encouraged to become autonomous learners, rather that this is being achieved within a more supportive and facilitative learning environment. It could be one reason why FD students perceive that their own learning needs will be best met on an FD in FE. The institutional habitus and pedagogy within FE is more accepting of their learner habitus. As Thomas (2002, p. 432) suggests ‘Pedagogy is not an instrument of teaching so much as of socialization and reinforcing status’.

The FE culture of learning therefore supports non-traditional learners in a way that is perhaps alien to HEIs, where the institutional habitus reinforces traditional student habitus as the gold standard and anything different as ‘other’. However, it may be a challenge for FE lecturers to support FD learners to become autonomous within an FE context which has historically had a more surface approach to learning. There is a need therefore to support ‘deep learning’ so as to encourage the students to become more self-directed on these types of HE programmes (Jones, 2006). Research undertaken with FD students suggests that one of the challenges is to encourage learners to become more independent and autonomous (Yorke 2005). My findings suggest that a central concern for lecturers is to support learners to become more autonomous and this was summed up by FE lecturer 4 who suggested that the challenge is

daring them to feel that they are autonomous learners but very subtly, encouraging them in ways of doing that, sort of helping them, helping them to learn to learn

In research undertaken by Burns (2007) questions were raised about how to create an ethos of HE in FE that best supports HE students. However the comments from lecturers within my study seems to suggest that what is required is an approach which supports an HE culture of practice for lecturers so that they are enabled to support an ethos of higher education for the learners on FD programmes. Earlier work undertaken on supporting the development of an HE culture within FE in the Dorset, South Somerset and South Wiltshire (DSW) region concluded that ‘*FE colleges faced difficulty, in varying degrees, in finding methods to support academic staff who undertake HE teaching*’ (Last and Powell 2005, p.42). This is linked to different contracts, pay and working conditions and is similar to findings from other research which suggests that FE lecturers feel that there is a lack of recognition of the demands of HE by the college management (Young 2002).

In a similar vein Jones (2006) suggests that one of the difficulties of embedding an HE ethos within FE is the switching between levels that the majority of lecturers are required to make during their working week. This results in the need to shift from a surface approach to learning that predominates in FE teaching, to an approach that supports deeper learning, as required within the more self-directed learning culture of HE.

Research exploring the transition of FD students onto honours degree top-up programmes has highlighted the discrepancies in approach between an FE and HE culture of learning (Greenbank 2007). This research suggests that one way to ease the transition for students would be to make the FD more like the degree. However, this approach risks the FD losing the characteristics that enable it to be more effective in supporting non-traditional learners (Greenbank 2007, p.99).

It has been suggested that to develop and grow such an HE culture it is important to achieve a critical mass of HE students and programmes within individual institutions, as this is the way in which management, staff and students ‘start to emulate behaviour in terms of management and learning that is the norm in universities’ (Rowley 2005, p. 13). In terms of my study, the Health and Social Care Faculty at the college have limited experience of running HE programmes. Their first experience was through the FD Early Years, which was validated in 2003, the year before the FD Health and Social Care was validated in 2004. Student numbers are limited on both programmes

and there are far higher numbers of students on a range of FE programmes at the college.

Due to the low numbers of HE students within the Health and Social Care faculty at the present time, and the high level of attrition on the FD Health and Social Care which reduces student numbers further, it is unlikely that the critical mass described by Rowley (2005) will be achieved. This will reinforce a situation where a culture of FE predominates, thus creating difficulties for management, staff and students to emulate a HE culture of learning, which includes a culture informed by scholarship and research. This provides one explanation as to why a traditional FE culture of learning seems to be adopted by the lecturers on the FD Health and Social Care. Alongside this, the lack of parity in terms of conditions for FE lecturers ensures that they continue to be seen as a Cinderella service. The remedy for this has significant budgetary implications, and is a national rather than local issue (Last and Powell, 2005).

Research into the experience of FE lecturers suggests that there is considerable pride amongst staff in the quality of experience they can offer mature non-traditional learners who have low confidence levels (Young, 2002). The expertise of FE lies in supporting such non-traditional learners to progress their learning careers. They require extra support to build their confidence, and this is different to the support that they might get within an HEI, where there are expectations about the students' abilities to be self-directed and more autonomous from the start. The distinction between the support offered by FE and HE is recognized by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (1999) which states that

FECs, for example, tend to adopt a more supportive and intensive teaching style than many HEIs. Such differences are legitimate and desirable, in order to reflect the different needs, abilities and circumstances of students' (HEFCE 1999, p.2).

What appears to happen within the FE lecturers response to the learning needs of FD students is that they acknowledge their status as non-traditional learners, and draw on the institutional culture of support that has been traditionally offered by FE to such students. They therefore see the students as 'non-traditional' and the same as other FE students first, whereas their student identity as HE student appears to be a secondary consideration.

A major message from my research is I believe a warning of ‘not to throw the baby out with the bathwater’. The ethos and culture of learning within FE is one that values diversity and difference within the student group. It accommodates the habitus of non-traditional learners and provides a supportive context for learning. It is important to learn from the FE institutional habitus and learning ethos, so that HE itself can create an institutional habitus that does not reinforce the habitus of dominant groups but embraces diversity and difference. Yes, FDs are HE programmes, and there are expectations concerning the level and quality of such programmes. However they have been established to widen participation of non-traditional learners, and therefore a culture of learning that validates the habitus of non-traditional learners is required, and FE does appear to achieve this.

This does not mean that challenges don’t exist. A number of factors exist which exert an influence on the successful delivery of FDs in FE. My research has highlighted the importance of partnership across FE/HE boundaries, but this is fraught with tensions which exist across traditional organizational boundaries. The ‘lack of parity’ experienced by FE staff in terms of the pay and conditions they experience compared with HE staff causes problems in terms of the time they get to devote to engaging in scholarship activities. This has been highlighted by other research which suggests that FE staff have neither the time nor the ‘permission’ to engage in scholarship (Harwood and Harwood, 2004).

The FE staff in my study describe the ‘ambiguities of partnership working’ whilst the HE staff describe an ‘HE ambivalence towards FE’. A number of factors have been identified as getting in the way of partnership working between FE and HE (Rowley 2005, p.9):

- FEIs and HEIs have different cultures, structures, funding regimes and identities.
- FEIs have a dominant quality culture of inspection, whereas HEIs have a dominant quality culture of peer review, and quality enhancement.
-

These features are similar to themes which arose in the FE lecturer interviews in my study, and illustrate the tensions of two systems operating side by side, and the requirement of FE lecturers who deliver HE in FE to slip seamlessly between the two systems. This is not easy to achieve when employed in an organization that has one

particular managerialist ethos, whilst trying to deliver the demands of another educational institution. Although FE and HE institutions are subject to the impact of managerialism, the experience of this is particularly acute for those working in FE, as discussed previously in Chapter 2. Changes in the management of FE discussed previously have had an impact on the working conditions and pay of FE lecturers, and resulted in managerial control over activities which were previously the domain of the professional academic within the college (Ackroyd et al. 2006). This managerialist discourse in FE has had an impact on the way that lecturer identity is constructed. As Shain and Gleeson (1999, p.445) suggest

...changes are occurring in terms of what counts as being ‘a good lecturer’ in FE, through mediation of managerialist discourses that emphasize flexibility, reliability and competence

A consequence of this growth in managerialism has been an increase in work related stress for FE lecturers; in a recent study of staff in an FE college an increase in teaching hours and administration tasks has led to stories of exhaustion, burn-out and stress related illness (Humphrey and Hogue 2007). Similarly Leathwood (2005) found a high rate of demoralization amongst female FE lecturers due to the pressure of work and increased administrative tasks. Findings such as these suggest that organisational changes have had a de-professionalizing effect on FE lecturers, and an impact upon the culture of learning within FE. However Randle and Brady (1997) argue that despite this de-professionalisation, FE lecturers retain a commitment to ‘public service’ values and professional autonomy that are fundamentally opposed to managerialism. This acknowledges the importance that FE has in terms of WP activity, the way in which it can provide a transition route into higher education.

The role of employers has had little coverage in my research. This might be surprising considering the way in which FDs are packaged as collaborations across HEIs, FECs and employers. Programmes such as FDs which emphasize work-based learning enable students to develop the skills they need to become reflective practitioners (Schon 1983,1987). It involves the process through which experience informs learning, and provides the opportunity to develop practice. As a result work-based learning ‘acknowledges the value of experiential learning and seeks to accredit that learning’ (Walker and Dewar 2000, p.715). Unlike traditional degree programmes, Foundation Degrees involve partnership with employers to ensure the centrality of work-based learning throughout the programme.

However it cannot be assumed that all FD programmes have the same level of employer involvement, and as Thurgate et al (2007, p.216) suggest ‘the willingness of employers to take equal partnership cannot be assumed’. As mentioned previously, I chose not to interview employers for this study, as a piece of research was already taking place in the SW of England at the time that I was undertaking my research, which was funded jointly by HERDA-SW and the NHSu.

Employer involvement did not figure highly in the student interviews, apart from some comments concerning whether they were perceived as supportive of the students studying or not. There was some consideration of the difficulties of employer engagement in the FE lecturer interviews, and in part this informed the ‘ambiguities on partnership working’ sub –theme. Within the HE Lecturers interviews there is some consideration of WBL, but not much consideration of the role of employers. I conclude from this an ‘invisibility’ of employers within the programme, as the notion of working in partnership with employers as part of the collaborative arrangement was not a key feature of the interviews with either staff or students.

The generic nature of the FD Health and Social Care award at Bournemouth University, and a diffuse employer base across a range of health and social employers became a weakness of the programme in the development phase, as individual employers did not see their specific interests represented in the FD programme. This weakness has been identified in other FD programmes where there is a diffuse employer base (Yorke 2005). This occurred despite the learning outcomes in the Work-based Learning Portfolio being mapped onto both NVQ4 learning outcomes for the social care market, and the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework for the health care sector. Employers still had problems identifying the FD as a tool for their own workforce development. In part this was related to local lack of clarity about assistant practitioner roles, but it also appeared to be related to a general lack of awareness about what Foundation Degrees are. One FE lecturer suggested that the lack of employer interest had parallels with previous new qualifications, which took time to become fixed in the employers’ mindset.

It seems that FDs are still an unknown quantity for most employers, who have little knowledge and understanding about what the FD represents. This results in a general ambivalence towards the qualification which is evident in the responses of FE

lecturers. Therefore one of the challenges of developing and supporting FDs is finding appropriate ways to involve employers throughout the process (Yorke 2005). The responses from FE Lecturers in my sample suggest that employers are not seen as key players within this particular programme, and this has implications on student perceptions on the value of the qualification.

In a comprehensive review of WBL in UK universities Brennan and Little (1996) highlighted the importance of negotiation between key stakeholders including the employer, the HE institution and the individual themselves. If this is related to the WBL element within the FD Health and Social Care, the generic focus of the programme has made it difficult to develop the work-based learning elements in relation to a specific employer needs or a specific area of practice. This can be compared to other FD Health and Social Care programmes which have been developed with a specific practice focus, or in partnership with one employer. The Report of the National Committee of Inquiry in Higher Education (1997) encouraged

institutions to identify opportunities to increase the extent to which programmes help students to become familiar with work and help them reflect on such experience' (Dearing 1997 Summary Report, p.44)

Conclusions

The findings from my research suggest that there are a number of contradictions and challenges within widening participation policy and practice. It is not a clear cut activity to engage non-traditional learners within HE, and a number of factors influence the ways in which non-traditional students make sense of themselves as learners within HE. This includes the impact of past experiences, such as gender, ethnicity, and class, as well as the family or social context of learning experienced. Educational disadvantage can be seen to be perpetuated in this way as individuals exclude themselves from future possibilities through seeing themselves as not worthy of HE, or by the barriers that institutions erect themselves to guard against students that are depicted as outside their realm of experience or 'other'.

The way in which FDs are often delivered through HE/FE collaborative partnerships also influences the way in which both FD students and FD qualifications themselves are seen as 'other'. This is evident in the following themes which reinforce an 'us and them' distinction. For example, 'denying FDs as HE', 'not ready for real HE' and

'FD students as outsiders' all reinforce the position that FE offers something different for students who are not ready for a real HE experience. The students themselves believe that FE offers a more supportive learning environment, and in this way the non-traditional learner identity and sense-making processes are influenced by the culture of learning experienced.

A number of challenges for widening participation policy and practice are raised within my thesis. The first challenge concerns the way in which FDs are perceived. They are being sold by the government as the panacea to providing skills for the 21st century and are expected to meet the demands of the knowledge economy by

equipping students with a combination of academic knowledge and technical and transferable skills demanded by employers, while facilitating lifelong learning in the workforce (Doyle 2003, p. 276)

This is linked to the re-definition of jobs within health and social care that is becoming the cornerstone of the modernisation of the workforce, particularly the knowledge and skills needed for Assistant Technical grades. FDs are HE qualifications, yet my findings suggest that students, FE staff, or HE staff do not see them as real higher education qualifications. FD Students, FD qualifications, and the delivery of HE through FE continue to be depicted as outside of traditional HE experience. Therefore, although the government appears to be pushing for change in the types of students that enter HE, the way that non-traditional students are depicted as 'other' continues to present barriers to this change. The 'massification' of HE is therefore occurring at the fringes through FE delivery and through post 92 universities, and in the main the elite universities do not engage in this debate. At the crux of this appears to be the continued dominance of the cultural capital of the most powerful groups within HEIs, and an 'us and them' culture which continues to deny access to the masses into the more elite universities.

Universities will need to change if this position is to develop in future. At the moment it appears that the status quo is a position where the traditional red brick university is the gold standard and everything else is judged against it. This reinforces the position of 'otherness' attributed to both FD students as well as the qualification itself. Widening participation activity is kept at arms length through the adoption of partnership arrangements, whereby the FE colleges deliver the 'outsider' programmes

such as FDs to the 'outsider' students. WP targets may be met, but the HEI ethos itself changes little, and students from diverse backgrounds are not accommodated comfortably within its culture of learning. Lessons can be learnt from the expertise of FECs in providing learning opportunities to non-traditional students and as Thomas (2002, p. 432) suggests

if the learning and teaching of students from under-represented groups is prioritized, this will enhance the position of these students in their relationships with staff

A second challenge out of the need for FECs to ensure that the staff that teach on higher education programmes are given sufficient support to ensure that they can cope with the demands of working collaboratively, across two different systems, as well as being encouraged to engage in scholarship appropriate to HE level work. Again this will reinforce the position that FDs are not just an extension of FE work, but something that is distinct and different, and involving a higher level of scholarship. Finally, the absence of employer involvement in these programmes needs to be tackled. This is not something that I have explored in any depth in this study, but is central to any discussion of FDs as they are collaborations across not only FECS and HEIs, but also key employers in the local area.

The next chapter will draw conclusions based on the various sections of my thesis which will include issues arising from this discussion chapter, the literature review and issues arising from the practice development Summer School. The Conclusion Chapter will make recommendations for practice and future research into the field of widening participation.

Chapter 8 Conclusions

The previous discussion chapter has analysed and discussed the themes and issues that have arisen from the interviews with students, FE and HE staff involved with a FD in Health and Social Care. This discussion suggested that the FD Health and Social Care is viewed as being 'not quite higher education', and this is reproduced in both student, FE staff and HE staff interviews. This highlights some of the contradictions inherent in widening participation policy, namely that new higher education qualifications provided through FE are not seen as real HE, even though the government intention behind them is to widen access into higher education. They are seen as some sort of 'half-way' point, 'not real higher education' but none the less a step in the right direction. Foundation Degrees run through FE colleges are therefore seen as some hybrid form of higher education, or 'nearly but not quite' higher education.

The reasons behind this, as discussed in the previous chapter, include not only the habitus of students and staff, but the institutional habitus of the organizations in which they work. It is also a result of government policy which has concentrated on providing a response to the needs of the knowledge economy through new work-based qualifications which are little understood by the very employers it set out to serve. These new types of qualifications tend to be run through the new '92 universities and partner colleges, leaving the status of the elite universities untouched by this aspect of the widening participation agenda. Therefore a further tier is added to the higher education arena, and one that channels new types of non-traditional students into new types of qualifications, leaving the elite and Russell group of universities still very much the preserve of the middle classes.

The contradictions and ambiguities in widening participation policy and practice will be explored further in this concluding chapter. I will pull together the different strands of this thesis, providing a discussion of the common themes that have arisen across the literature, practice development and research elements, and the implications this has for future widening participation practice. This chapter is divided into four sections in which I will consider:

1. the achievement of aims and objectives from the study;

2. limitations of research and practice development project;
3. Key messages emerging from the thesis
4. the implications for professional practice arising from findings; and
5. recommendations for further research and practice development.

Achievement of Aims and Objectives of Study

The overall aim of this thesis was to explore different aspects of the widening participation agenda. This included practice development activities focused on building aspiration and understanding for mature learners at the start of their learning journeys, as well as an evaluation of a Foundation Degree which sets out to offer progression routes into HE. My research set out to explore the experiences of students and staff involved in a FD Health and Social Care, and hoped to make a significant contribution to my own practice as well as informing organizational practice development and change concerning the role of FDs in widening participation activity. On a personal level this aim was linked to Technologies of the Self (*pratiques de soi*) (Foucault 1986), and the desire to develop my own practice in relation to widening participation. On an organizational level, I anticipated that the findings could help to develop the practice of the HEI in which I worked, as well as contributing to the growing body of knowledge in the field of widening participation. My thesis concerns the following broad aims:

- To acknowledge the uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity of widening participation practice.
- To understand the implications of collaborative partnerships and the delivery of HE through FE
- To explore how non-traditional learner identity and sense-making processes are influenced by the culture of learning experienced.

The first aim sought to consider the uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity of widening participation activity and Foundation Degree development. This was approached by reviewing widening participation policy and literature, as well as through my practice development project and research elements of my thesis. This uncertainty and ambiguity began to be explored in the literature review and I believe is a result of the differences in practitioner focused literature and policy, theoretical

and research based literature which emerges from academia, and the reality of widening participation practice. These differences include what they each set out to do, and what they assume or take for granted. Indeed, the unsettling of my own naïve practitioner focused beliefs concerning widening participation can be seen as part of this process.

There appears to be a gap between government policy and rhetoric which tends to portray widening participation with a positive spin, and the reality of achieving these ideals on the ground. A key issue arising from this is the continued power of certain social groups to progress into higher education, and the continued difficulty of other social groups to access these opportunities despite initiatives to promote this. As a result of this the theoretical framework of Bourdieu assumed a central importance within my thesis, and the concepts of field, habitus, cultural and social capital are key to understanding continued educational inequality and the experiences of the participants on the Mature Learners Summer School and the FD Health and Social Care students.

Although participation in HE has increased dramatically in recent years, the increase in participation is not uniform across all social groups (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997), and social class remains a major determinant of progression into HE (Reay 2006). Research has highlighted that many children from working class backgrounds do not aspire to HE as they do not see it as a place for them (Archer et al. 2003). My research also suggests that although mature non-traditional learners can transform their own learner identities, they do so in a way which denies Foundation degrees the status of HE qualifications. Their transformation is therefore limited by their own habitus, which allows them to belong on a Foundation Degree in FE but not to see this as higher education. This continues to reinforce the notion that HE is not a place for them, although higher education through FE is. This illustrates the exclusionary power of the habitus of the non-traditional students and how it prevents them from seeing themselves as belonging in higher education.

The transformation of their non-traditional learner identities is therefore limited on a micro 'individual' level, and it might be suggested that their class habitus is little changed by this experience. Bourdieu's theoretical framework does not accommodate this individual transformation or some of the complexities and contradictions

involved in this process. Although the learner identities of both FD students and the participants of the Mature Learners Summer School were ‘transformed’ by the experience, these changes were on an individual level, and perhaps could be critiqued as being such. Focus on individual change produces change on a micro level, and perhaps as a sociologist, this was not a key focus for Bourdieu. The class differences and inequalities in education he highlights are at macro structural levels within society. Although individual habitus has a role in sustaining or challenging this, class inequalities in education remain rigid despite widening participation activity.

The changes that happen in terms of increased numbers of non-traditional working class learners accessing higher education appears to happen on the periphery of the system. The so-called elite institutions remain mostly untouched by widening participation, whereas on the periphery non-traditional learners are allowed access into new forms of HE offered through FE. This could hardly be claimed to be a revolution in the existing power hierarchies that beset higher education, and widening participation perhaps can be seen as being marginalized itself within the field of education.

The framing of the widening participation agenda within a ‘knowledge economy’ discourse can be seen to individualize the response further, framing the responsibility on the individual to equip themselves with the necessary skills to participate in the 21st economy. This does two things: it pathologises individual working class non-traditional learners who are unable to play the education game, and it also frames knowledge and education in middle class terms, which may ultimately present a further barrier to those currently excluded.

I believe that my thesis has highlighted that current widening participation policy and practitioner focused literature downplays the complexities involved in achieving widening participation goals. As well as the barriers produced by the students’ own habitus, there are contradictory drivers of this policy operating at different levels of activity. On a macro level policy driven initiatives to widen participation are an important consideration.

Part of this macro picture is the role of HEFCE as the funder of Aimhigher and the targeting criteria they have. HEFCE (2007) has set out to tighten it’s criteria for funding, but uncertainties remain as to the accuracy of targeting methodologies.

Identifying parental employment status is difficult for children, and when working with mature students other criteria such as 'own employment status' must be used. At a mezzo level are the institutions involved, and this includes the institutions commitment to supporting WP initiatives.

As my own experience highlights, this appears to be a moveable feast, with institutional focus on widening participation policy changing rapidly from year to year, and the impact of new managerialism on the time and resources given to such activities. At a micro level are individual practitioner responses to widening participation, and the influence of the habitus of both students and staff involved. As seen in the staff interviews this can serve to reinforce the exclusionary nature of this process and how FD are depicted as 'other' within the FD community of practice (Tett 2000; Read et al. 2003).

The second objective centred on my interest in the implications of collaborative partnerships and the delivery of HE through FE. Both the Mature Learners Summer School and the FD Health and Social Care illustrate the importance of successful collaborative partnerships between FE and HE. This type of collaborative arrangement is central to the government's approach to widening participation activity (HEFCE 1999 funding objective 2d), and FE is depicted as being more accessible for non-traditional learners as it is both geographically and culturally closer to students (Jones 2006).

My practice development project and research suggest that the relationships between FE and HE are not straightforward, and certainly my own experience of being a practitioner saw me as a novice when working with non-trditional mature learners, and being reliant on the expertise of my FE colleagues. However my research illustrates HE staff ambivalence towards FE, and this is similar to the findings of other literature (Parry 2003). This results from concerns that HE has to parent the FE child, and that despite opportunities presented by partnership working, there are also inherent risks. The complexities of partnership working are not apparent in government widening participation policy, and I believe my thesis highlights the complexities and ambivalence involved in working collaboratively across HE/FE boundaries. It is not straightforward or easy, and to work effectively requires the commitment of both institutions.

Finally, the third objective set out to explore how non-traditional learner identity and sense-making processes are influenced by the culture of learning experienced. In many ways this was informed by the previous two learning objectives, but involved an exploration of how activities such as Summer Schools, as well as how learning on FD programmes can influence the learner identities of non-traditional learners. An important dimension emerging within my thesis concerns 'identity' and how learners and staff make sense of themselves within the changing context of work and education. Weick (1995, p.17) identified one of the seven characteristics of sense-making as being grounded in identity and its production, and as the learner identity of participants within the Summer School and FD students was a central discussion point within my thesis, identity and how student make sense of themselves as learners assumed a central role within my thesis.

The Summer School provided a supportive learning environment in which participants were able to 'taste' a range of learning experiences which may start to challenge their negative self-perceptions, and allow them to envisage college as somewhere for them. This involves meeting other similar learners, building confidence in their own learning abilities, and discovering more about the options open to them. This links to research findings by (Walters 2000) which highlight the routes that mature learners take into study. This includes meanings around self-concept, self-esteem and self-confidence.

A key issue in the Practice Development Project (PDP) is working with second chance learners at the beginning of their new learning careers. They may be taking very tentative steps along this journey, and are unsure about their own potential to learn. The process of engagement may therefore be tentative and uncertain, and depends upon 'how people's perception of their self identity changes over time' (Gallacher et al. 2002, p.499). The value of the PDP is that it allows individuals to try out a new identity as 'learner' on an experimental basis, a sort of dipping their toe into the pool of learning, without having to commit fully to a college course. This is a form of what Gallacher et al. (2002, p. 499) identify as 'peripheral participation' in a community of practice. It can provide a 'safe environment' in which to test the water.

The issues arising from the PDP and research resulted in my development of the Chair of Learner Identity presented in Chapter 6. which relate to structural inequalities (class, gender, ethnicity etc), previous learning experience, familial

support and expectations of learning, personal autonomy, and the culture of learning and support available to support non-traditional learners. This demonstrates that individuals who experience widening participation opportunities such as Summer School, or become students on programmes such as Foundation Degrees, can transform their learner identities from ones of failure to those of achievement. However, this remains an individual transformation, and increased numbers of non-traditional students experiencing HE does not transform HE into a working class game. Each individual student may transform their own learner and indeed class identity, but HE tends to reproduce existing class and structural boundaries.

Limitations of the Thesis

Having completed the research and practice development elements of my thesis, it is important to identify and consider any limitations that may have an effect upon the findings. Two limitations are explored in respect of the practice development project, and four areas of limitations are explored in relation to the research methodology.

Practice development Summer School limitations

- The Mature Learners Summer School was limited by the number of participants who eventually took up the offer of a place. This aspect of my practice development project could have been strengthened by opening the opportunity to a wider group of potential participants, and by working collaboratively with more than one partner institution. In the second year of the project this was explored but it was found that the location of the Summer School within one particular college, which was also in reasonably close proximity to the university, precluded other participants based in other colleges attending due to the distance and travelling required.
- In retrospect an area which would have given more insight into the barriers mature non-traditional learners face would have been to follow up and interview those individuals who were offered a place and then did not attend the Summer School and those that started but then dropped out. The time and resources of this thesis did not allow this avenue of exploration, but this certainly could provide useful information in terms of exclusionary forces that keep individuals out of learning.

Research Project limitations

- I originally intended to conduct the research with FD students in their final year of study (year three of a part-time programme). It was anticipated that students at this stage of their studies would have a well developed sense of what the FD meant for them as they would have been studying on the programme for over two years. However due to the high attrition rates, there was only four students left in year 3, and only three of these agreed to be interviewed. I therefore had to widen my sample to the second year students who had just completed the first 12 months of the three year programme. The result is that the sample spans two different student cohorts, who may have different experiences of the programme.
- Similarly, due to the small numbers of staff, within both the FECs and HEI, involved in either delivery or developing FDs, the possible sample size within my case study of the FD Health and Social Care was very restricted.
- I had planned to review the students' work-based learning portfolios as part of my methodology. However at the time that my fieldwork was undertaken, none of the students interviewed had started to work on these portfolios, and I was therefore unable to review these.
- A decision was made not to include interviews with employers in my research, as this was already the focus of a jointly funded HERDA-SW/NHSU project undertaken in 2004/5, which I had involvement with through the steering group. The HERDA project set out to identify a common accreditation framework for work-based learning and a common core curriculum for NHSU endorsed FDs in health and social care in the South West region of England. It involved interviews with health and social care employers.

As this research was occurring at the same time as my research, I felt that it was inappropriate to replicate this again, and therefore chose to focus my work on the student, FE and HE staff perspective. However the absence of an employer perspective could be construed as a limitation to my study.

- In retrospect it would have been interesting and illuminative to have followed-up those students who dropped out of the FD. As Appendix 2 illustrates three quarters of those students who originally enrolled on the FD failed to complete it. This could be seen as a limitation within the study in terms of

understanding reasons for attrition. However the purpose of this study was to explore student experience of the FD, not the reasons for leaving, and it was therefore beyond the remit of this thesis.

- A methodological weakness may be perceived within the case study approach that is only focused on the experience of one FE college. This could have been strengthened by research triangulated across other FE colleges offering the same programme. Indeed, this had been my intention at the beginning of the process, but very small cohort numbers in College B, and the failure of College C to deliver the validated programme prevented this. I did consider widening the sample to include students from the FD Early Years Care and Education, but decided that differences between the Early Years and the Health and Social Care sectors would make this process very complicated. In hindsight, this would have provided an interesting study that may have offered insights into the role of sector skills endorsement and employer engagement in encouraging students both to access and remain on particular programmes of study.

Key messages emerging from the thesis

A key issue arising from this thesis is the way in which widening participation policy can be challenged on a number of fronts. It is an area fraught with ambiguities and contradictions and therefore like most areas of practice is not straightforward or clear cut (Schon1987). Firstly, the government's emphasis on widening participation can be seen as more than just a social justice/social inclusion discourse, with the ideal of combating inequalities and including those groups that have been traditionally excluded from education. It is ultimately focused on meeting the needs of the knowledge economy and therefore has economic discourse at its heart. As a result social justice is undermined by the needs of the economy (Watts 2006), and cynically it might be suggested that widening participation turns certain social groups into the 'fodder' the economy needs to keep growing.

Secondly, such activities and projects focus on the individual and individual deficits/needs rather than challenging oppressive social structures that maintain and reinforce inequality. Changes in the economy, globalisation and the need for a flexible workforce have promoted the notion of the 'lifelong learner' (Jary and Thomas 1999), placing the responsibility on each individual to equip themselves with

the necessary skills to compete in new employment markets. In this way, although widening participation activity may help to transform individual learner identities, they do little to change structurally embedded educational inequality, and the way this is reproduced within institutional culture. These activities then become rather 'tokenistic' displays that support the rhetoric of widening participation, rather than really challenging the status quo within institutions and society as a whole.

These issues can lead to a somewhat pessimistic evaluation of widening participation policy and rhetoric, as although changes are made to the periphery due to new types of FD programmes, collaborations with FE, and non-traditional students engaging with HE learning, the traditional status quo and structural educational disadvantage remains largely unchanged by such interventions. Perhaps I am naively expecting too much too soon. Structural inequalities and class differences have been embedded within our social life for a very long time, and it is naïve to think that things will change quickly or indeed smoothly. Small steps may indeed lead to change and progression over time, and it is important to value the impact that such policies have on an individual level, and the transformations that occur as a result of engaging in widening participation projects and new forms of learning such as Foundation Degrees for second chance learners.

Another important message to emerge from this thesis concerns the challenges of working across traditional HE/FE boundaries. Although the government sets FE and partnerships with FE as a cornerstone of widening participation policy, it is also an area fraught with tensions and ambivalence. It does provide the opportunity to provide 'seamless' transition routes for non-traditional learners, but at the same time the success of such ventures are influenced by aspects of 'new managerialism'. This has an impact on the organization, structure and function of educational activity.

Managerialism is important within both the FE and HE staff identities within my thesis. The approach of FE staff in 'nurturing' students both with the summer school and on the FD, demonstrates how they assimilate the 'institutional habitus' of an FE culture of learning. They perceive a lack of parity with their HE colleagues, and a managerialist culture within FE means that they have neither the time nor the 'permission' to engage in scholarship (Harwood and Harwood 2004). Equally an increasingly managerialist culture within HE means that the relationship with FE is constructed around output measures and quality performance. This helps to shape the

relationship across FE/HE boundaries, placing emphasis on the role of HE in ensuring that a 'quality' HE experience is offered by the FE staff. The result of this is to focus on the deficits in the FE culture, and leads the HE staff to describe their relationship as 'parenting the FE child'.

Despite the ambivalence that HE has towards FE, I believe HE can learn a lot from the approach taken by FE to support non-traditional mature learners. A major message from my research is I believe a warning of 'not to throw the baby out with the bathwater'. The ethos and culture of learning within FE is one that values diversity and difference within the student group. It accommodates the habitus of non-traditional learners and provides a supportive context for learning. It is important to learn from the FE institutional habitus and learning ethos, so that HE itself can create an institutional habitus that does not reinforce the habitus of dominant groups but embraces diversity and difference.

These findings suggest that there are subtle nuances in the relationships between FE and HE, and between the staff who work there. These relationships are often contradictory, and reflect the complexities involved in partnership working where one organization has a more powerful role than the other in terms of control of resources, quality assurance mechanisms etc. For example, staff in HE recognize and value the expertise of FE in nurturing and supporting non-traditional learners, yet at the same time perceive deficits within the FE culture which mean that they have to parent and support the FE child. Equally HE staff appear to have a commitment to WP activities, but continue to define non-traditional students FE students as 'outsiders'. This is similar to other research which suggests that HE institutional culture continues to define non-traditional students as 'other' (Tett, 2000; Read et al. 2003).

The relationships between staff and students is complex and the way this is played out in terms of delivering HE through FE is important as these partnerships 'sustain identities and boundaries for both students and teachers and at the same time limit as well as enhance people's expectations and possibilities' (Young 2006, p. 3). It might be suggested that FE developments allow HE to commit to WP, whilst holding it at arm's length through their delivery in FE. This may be reinforced by an HE institutional habitus which reinforces the perception that widening participation risks lowering standards due to the support needs of non-traditional students (Hudson 2005).

This has made me think much more critically about WP practice within my own institution, and how fully we embrace the principles of widening access to all, across all programmes of study. A true commitment should be reflected in our ability to be a place where non-traditional students can identify and belong, and this means changing the culture of learning to offer a more inclusive approach to support. Widening participation is only a small part of a much bigger picture of social exclusion, and in to be truly inclusive educational policy needs to change at the ‘cradle’ stage of development, ensuring that each child gets an equally secure foundation on which their learner identity can be built. This encompasses equality of access to good quality provision, not just for those that can pay or live in the ‘right’ area, but as a right for every child.

This is an ideal scenario, and socio-economic factors and factors such as class, ethnicity and gender continue to have a major influence on the opportunities that each child gets. These inequalities are perpetuated through a market system, that allows those that can pay to opt out into the elite private sector, or move into areas with better school. Until these basic inequalities are rectified, it is the role of widening participation activities to somehow level the playing field. This should not just mean that non-traditional learners are accepted into a game that is defined by other social groups’ rules, but that their own social capital is valued and allowed to dominate the field.

Implications for Practice

My choice of a Professional Doctorate over a more traditional PhD route was linked to its relevance for my own practice, and indeed a central component of the programme was the practice development project. The following figure (Figure 14) details some of the principal implications for practice arising from both my practice development project and research findings. The table moves from the micro-level (the researcher) to the meso-level (FEC and University staff) and thus offers implications for pedagogical and managerial practice.

Figure 14 Implications for Practice

Issue	D.Prof Student/Researcher	Further Education College	University
Engaging ‘non-traditional’ mature learners	Develop understanding of mature learners identities across all HE programmes– application of Chair of Learner Identity to non-traditional learners	FE culture of learning is valued for its expertise in engaging non-traditional learners. Teacher centred pedagogy	Partnership with FE is a useful tool to widen participation – but need to change HE culture that sees non-traditional learners as ‘outsiders’
Facilitating Progression Pathways for Learners	Support colleagues to challenge assumptions and stereotypes about non-traditional learners	Partnership working with HE, and LLNs. Need to develop more robust partnerships with	Need to develop a culture of inclusiveness across all programmes within the HEI, and not just FD

	Work in partnership with FE, schools and LLNs to develop pathways	employers	programmes through FE. Need to develop more robust partnerships with employers
Working across HE/FE boundaries	Move beyond my own positive experiences of partnership working, to develop a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities involved in working across FE/HE boundaries	Provide resources to counteract lack of parity between FE and HE. FE staff need opportunity to have more time for scholarship, and to meet with HE colleagues	Need to challenge the 'parenting the FE child' perception. Develop ways of working collaboratively.
Sustaining Widening Participation Activity	Develop understanding of ways of sustaining WP activity within my everyday practice, and ways of funding this	Commitment at strategic level to provide an HE culture of learning for staff and students	Commitment to sustain WP activity at a strategic level, as well as embedding principles across all HEI programmes and levels

Recommendations for Further Research

This research has highlighted a number of other possible areas of research. Firstly, it could be replicated and extended through a study conducted across another HEI/FE partnership. This has been a case study of a particular FD, in a particular FEC, and it would be interesting to discover whether the emergent themes are similar across other FD Health and Social Care programmes, and in other HEI/FE partnerships. The aims and methods of this study could be applied to a larger sample of students and staff than was possible in this study, thus allowing for a possibly broader set of perspectives than is captured here.

Secondly, a future study could include employer perspectives. As mentioned previously, this was not an approach adopted in this study, due to employer-focused research already occurring at the same time in the SW region. However a future study

could include interviews with health and social care employers, to explore their understanding of what FD qualifications mean to them in terms of workforce development. This would be interesting in light of research that suggests that NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) are seen as ‘the badge of excellence’ by social care employers, and has implications for the way in which FDs are perceived (Thurgate et al. 2007:220).

Thirdly, barriers to HE could be explored through interviews with those students who were offered places on the Summer School and then fail to attend, and also with those students who leave the FD Health and Social Care before completing the programme. This is potentially a large pool of participants as in year one of the programme over three quarters of students left the programme before the end (See Appendix 2). Fourthly, as discussed earlier, comparisons to the FD Early Years could have been made which would have given insights into the role of sector skills endorsement and employer engagement on recruitment and attrition, which were absent in the FD Health and Social Care sample.

Finally, the issues raised regarding supporting an HE culture of learning in FE could be explored further. The nature of ‘scholarship’ and teaching on FDs, and how FE lecturers ‘make sense’ of themselves could be explored further in future research. This could include their self perceptions of a ‘slight change of role’ and the way in which they approach HE teaching as ‘more of the same’. Further research could be undertaken to explore what HE in FE means in terms of ‘scholarship’, and the nature of the HE experience which students have access to on FD programmes. This is an important consideration given research that highlights discrepancies in approach between an FE and HE culture of learning (Greenbank 2007).

Listening to the voices of students

As I reflect back on both the practice development and research elements in this thesis, I feel that the use of more participatory methods towards both research and practice development are required so that the often silenced voices of non-traditional learners are heard. In Chapter 3 I describe my surprise that we had not worked in a more inclusive way with the potential attendees of the Mature Learners Summer School. For me this highlighted the importance of remaining vigilant about

assumptions and beliefs we might have about practice, but which may be different for those that we work with as students, service users and carers.

My involvement with other research such as the Gay and Grey project, has signalled to me the importance of working in ways that are inclusive and not exclusive, and where possible to involve participants in the research process, not just as respondents, but as co-workers. This was not appropriate in this particular study, but I would hope that future research could involve non-traditional students in an empowering way which values their own cultural capital and what skills and insights they can bring to the research process.

Doctor of Professional Practice Programmes

Programmes, such as FDs and Professional Doctorates, which place a focus on the centrality of practice and employment, offer challenges in framing real world practice issues as research, particularly at doctoral level. This highlights the need to document professional expertise

so that this can be ‘counted’ as knowledge in an academic sense and integrated effectively with published literature (San Miguel and Nelson 2007:, p.82)

There are also tensions in being able to embrace critical reflection and creativity within the confines of work settings and as Dawson (2003, p. 38) asserts

the conditions in which we all labour as academics, students, and education practitioners seem almost antithetical to these requirements

This has implications for the ways in which professional doctorates are assessed, particularly in terms of the relevance to practice and the development of practice. The development of a knowledge economy requires new relationships with practice, and a more collaborative stance between higher education and the wider community. As such, professional doctorates should evolve to meet the needs of ‘scholarly professionals’, and as part of this development professional bodies should support them as a valid qualifications (Wellington and Sikes 2006). Programmes that emphasise learning that takes place in practice, such as the D. Prof and the work-based learning on Foundation Degrees offer challenges to HE about the nature of knowledge.

A key feature is that they move the locus of knowledge from the university to the practitioner or community of practice (Lester 2002). This challenges traditional HE control over the production of knowledge and also requires the involvement of practice partners in supporting the development of such programmes in the form of a 'coalition of equal partners' (Johnson 2005, p.90).

'Realizing potential? The challenges of widening participation for students, Further Education and Higher Education'

The narrative element in this thesis has allowed me to draw together the various strands of the Professional Doctorate programme, including the importance of the literature review in helping to frame the context of both my practice development project and research. This has enabled me to approach widening participation in a holistic way, exploring the experiences of students at the start of their learning journeys before they have even started an access programme, to the point where students gain an HE experience through the Foundation Degree programme.

In conclusion, I refer back to the title of my thesis that questioned whether widening participation does realize potential. On reflection I feel that it partly achieves this by allowing individuals who would not have traditionally undertaken higher education qualifications to do so. It does allow certain individuals to transform their learner identities, thereby enabling them to access learning opportunities. However the potential for such learners is restricted by the limited range of opportunities on offer. Widening participation activity tends to be focused mainly within the new '92 universities and their partner colleges, where new FD programmes have been designed to meet the demands of the knowledge economy. It is unlikely that many WP students progress onto Oxford or Cambridge, particularly as widening participation funding is being switched away from the elite institutions to the post '92 universities (Curtis 2008).

The results of widening participation are then focused on realizing individual potential rather than the potential for learning that remains untapped within particular social groups. Particular social groups continue to face barriers due to the currency of their working class capital within a predominantly middle class field. Unless

widening participation activity is embraced by all institutions with the same level of commitment and support, the status quo will remain, and the potential to learn within certain social groups will remain untapped.

Chapter 9 – Epilogue

Some final thoughts

In this final chapter I will offer some final thoughts on my own journey on the Professional Doctorate and explore my own ‘location’ within this thesis. This has been an epic journey not just for me but for all members of the Professional Doctorate cohort. We have encountered the trials and tribulations of our studies, alongside the ongoing pressures of everyday life, including house moves, job changes and family demands.

At the beginning of the process I could not imagine writing this final chapter as the task ahead appeared too large and beyond my capabilities. I remember feeling a fraud for the first year of the programme as I tried to get to grips with the focus of both my research and practice learning, and indeed this feeling persisted until I was undertaking interviews and starting analysis of my data. As I now complete my final chapter, this feeling has passed and has been replaced by a feeling of not believing that I’m at the end. This is also tinged with an acknowledgement of loss for something that has pre-occupied my thoughts, dreams and sometimes nightmares, over for the past four years. This is not just an acknowledgement of the loss associated with the completion of my studies, but also an awareness that the cohort of students that I have been part of will cease to be.

Peer –group support and the value of group supervision

A central aspect of the past four years has been the support of the other members of the Professional Doctorate cohort, and the impact of the group learning within this process. Part of this has been through the process of ‘telling stories’ as a route to critical reflection and learning, and this can be linked to the use of ‘dialogue’ (Bohm 1989) which refers to a particular form of interaction between people. This process of dialogue encourages critical reflection (Brockbank and McGill 1998), and although language and communication are parts of our everyday existence dialogue has been described as

a form of conversation that makes it possible for participants to become aware of some of the hidden or tacit assumptions that derive from culture, language, and psychological makeup (Sparrow and Heel 2006, p. 152).

This has been as central part of the Professional Doctorate programme, where the Group Supervision unit encouraged dialogue and critical reflection, and on reflection I believe this is one of its strengths.

The use of dialogue or telling our stories within group supervision can be viewed as a potentially empowering approach to learning which values the 'expertise' of the participants within the learning process. This process of learning is similar to action research, which is a collaborative approach to inquiry that involves participants in the research process as active members (Zuber-Skerrit 1996; Reason and Bradbury 2002), and as a result our group supervision sessions could be described as 'action learning'.

All of us contributed as participants and were involved in the learning and reflection that took place in these sessions. In the facilitated group supervision sessions we were encouraged to reflect upon the process of learning through stories (Lesham and Trafford 2006), which included how we came to choose our focus of research and the issues we faced as we negotiated these studies. We were encouraged to consider our thoughts and feelings, and the process of listening to our own stories and that of fellow students acted as a catalyst for both self-discovery, and the identification of linkages across all of our studies.

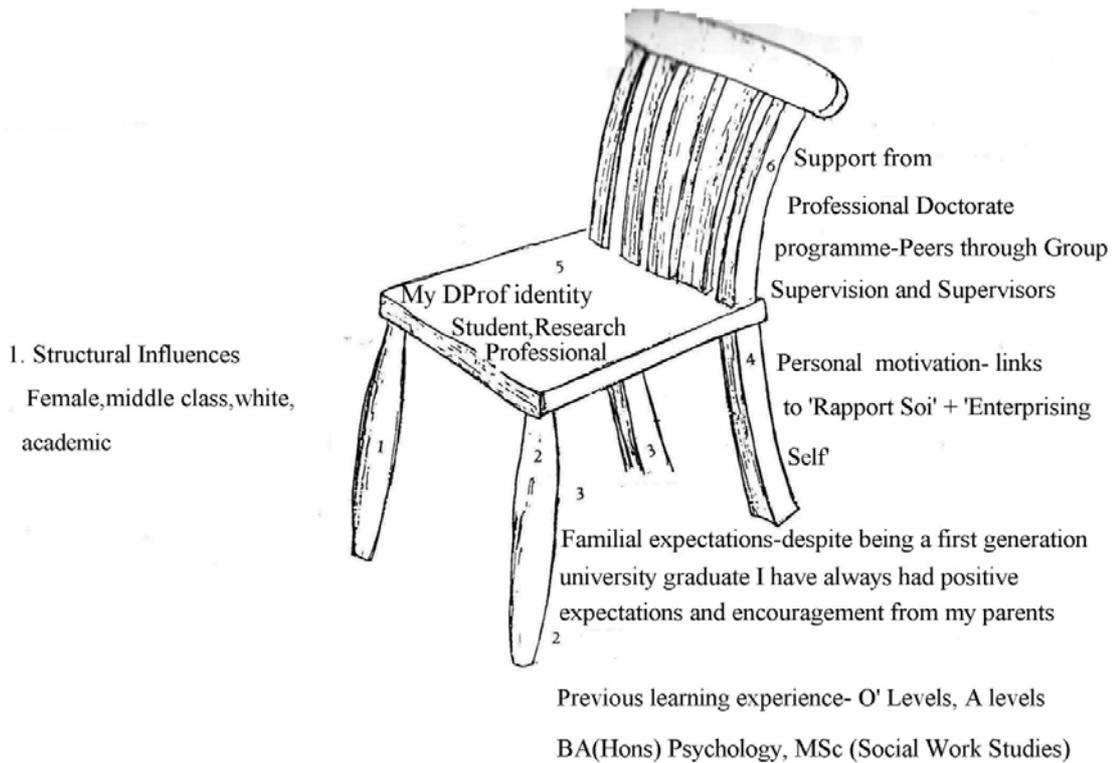
Just as the collaborative emphasis in 'action research' blurs the traditional boundaries between the dominant researcher and submissive subject, so 'action learning' could be seen to enable new bonds to develop in contested spheres of knowledge. This involves Professional Doctorate students being active partners in each others learning process. It therefore recognizes the expertise of scholar researchers, enabling them to share their own experiences and 'insider' knowledge, and as a result impact upon the learning process of the wider group. For example one link that became a common theme or *leitmotif* in our discussions was the impact of 'organizational constraint'. We were able to draw parallels between the constraining effects of organizational structure and culture across a range of public services including education and health. We were able to explore on individual levels what it felt like to be 'disempowered' by the organization, yet at the same time consider new ways of thinking about the issues based on the reflections of fellow students.

In this way our dialogue opened deeper understandings on both individual and cohort levels. Our experience of developing deeper levels of understanding through dialogue is supported by research into doctoral students, which concludes that story telling can 'extended learning from the individual to the group' (Leshem and Trafford 2006, p.24). The process of dialogue through group supervision could therefore be seen as a potentially empowering process for the doctoral students involved. At the beginning of the four years we were confused, overwhelmed by the task ahead, and feeling pretty much helpless. However, over the four years of the programme we have used narrative and stories in our dialogues with each other, and as a result our learning has become enriched and empowered by the process. Alongside the focus on Professional Practice, I believe that the strength of the Professional Doctorate route lies in the peer supervision element and the shared journey that we have all taken.

I believe the application of the Chair of Identity, which I applied to Learner Identity in Chapter 7, is a useful model and one that clarifies the role of the habitus further. The Chair of Learner Identity can be applied to a variety of circumstances from those at the beginnings of their learning journeys, such as those coming into Summer Schools and those at later stages of their learning journey, such as the students on the FD Health and Social Care programme. Chapter 7 related the Chair of Learner Identity to the experience of mature non-traditional learners on the FD Health and Social Care. This model depicts how structural inequality, previous experience of learning, family expectation and personal motivation contribute to individual learner identity. It is equally possible to apply it to my own identity on the Professional Doctorate Programme, and the structural, social and personal elements which contribute to my own identity as student/researcher (See Figure 15).

My own learner identity as a student on the Professional Doctorate programme highlights the importance of holistic learning (academic, professional and personal), and the learning enabled through a group cohort experience (Mullen 2003). The Group Supervision unit reinforced a cohort identity and supported us as a community of scholar practitioners, and this was a central support for our emerging learner identities. This can be related to the way in which an FE culture of learning serves a similar purpose for the FD Health and Social Care students. Both provide a structure of support that provides stability and security for the learner, and this is particularly important for non-traditional learners where the legs on their Chair of Learner identity may be uneven due to earlier life experience.

Figure 15 My Professional Doctorate Chair of Identity



Looking to the future

The organizational changes highlighted in the prologue to my thesis are still reverberating in my own particular world of practice. As I write this final chapter, I have just been appointed to a new role within the university that will take me back into the social work academic group, and away from the world of widening participation which I once inhabited. It is interesting that the concept of WP does not get mentioned once within the person and job specification for this new role, despite the role being responsible for both educational and research development within the academic area. This saddens me immensely, and highlights an institutional move away from WP activity at a time when national policy is raising its importance further. What I had hoped would inform not only my own future practice, but that of my employing institution, now seems to have very little relevance in the future scheme of things, and is no longer my remit.

To some extent this makes ‘nonsense’ of my practice development project, because it is unlikely that this sort of activity will be valued or indeed repeated within this institution in future. I have learned a lot through the process on a personal level, particularly about working in partnership with colleagues in the FE sector. It has also reinforced for me the understanding that the world is in a constant state of flux and change, and to survive this we need to be able to adapt. This perhaps links back to the themes of lifelong learning and the notions of enterprising self that were highlighted in my study.

Specific issues relating to my research and practice development may no longer be a priority for my ‘home’ institution, but there remains a resonance with wider government policy and practice. I also hold on to what I have personally learned on this journey that will send ripples into my own future research and practice for years to come. My own commitment to widening participation has become stronger than ever as a result of both my research and practice development, and I feel a strong commitment to a social justice discourse which views education as a right of all citizens. However I realize that for this to become a reality, we cannot just tinker at the fringes through individual widening participation projects. There needs to be a commitment to make the whole system of education fairer, which means that all institutions and types of programme should become equally accessible to all, not just the privileged few.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1



Aimhigher...

Dear

***** College, in collaboration with Bournemouth University is running a Summer School for health and social care to enable prospective students to feel confident and happy about coming to the college and starting their programme.

This is a free 4 day Summer School which aims to introduce to study at the College, and will give support for those returning to study, study skills, use of library etc.

We'd like to invite you to apply for a place on the Health and Social Care Summer School (29th June, 30th June, 7th July, 13th July). An outline of the programme is enclosed with this offer letter. Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis, so it is important that you reply as soon as possible.

Please complete the reply slip and return it to ***** by 15th June 2005. As places are limited, we will confirm that you have a place on the course as soon as possible. However, if you have any queries now about the Summer School please contact us on *****.

Yours sincerely

Head of Programme Area
Health and Social Care

Health and Social Care Summer School

This section to be completed by the student		
I would like to apply for a place on the Health and Social Care Summer School 2005.	Yes	No
Name:		
Address:		
.....		
Postcode:		
Email address:		
I have additional learning needs (specific learning difficulties, disabilities or medical conditions)	Yes	No
If yes, please give details:		
.....		
.....		
Note: this information will be passed to an Additional Learning Needs Adviser at the College who may contact you to discuss your support needs. Please contact us if you would like this letter in an alternative format.		
Your signature:		Date:

Please complete this slip and return it by Wednesday 15th June 2005 to:

Centre for Health and Social Care
The ***** College
***** Road

Summer School 2005

Programme

Day	Content	Location	Led by
Day 1: 29 th . June 2005	10.00 am Coffee and induction to programme 10.45 am Discover your talents and skills 11.15 am Strategies for overcoming barriers to learning Lunch 11.45 am Time management 12.30 pm Library induction 1.30 pm End of day 2.30 pm	College	*****
Day 2: 30 th . June 2005	Learning Styles Introduction to HE – overview of vocational areas (Rehabilitation, Social Work, Nursing etc.) Clinical Skills Labs and campus tour	Bournemouth University	*****
Day 3: 7 th . July 2005	10.00 am Coffee and reflections on visit to Bournemouth University 10.45 am Mindmapping + discovering the secrets of planning a sensational essay! 12.15 pm Lunch 1.00 pm Referencing workshop 2.00 pm End of day	College	*****
Day 4: 13 th . July 2005	Guidance and preparation day. 10.00 am Coffee and introduction 2.30 pm End of day A day of activities to explore career choices/options and the world of Higher Education. Workshops will include job roles, personality considerations, entry points to careers, educational requirements and personal statements. You will also learn how to do a poster presentation. Programme evaluation.	College	*****

Appendix 3 Attrition figures for the FD Health and Social Care from College A

Students Enrolling and year of intake	Completing Year 1	Completing HE Cert HSC	Completing Year 2	Completing Year 3	Achieving FD HSC	Reasons for withdrawal
2004 12	7	7	6	4	4	2 to O. T programmes (1 in 2005 and 1 in 2006) 1 exited after completing HE Cert, 1 moved from area, 4 left for personal reasons
2005 17	10	6	3			1 to Social Work programme in 2006, 9 left for personal reasons or found the course unsuitable, 1 moved from the area, 2 left after completing HE Cert, 1 withdrew after failure, 1 withdrew due to ill health
2006 12	9					1 advised by employer that OU K100 more suitable 2 left for personal reasons

Appendix 4

Name
FD Health and Social Care Student
Bournemouth and Poole College

17/05/06

Dear ,

Re: Research into Widening Participation: An evaluation of
student
and staff experience of a Foundation degree

I work at Bournemouth University and am Head of Widening Participation initiatives within the Institute of Health and Community Studies. As part of this I have an interest in the development of Foundation Degrees. I am now undertaking a Professional Doctorate and as part of my studies I am undertaking research into both student and staff experience of Foundations degrees. My plan is to interview both college and university staff involved in the development and delivery of FDs, and the students studying on them. I also hope to analyse students' work-based learning portfolios.

I would like to interview you as part of my research, as I believe you are currently a student on the FD Health and Social Care programme. I also plan to interview HE and FE staff, and I hope to analyse students' work-based learning portfolios.

I have completed a full ethical approval for this research, even though this was not required, and this was peer reviewed by the IHCS School Research Committee. I have enclosed the information for participants and consent forms for you to complete.

I would be grateful if you could let me know if you are happy to be interviewed as part of this study. I expect the interview to last about 45 minutes. I hope to start these interviews in June. If you require any further information or details, please contact me on
01202 *****.

Yours truly,

Lee-Ann Fenge

Appendix 5 Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Widening Participation: An evaluation of student and staff experience of a Foundation degree
Name of researcher :Lee-Ann Fenge

**Contact details: Institute of Health and Community Studies,
Bournemouth University, Room S706,
Studland House, Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BH1 3NN.
Tel. no. 01202 *****. e-mail: lfenge@bournemouth.ac.uk**

Please read the Participant Information Sheet before completing this Pform.
Please initial each box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet dated 05/10/05 and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I understand that will be invited to participate in an interview, which will be tape recorded. I further understand that the tape recorded interviews will be recorded anonymously and destroyed once the recording has been transcribed onto a computer. I understand that this data will be kept for five years, at Bournemouth University, as part of University regulations.

4. I understand that I will also be asked that the researcher have access to my Work-based Learning Portfolio so that the data within this log can be analysed. This data will be stored for a period of five years at Bournemouth University.

5. I understand that I can request that elements of the transcribed interview be deleted at my request if I consider them to include confidential information.

6. I understand that I will be anonymous in any written reports/papers from the project, but that these reports will include quotations that will be reported by reference to either FE staff, HE staff or student body membership. This means that colleagues may be able to make informed guesses as to the source of the information.

7. I understand that my personal details (e.g. name) will be treated with strict confidentiality and will not be given to any other individual without my prior consent.

8. I understand that the findings will appear in the Doctor of Professional Practice thesis to be submitted by Lee-Ann Fenge to Bournemouth University. Academic papers may also be written for journals.

9. I confirm that I am not simultaneously involved in other research such that

Appendix 6 Semi- Structured Questions

Research Question

To offer an understanding from both the student's, FE and HE staff's perspectives, of what Foundation Degree study means.

Interview questions:

For staff

Can you describe your involvement with FDs?

For students

Why did you choose to study for a FD?

From your involvement in FDs (either as student, HE staff member or FE staff member) what does study on a foundation degree mean to you?

Staff

From your experience can you describe the needs or requirements that students on FDS may have? What might these be and why?

How are they addressed?

Students

Do students on FDs have different needs to students on other HE programmes?

If so, what might these be and why?

How are they addressed?

Research Question

To explore what work-based learning means to both students and staff, and what it means in the context of the Foundation Degree study.

Interview questions:

What is your understanding of work-based learning?

What is your experience and understanding of work-based learning within Foundation Degrees?

Are there issues related to supporting WB learning on FDs?

Can you think of an example from your own experience that highlights this issue?

What role should employers have in supporting WBL? From your experience does this happen?

Research Question

To identify factors associated with delivering HE in FE settings.

For staff

What does partnership working between HE and FE mean to you?

What is your experience of working in partnership in terms of FD delivery?

From your experience what issues arise from delivering HE in FE settings?

For students:

What is your experience of being a university student?

How does this fit with your expectations?

From your experience what issues have there been for you by undertaking your FD within a college environment ?

Research Question

To identify factors associated with access, retention and progression on Foundation Degree programmes.

For staff

In your experience do FD programmes pose particular issues in terms of access, retention and progression?

Why might this be?

What solutions could be offered?

For students

From your own experience are there any issues related to getting a place on a FD programme?

Were there any issues that either encouraged or discouraged you from considering FD study?

From your experience are there issues related to retention of students on FD programmes and their progression on these programmes?

Are you aware of an honours degree top-up route, and might you be interested in taking this?

What might support you to do this?

What might prevent you from doing this?

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