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**CUTTING 'ROUGH DIAMONDS': FIRST GENERATION
STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

By

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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Cutting rough diamonds provides an insight into higher education (HE) participation, which has become an important focus for policy debate and research. This is the result of ongoing attempts to expand the HE system in line with wider policies promoting a 'knowledge economy' and resulting from policy concerns with equity and inclusion. Previous research focuses largely on demographics, academic performance, and persistence rates of first generation students. Studies in the field of student experience, learning approaches and transitions have examined the relation between learning and contextual factors. The focus of this inquiry is significant as it focuses on first generation students' experience and the ways they cope with change (transition to HE) at a personal and academic level. The term 'rough diamond' is the title for this thesis, as it is redolent with metaphor that encapsulates many of the discourses that position the students within the inquiry.

To develop a clear and holistic picture of the participants' experiences of higher education, fifty semi-structured interviews were undertaken. Grounded theory techniques were the initial method of data gathering and analysis. Phenomenographic techniques were later employed for a deeper exploration of variation in the group and to generate new knowledge in an under-researched area. The use of grounded theory and phenomenographic approaches highlighted the complexities in the experiences of these first generation students. They showed the individual nature of those experiences, set as they were in a highly politicised and dynamic field. The inquiry traced how these students moved into and took up their place at a single case study university site, 'The Centre' and how they engaged in their first semester of study of an undergraduate degree. The participants discussed their experiences transitioning to university and the issues and challenges associated with their new environment.

In the light of the evidence gathered and a review of existing scholarship, a detailed exploration and theorisation is offered which draws on the theoretical concepts of Archer (2000, 2003, 2007), Bourdieu (1980, 1984, 1986) and Weick (2001, 1993, 1995, 2009). These have been combined to provide a conceptual theoretical framework that helps to illuminate the complexity of the transition process undertaken by these students. The research findings demonstrate that the point of registration at higher education institutions does not in itself constitute a successful student transition to university. The findings suggest that underpinning the students' experiences of transition is a complex interplay between becoming, being and achieving as a higher education student and their own cultural and social identity. The interplay between university life and personal circumstance is not easily or simply reconciled or identified.

A psychosocial approach examined the premise that the interaction and transaction between individuals and structures is essential to develop a holistic understanding of what shapes first generation students' experiences and choices. Insights for policy makers, policy researchers, higher education managers and lecturers are offered with regard to provision, transition and subsequent enactment of agency of the first generation students. This led to a model of the 'process of transition' to illustrate how these students navigate crossing the cultures of home and university. The model could help retention of first generation students in a competitive market place for post 1992 universities who rely on these students for their intake.

The thesis offers insights that could inform universities of strategies and practices that may aid widening participation students to successfully make the transition to university life, and ultimately to graduation. The inquiry invites further investigation of current higher education policy priorities for first generation students.



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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Julia Hope

declare that the thesis entitled

CUTTING ‘ROUGH DIAMONDS’: FIRST GENERATION STUDENTS IN HE

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

Signed:

Date:.....

Acknowledgements

‘Caelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt.

(They change their sky, not their soul, who rush across the sea.)’

Horace, The Odes of Horace

The Robbins principle that ‘university places should be available to all who were qualified for them by ability and attainment’ is as powerful today as it was fifty years ago.

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Definitions and Abbreviations

Within this thesis, many acronyms and abbreviations have been used, as well as terms relating to the UK education system that may be unfamiliar to those from different educational backgrounds. Every attempt has been made to explain each term when first used within the text. All terms are included in alphabetical order.

| | |
|---------|---|
| A level | Advanced Level – examination at the end of post compulsory education (18+) |
| BERA | British Educational Research Association |
| BTEC | British Technical Education Certificate. BTEC Nationals (equivalent to A levels) |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CBI | Confederation of British Industry |
| DBIS | Department for Business Innovation and Skills |
| DCMS | Department for Culture, Media and Sport |
| DCSF | Department for Children, Schools and Families |
| DfEE | Department for Education and Employment |
| DES | Department of Education and Science |
| DfES | Department for Education and Skills |
| DIUS | Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills |
| EMA | Educational Maintenance Allowance |
| EOC | Equal Opportunities Commission |
| ECU | Equality Challenge Unit |
| EU | European Union |
| FD | Foundation Degree |
| FE | Further Education |
| FGSs | First Generation Students. The definition of ‘first generation’ can vary depending on the literature reviewed. For purposes of this inquiry, ‘first generation’ is described as any student where neither parent has attended higher education (university) at any time |
| FEI(s) | Further Education Institution(s) |
| FS | First Semester |
| FSM | Free School Meals |
| G7 | The G7 is a group consisting of the finance ministers of seven developed nations: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States |
| GCSE | General Certificate of Secondary Education – Examinations at the end of compulsory schooling (16+) |
| HE | Higher Education |
| HEFCE | Higher Education Funding Council for England |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |

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|---------------|---|
| HEPI | Higher Education Policy Institute |
| HESA | Higher Education Statistics Agency |
| IFS | Institute of Fiscal Studies |
| IPPR | Institute for Public Policy Research |
| NAO | National Audit Office |
| NCIHE | National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education |
| NIESR | National Institute for Economic and Social Research |
| OFFA | Office for Fair Access |
| ONS | Office for National Statistics |
| QAA | Quality Assurance Agency |
| Russell Group | An organisation consisting of the top twenty research-led higher education institutions in the UK |
| SES | Socioeconomic Status |
| WP | Widening Participation |
| UCAS | University and Colleges Admissions System |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| USA | United States of America |
| UUK | Universities UK |

1. Conceptualisation of the Inquiry

'Cutting Rough Diamonds: First Generation Students in Higher Education' set out to explore issues of equity in higher education, as opposed to attempting to test a hypothesis or solve a problem. The inquiry provides a greater understanding of the experiences of first generation students (FGSs) in their first semester (FS) at a case study campus (The Centre). The findings of this inquiry are significant in the context of policy debates regarding higher education (HE) access and widening participation (WP). Current discourse in UK higher education policy emphasises the need to recruit and retain students to deliver future economic growth and social mobility, over creating opportunities for students to 'participate'.

HE is considered an important factor in advancing social mobility (DBIS, 2011; DfES, 2003a). To promote social mobility the 'New Labour' government (1997–2010) made equality of opportunity to enter HE a key policy issue (Graham, 2010). 'New Labour' set out its policy for increasing participation in HE in the White Paper '*Future of Higher Education*' (DfES, 2003a). The New Labour government claimed a commitment to widening participation in HE by increasing the number of students from under-represented backgrounds and disadvantaged groups. Their aim was to close the gap between proportions of students from social classes I to IIIN and those from IIIM to V (see Appendix Three-Socioeconomic Classifications), that is, between students whose parents are largely from the middle and professional classes and those from a working-class background.

The government's policy on expansion of higher education and the pursuit of broadening participation ostensibly aimed to improve the UK's economic performance, and to aid social justice through increased opportunity for better jobs for those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (DfES, 2003a). However, some academics argue that, despite the New Labour government's wide use of the term social justice, in reality social justice was not the key issue underpinning widening participation in higher education; rather, the aim was one of economic performance (Dillon, 2007; Lunt, 2008).

When discussing the government or government policy this thesis refers to the Labour government's policies and agendas. The empirical aspect of this inquiry draws on data collected between October 2011 and January 2012 and focuses on the period 1997–2010 when 'New Labour' was in government. After the May 2010 general election a Conservative-led coalition government came to power with new ideas and policies for the university sector. Their HE report, '*Students at the Heart of the System*' (DBIS, 2011) continued support for the idea

that universities are key to increasing social mobility and the results of the Browne Review (Browne, 2010) continue to be highly relevant to HE policy and practice.

This thesis stems from the researcher's interest in the FGS' experience and widening participation policy and is concerned with the transitions to HE made by those who could be described as 'widening participation students'. The germ of this inquiry came when I was a 14-19 manager at an FE in the campus town, as part of my role I had to report to the Principal the number of Level 3 students who had progressed to HE. One year it was clear from the data that approximately half of those had chosen to study at The Centre. The Principal wanted to remove these students from the data as '*they had not really gone to university as they had not left the town*'. I argued that they had as they were undertaking undergraduate programmes; the Principal's view was that they were not really university students as they had not left home. From this meeting I left with a feeling that this was an issue that needed to be researched as I was unable to find any substantial evidence in the literature to support my argument. I subsequently left my job at the college and decided to undertake a PhD using The Centre as my case study site.

There are many studies about the experiences of first generation young undergraduate students in HE (c.f. Teft, 1999; Ball et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2002; Osborne et al., 2004). Much of the contemporary interest in the 'student experience' of 'non-traditional' students (Bowl, 2001, 2003; Reay, 2001, 2003a, 2003b; Ball et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2005, 2009, 2010), stems from successive governments' rhetoric concerning widening participation in HE, and claims about the economic and social benefits that higher education (governments claim) brings (c.f. NCIHE, 1997).

HE participation became an important focus for policy debate as well as scholarly research during the New Labour administrations. This was in part the result of ongoing attempts to expand the HE system in line with wider policies promoting a 'knowledge economy' and resulting from policy concerns with equity and inclusion. 'Rough diamond' in the title, is redolent with a metaphor that encapsulates many of the discourses that position the students within the inquiry. 'Rough diamond' illustrates the 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980) informing social policy in the UK, that has never altered, despite rhetoric to the contrary, that there are only a few amongst the 'rough' working classes that are of value and that many are viewed as simply chaff (or 'Chav' Jones, 2011). In the words of a participant, '*I used to be a chav, but I am a student now*' defining themselves as different from their excluded peers 'the chavnots'.

'Rough' is a pejorative metaphor for working class and holds within its opposite, the 'smooth' (superior, educated) and 'finished' (established) middle class. The term 'diamond' has connotations of commercial value, a resource that can be cultivated and turned into capital, or in the case of 'first generation' young undergraduate students in HE, educated to benefit the economy. The metaphor also individualises these 'rough diamonds' that, due to their own particular innate wit and talent, can be excavated and polished by higher education institutions (HEIs).

Policy makers and researchers tend to focus on access and entry to HE, with less attention to the lived experience of students. Merrill (1999: 203) explains the life of institutions becomes most 'meaningful' when it is explored from the 'perspectives of the actors' involved. Drawing on the experiences of FGSs provides a more nuanced representation of the experience of HE at The Centre. Theorised by Garner (2007), white working-class (lower socioeconomic) identities have been pathologised in specific and spatial contexts, with labels from academia ('underclass') and popular consciousness ('chav'). 'Widening participation' is a term used by central government (regardless of the political party in power) and its agencies. In the absence of a clear definition of widening participation at the national level, institutions have been able to apply their own understandings of the term in designing their widening participation policies and practices. It is suggested that widening participation refers to efforts on the part of the government or HEIs to encourage more applications to university from groups who are currently 'under-represented' (a term, which is itself, contested).

The research site is a single case study, taking place within one HE institution campus (The Centre) and is limited to the practices in that particular institution, therefore the principle underlying theme is the experiences of a single group of first generation students (FGSs). The background of the participants was working class as their families were from NS-SEC groups 4-7. The inquiry initially sets the context by examining key literature in the field, the wider impact of globalisation on HE policy making. The research examines the impact of relevant historical developments in HE, and considers key sociological issues, such as family background and social aspirations, in its examination of FGS' experiences.

Widening participation policy is considered in relation to the experience of 'first generation' year one undergraduate students (FGSs) aged 18-20 in their first semester (FS) at The Centre. Insights are provided into their experiences of HE at a period of policy transition and their transition to and within HE. Consideration was given regarding how this cohort of FGSs have been supported by family, peers and the institution. The participants in this inquiry are not representative of the university as a whole or The Centre. The intention was not to validate or

evaluate their accounts, but rather to use them as a means of making sense of FGSs transition into HE. This satisfies two of Silverman's (2000) criteria for originality of research, in that it makes a synthesis that has not been made before, and that it applies old knowledge to new contexts.

The 'history' of the campus in relation to changing HE policy is considered with a focus on how socioeconomic group (social class) may act as a key determinant of educational achievement and subsequent access to HE. Specifically on widening participation (WP) at The Centre in relation to FGSs in their FS of study. WP policy 'migrates' from government (Greenbank, 2006) and analysis of institutional WP work cannot be divorced from this wider context. Much WP work carried out by institutions is strongly encouraged by government agencies such as the HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2003a).

WP, at both the macro level of policy formation and at the micro level, and its implementation at The Centre is considered, as is the relationship between the local (meso) and national (macro) WP agendas, and places The Centre (micro) into the wider policy context. This contributes to the research community within a practical framework. The unit of analysis for the case study being the individual FGSs, the inquiry will be able to contribute to the current knowledge regarding this cohort of students by providing a deeper insight into their lives, views and aspirations during their FS at the 'The Centre'.

On a practical level, HE Institutions (HEIs) have an interest in obtaining an insight into the type of students they are currently targeting as part of their widening participation policies and what actually matters to them. For the research community, it will provide further knowledge regarding FGSs transition to and in HE, and stimulate further research.

1.1 Aim and Research Question of the Inquiry

Reducing inequalities in access to HE has been a persistent theme in British government policy since the mid-1990s (Dearing, 1997; Kennedy, 1997; Fryer, 1999). 'WP' became a buzzword in New Labour policy documents and as such was used by funding and advisory bodies. WP has been defined as 'extending and enhancing access to HE experiences of people from so-called under-represented and diverse subject backgrounds, families, groups and communities and positively enabling such people to participate in and benefit from HE' (Watson, 2003a: 4).

WP originated and gathered momentum in the 1990s as part of equal opportunities policies and discourses to improve social mobility and opportunities. Increasing access to HE has led to a

diversified student body, suggesting that conceptualising the 'student experience' as homogeneous is no longer viable. A scoping out of the literature regarding the experiences of FGSs revealed two omissions.

- Limited attention to the FS transitional experience of FGS. Research is focused on the first year and beyond.
- No explicit investigation regarding academic and social adjustment variables, to determine which specific factors may hinder FGSs transition to HE.

Traditionally, the practices and processes of educational policy which are formulated at the macro level and the experiences of agents on a micro level have been conceptualised as being two distinct fields of research. Although recent developments in social theory have advanced our understanding of some of the problems regarding educational policy (c.f. Penney & Evans, 1999), there remains considerable friction between the study of large scale phenomena such as social systems and national policy. These contrive to influence everyday interactions and actions and the need to address the local particularities and interactions that occur on a daily basis (Shilling, 1992).

Arguably, the friction in understanding has detracted from the very complexities that the sociology of education sets out to explore and indeed needs to explore in terms of transition. One of the ironic consequences of this is the perpetuation of the sociology of education's difficulties in accounting for class inequality reproduced between structure-agency relationships within HEIs. A partial reason for this difficulty is the mixed consensus for speaking about working class and middle class as clearly defined entities within modern education. While there have been a number of attempts to overcome such problems (c.f. Tett, 2000; Waller, 2006) there remain areas to develop pressure upon the field of educational researchers to evaluate and measure individual experience within HE.

This has led to the polarisation of analytical perspectives in which the individual experience is drowned out by what Ball (1995: 258) highlights as 'implementation studies, focused issues like quality, evaluation and accountability'. Following from Ball in coming to understand experience from this perspective, the agent is often situated within closed and tightly framed analytical frameworks. This viewpoint is an attractive but often detrimental enticement for governments seeking to justify recruitment of working-class students into HE, and ultimately employment.

Consequently, those within educational research seeking to move beyond the ascribed parameters of performativity and metrics find themselves marginalised from the developing research game. Contrastingly, those who choose to adopt evaluative projects are becoming increasingly distant from the lives and struggles of those currently experiencing HE. Under the conditions of rapid change within Higher Education the detachment by those following this popularised performativity culture leads to an evaluative understanding of past relations (Bernstein, 1999). As such, current gaps in the understanding of transitional experience within the various perspectives of educational research provide space from which to develop a different conceptual lens.

Palmer, O’Kane & Owens (2009: 38) argue ‘the actual experiences of students entering university have somehow failed to attract the level of academic scrutiny that is necessary to appreciate this transition’. The first year experience at university is a significant one and is linked to issues of retention (Tinto, 1993) and research has focused on factors ensuring progression and success for first year students.

Researchers (within the UK and the USA) recognise the need to study the subjective response of students to their experience (c.f. Pasacrella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Thomas & Quinn, 2006), and assert that there is a dearth of such research. Any study of a particular group must include an examination of the subgroups to allow for a thorough analysis and observance of target populations. The void in the two areas provided the initial impetus to investigate first generation first year undergraduates during their first semester, and identify the relationship between their status and perception of their academic and social adjustment.

Bourdieu (2001: 32) asserts that when detailing social space as a basis for further investigation, the social space acts ‘both as a field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on individuals who are engaged within it, and as a field of struggles within which individuals confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position’. The perspective of FGSs is interrogated regarding how they perceive their experiences and in doing so develop understanding of FGSs in the field of HE. The concern being the ideologies of The Centre, based on the possible unique characteristics of these students (first generation) and the implications of this for widening participation practice in the light of HE policy, and the focus being the experiences of year one FGSs in their FS at The Centre, the overarching questions were continuously refined, which led to the creation of four questions to enable exploration.

1 How do first generation students negotiate entry to HE?

- 2 How do these experiences influence their desire and pathway to study at a university?
- 3 What factors led the first generation students to study at The Centre?
- 4 What are the experiences of first generation students at The Centre during their first semester?

These led to establishing how widening participation is positioned at The Centre in relation to FGSs. The literature regarding HE focuses on the 'situated' nature of 'working class' (socioeconomic groups 4-7) experiences within education. It observes that the identity of lower socioeconomic students in relation to HE in particular is frequently constructed as 'other' (c.f. Archer, 2003; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003) and where 'academia has rarely developed complex understandings of working class people' (Reay, 1997: 18).

Approaches within the literature to understanding 'working-class' relationships with education have been developed from eliciting the opinions of students at particular points in their educational careers. These include school pupils, such as work undertaken on school choice (c.f. Ball, 2003; Power, Edwards et al., 2003), HE choice that focuses on a range of under-represented groups (c.f. Ball, Davies et al., 2002; Archer, 2003; Bowl, 2003; Brooks, 2003; Reay, 2003; Reay, David et al., 2005), mature students returning to study (Bowl, 2003) and retrospective personal narrative based accounts (c.f. Rose, 1989; Law, 1995; Reynolds, 1997; Walsh, 1997). These studies have much in common, as they identify the situated positions of 'working-class' students and their difficulties in progressing through education. They also point to the importance of such work in focusing on the experiences of working-class students from the students' perspectives. It is through personal accounts that insight into the classed nature of educational experience can be identified.

Researchers highlight the complex interplay of issues around students who are first generation, such as their social, economic and cultural situations (the focus being in the main on those from a lower socioeconomic background). These include their knowledge of HE (Hutchings, 2006), the route from which they access university (Leathwood & Hutchings, 2006), funding issues (Jessop, Herberts & Solomon, 2005; Hutchings, 2003b), and concerns they feel about fitting in with the culture of the institution (Field, 2005; Archer & Leathwood, 2006). The complex relationship between these factors has sometimes been neglected.

This inquiry recognises that student experiences are informed by their habitus, social and cultural capital and higher education student practice. During data analysis Archer's (1982, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2007) concepts regarding the interrelationship between

social structure and human agency were used to consider and reanalyse past roles and identities and their influence on the current identity of the FGSs. Grounded theory techniques were initially used to analyse the transcripts, these were then reanalysed using phenomenographic tools.

When the research proposal for this inquiry was developed in January 2010, New Labour was still in power and the policy road map for the future of HE was laid out for all to see. However, a new central government administration came to power and proposed radical changes to HE policy. This meant that the FGSs who participated in the inquiry were not only unique in that they were studying at The Centre, but that they like many in September 2011 ran at the closing door of HE lower tuition fees.

Dearden et al. (2011) used data on potential university entrants from the Labour Force Survey to examine the impact of reforms to tuition fees, grants and loans between 1992 and 2007. They attempted to control for differences in unobservable characteristics by dividing their data into cells of individuals who are observably similar and estimating for each cell separately. Their results suggested that a £1,000 increase in undergraduate fees is associated with a 3.9 % reduction in demand for undergraduate places, while a £1,000 increase in maintenance grants is associated with a 2.6 % increase in demand. Dolton & Lin (2011) used a large time-series dataset to look for structural breaks in participation rates in the UK and similarly conclude that students' participation behaviour does respond to financial incentives.

After taking power on 11th May 2010 the coalition government made a number of policy changes regarding HE. It ceased to fund the Aimhigher programme, and in December 2010 raised the cap on university tuition fees to £9,000. Changes were also made to the rules on how many students a university could recruit. These were designed to meet the government's aims of increased dynamism and student choice within the HE sector.

Government policy after 2010 has focused on raising the aspirations of young people deemed to have the potential to participate in HE despite their disadvantaged backgrounds. This was driven by concerns about the creation of a 'lost generation' as the number of young unemployed passed the one million mark in November 2011. With growing pressure on universities to recruit a variety of students, widening participant applicants are attractive for many reasons, not least by helping universities to meet widening participation targets and attract additional funding (Hinsliff-Smith, 2010).

Drawing on Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2007) guidance, this might include students from lower socioeconomic groups. Students who are the first in their family to go to university (the focus of this inquiry), students with disabilities, students from certain minority ethnic groups, and white working-class boys. This list is not exhaustive and different institutions target different groups, depending upon the pattern of participation in their own institutions and upon their interpretations of national strategies. The targeting of widening participation in this distinct manner may work against the development of a more transformative approach to HE.

The interpretation of widening participation used in this thesis corresponds most closely to the model of Jones & Thomas (2005) who discuss a 'transformative' model, which places the needs of the student first, and calls for a much greater emphasis on institutional change as a means of meeting these needs. Rather than expecting the students to adapt to fit into a pre-existing HE system, this transformative approach seeks to create institutions that take a positive view of diversity, and adapt their own structures to embrace the diversity of the student body.

Jones & Thomas (2005:1) offer a comprehensive critique of widening participation government 'Access' discourse which is couched in terms of 'problems' for certain groups needing to be rectified. They identify two policy strands and a more progressive perspective:

'The academic strand seeks to attract 'gifted and talented' young people into an unreformed HE system. The second strand, ... the utilitarian approach, posits a need for reform. However, this is undertaken largely to meet the requirements of employers and the economy. In contrast, a transformative approach values diversity and focuses on creating a system of HE that does not place the burden of change upon potential entrants'.

These strands (academic, utilitarian and transformative) are presented to categorise the approaches to widening participation by HEIs, in their attempt to interpret WP policy and highlight that change is needed, but at what level is dependent upon differing university values and culture. This is an over-simplification and the business of HE is more complex with widening participation as merely one part of this business. The creation of the case study campus 'The Centre' is an example of the transformative approach in action. Such a model is characterised by an institutional willingness to change traditional structures of engagement to enable more students to show their potential. The analysis applied to the transcripts of FGS' accounts illustrate the effects of this engagement (see Chapters Six and Eight). The overt interpretation of widening participation (see 2.1), the approach taken and methods employed

(see Chapter Four) cohere with the validity of the findings and subsequent conclusions of this inquiry (see Chapter Nine).

1.2 The Demographic Location of the Inquiry

The town, nicknamed ‘Pram face by the Sea’, has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the UK, high unemployment, a high incidence of mental illness and poor infrastructure. The development of The Centre was established with Strategic Development Funding (part-financed by the European Union) as part of an initiative by economic development agencies as a way of making HE attractive and accessible to disadvantaged individuals and communities. It was also part of a drive to develop a knowledge based economy and to stimulate the creative, cultural and tourism sectors. (See Appendix One – Economic and Social Indicators for the Campus Town). The Centre developed in 2003 and the first students graduated in the summer of 2006 (the concept was copied in over twenty other locations across the UK). The opening of The Centre brought higher education to the area for the first time in its history and offered state-of-the-art facilities in the centre of town.

In 2003 six HEIs nominally had use of The Centre with forty students, five staff and three courses. The Centre’s focus was to enable local people to study a broad range of subjects, most of them commercially focused to help them gain well-paid jobs and support the growth of local companies. Professional courses were also provided to help working people further their careers, and links were established with local industrial and engineering firms. Bringing university education to the town was a central part of the County Council’s regeneration scheme, to help people increase their skills and get better jobs as well as contributing to the local economy.

In 2005, The Centre was greatly expanded from the original 2003 conversion of a 1960s building. By 2009, one university offered to run 95 % of the courses at The Centre to secure the future of university level education in the town; The Centre became its fifth campus, a ‘hub’, which offered a portfolio of courses. The university invested strategically at The Centre through its access agreement and HEFCE funding in outreach and support for students, the aim being to drive up attainment in schools and HE participation in a severe participation ‘cold spot’(education-led regeneration).

In 2010, Strategic Development Funding and the university initiated construction of a second university building in the town centre. This involved refurbishing and extending the existing campus (a converted 1960s building) and the creation of a second building which enabled the

university to double its student numbers to over 1,000 and increase its range of courses, with an expanded emphasis on science.

The Centre is geographically remote (36 miles) from its home base (the main university site). In 2011 (the year the interviews commenced), twenty five courses and six hundred and fifty students, with over sixty staff full and part time in academic and support posts were based at The Centre. In September 2012, The Centre was extended; this doubled the learning space and increased the student community to over 1,200. The undergraduate programmes in September 2012 comprised of a number of different course types, including foundation degrees, single honours and combined honours. The mode of learning at university could be new to the students, as they were expected to take more responsibility for their learning, work independently; undertake research and engage in a programme of in-depth reading.

The MOSAIC¹ profile in Table One below compares households in the campus town with where the other university sites are based and displays how the two communities differ.

Table One: The Households in the Campus Town Compared with the other University Sites

| MOSAIC Group | Campus Town Households (%) | Other university sites Households (%) |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| A Symbols of Success | 2.2 | 7 |
| B Happy Families | 6.6 | 3 |
| C Suburban Comfort | 11.4 | 15 |
| D Ties of Community | 28.7 | 7 |
| E Urban Intelligence | 0.4 | 32 |
| F Welfare Borderline | 3.1 | 9 |
| G Municipal Dependency | 3.3 | 9 |
| H Blue Collar Enterprise | 8.0 | 9 |
| I Twilight Subsistence | 3.3 | 2 |
| J Grey Perspectives | 31.1 | 13 |
| K Rural Isolation | 1.9 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 |

¹ MOSAIC (a geodemographic classification system) takes postcodes and creates area profiles by combining several different forms of information, including the electoral register, TV licensing, DVLA information and annual household income. Using these different forms of information it 'creates a picture' of the kinds of people who are most likely to live in a particular postcode area. (Experian 2011).

A key aspect of the MOSAIC data is that 28.7 % of the population of the campus town fall into the category 'Ties of Community' compared with only 7% in the university town. This category describes:

'people whose lives are mostly played out within the confines of close knit communities. Often a younger than average population, with couples bringing up young children benefiting from the social support networks of rather old fashioned communities, where friends and relations seldom live far away. The focus of most people's lives is local. The close knit nature of these communities provides support networks for the locals.' (SAM, 2007).

1.3 Starting Points

The majority of research regarding first generation students often examines demographics, withdrawal rates, and graduation rates. There has been little qualitative research that addresses FGSs' transition to and integration into higher education. Even fewer studies examine the lived experiences of first generation students as they enter higher education (Thomas, 2002). As a result of this gap, there has been a call in the USA for an increase in qualitative research examining the social and cultural transition for first generation students. Much of the research in the USA and UK focuses on negative characteristics, a deficit model based on being 'at-risk' or having a 'low income' and this is often associated with FGSs.

Qualitative research can shed light on the micro level dynamics of cultural navigation of first generation and non-first generation students (Nunez, 1998: 26). Additionally, Pascarella et al. (2004: 250) stated that 'surprisingly, little is known about their college experiences or their cognitive and psychosocial development during college'. First generation students are a difficult group to visibly identify, whereas many marginalised identities are often visible due to physical identifiers such as gender or race.

FGSs exist in a world where, in most circumstances, they must actively choose to disclose their status. Much analysis of higher educational change 'measures' its effect upon the recipients, using quantifiable indices, such as equality of access to provision. Studies such as Jones & Castle (1986), PCFC (1992), Blackburn & Jarman (1993), Egerton & Halsey (1993), Modood (1993) and HEFCE (1997) mapped out patterns of participation by specific social groups and use their presence as a means of assessing equality of access to HE.

Such research is useful in identifying patterns of exclusion, but it tends to view the existing system as relatively unproblematic once access to HE has been achieved. Rates of participation reveal little about a student's entry to and experience of university. The aim of this inquiry is to uncover the motivations of FGSs at The Centre to enter HE, their experiences in the FS and capture their 'lived experiences'. This raises important issues about the nature of FGS' experience, the extent to which such students are integrated into the sociocultural life of HE institutions, and what it means for them to be an HE student.

Focus at the start of the literature review was on HE and WP policy, which required some conceptualisation of policy and policymaking. Dye (1978: 3) views public policy as whatever governments choose to do or not to do. Hill (1993) defines policy as the creation of political ideology and political priorities and the conversion of these into social change through governmental activity, including legislation regulation and resource allocation. Hill (1993) usefully distinguishes between policy formulation and policy implementation, recognising that these two stages are distinct but interrelated. Both are necessary if political stances are to be converted into processes that impact upon social groups and individuals. Hill (1993) also emphasises the interactive role of implementation in contributing to policy development because of the interrelation between new policy and existing practice and the complexity of the implementation process, which involves a plethora of governmental and non-governmental agencies, organisations and individuals.

Policy is often presented as a specification of principles and actions, designed to bring about desired goals and is conceived of as a statement of government intentions. This perspective is somewhat limited as it is at risk of failing to accommodate the complexity of the policy field. Policymaking is a dynamic process that often emerges from within overlapping areas of competing views and involves conflict between policymakers and those who put policy into practice or are impacted by its outcomes. Interpreting and evaluating policy is an active process for policy and open to multiple interpretations and methods of evaluation. The practice of policymaking is complex and rarely are policy goals or objectives achieved without the risk of unintended outcomes or unanticipated effects that run contrary to the policymaker's intentions.

Ball (1994: 10) alludes to the complexity and uncontainable nature of the policy field:

'Policy is text and action, words and deeds; it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete insofar as they relate to or map on to the 'wild profusion' of local practice'.

Scholarship within the field of policy studies finds expression in trying to inform, evaluate, model, understand, offer explanations and critique the complex and multifaceted elements that are embraced by policy. Such efforts tend to be expressed through the construction of theoretical frameworks that rest on differing philosophical and theoretical assumptions. Building from their foundations, such frameworks provide a language, a set of relations and ideas with which to explore, evaluate and attach meaning to the multiplicity of relations, actions, events and outcomes within the field of policy (Parsons, 1995: 57). Rational decision making (the strategic approach) is conceivably the predominant framework within the policy field (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984).

Critics of the rational decision making approach point to its limitations but its endurance as a framework reflects its conceptual strengths, including the provision of a rational structure that provides some leverage on the multiplicity of policy activities. Policy implementation in the area of widening participation in HE integrates diverse stakeholders to work together to achieve the aim of a more representative student population. Stakeholders from the perspective of HE include the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), DfES, Higher Education Academy (HEA), Universities and College Admissions Service (UCAS), HEIs, and bodies of education outside of HE such as Further Education (FE) colleges and schools. It also includes providers of advice and guidance services and beyond, including public and private sector employers, Trades Unions and community groups.

Hodgson & Spours draw on Bowe et al.'s (1992) 'policy triangle' model to point out that policy creation, implementation and practice provide three 'contexts' (influence, policy text production and of practice) where there can be interaction between policy and stakeholders. This 'policy triangle' model may explain why policies conceived in one way at the level of policy production could be interpreted in another at the level of implementation, to illuminate why intended and unintended outcomes may occur.

This is pertinent when considering the varied ways widening participation policy is experienced and interpreted and the consequent perceptions by stakeholders unable to visualise it in its entirety. For example, widening opportunities for participation to HE have been interpreted as lowering standards (or qualifications) (Haggis, 2006) which has implications for relationships between stakeholders and students. A good policy translates intentions into action, by focusing on what is important, informed decision making and the need to change (DCS, 2009).

The literature in widening participation continues to evolve with as varied and diverse foci as the subject area itself. The vast array of aspects range from policy and economic analyses to

research of students perceived as excluded, pre-HE choice and information, aspirations and abilities, experiences of students at varied points in the student life cycle, curriculum issues, employability and the persistent population social inequality of HE participation.

Opinion remains divided on the viability and legacy of the New Labour government's widening participation policies. The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government's 2011 Social Mobility Strategy emphasises the importance of HE participation, including elite HEIs, for increasing social mobility and life chances amongst socially disadvantaged groups. Despite these tensions, the concept of widening participation achieved a high public profile during the New Labour Administrations (1997–2010) and is closely identified with the policies of the New Labour government.

The Centre was built in an HE 'cold spot' as part of the New Labour government's policy to encourage students from underrepresented groups to participate in HE. Widening participation policy is mediated through institutions, and the student experience is influenced by the ways universities translate the government's widening participation policies into practice. Duke (2004) has suggested that researchers need to consider organisational behaviour as a means of bringing about institutional change. In the case of this inquiry, this is shown through the development of The Centre within an area of social deprivation. Such a position moves away from the 'pathologising' of students described by Archer (2007). The simple assumption is that it is the fault of FGSs if they cannot fit into pre-existing institutional structures.

There is a distinction made in the UK's HE sector between 'selecting' universities and 'recruiting' universities, it provides some indication of the insulation that is maintained between new 'widening participation' universities and exclusive Russell Group institutions. The so called 'selecting' universities tend to be oversubscribed: they do not need to be concerned about filling places and their marketing efforts reinforce their perceived position as 'selecting' institutions. (Most of the pre-92 universities fall into this group). A number of post-92 universities, struggle to fill places on at least some of their courses. These HEIs are sometimes referred to as 'recruiting' universities. This dichotomy appeared to exert an influence on the ways widening participation was positioned at The Centre. It is important to note that The Centre is a campus of a 'recruiting' university.

In general terms, it is suggested that this 'insulation' perpetuates the two tier system, whereby students from underrepresented groups are encouraged more consistently by institutions with a stronger widening participation mission (c.f. Archer, 2007). It might be that in a market based system, these institutions are motivated by market survival as much as a desire to promote social

justice. Students from underrepresented groups are more likely to choose these institutions because they 'feel less conspicuous there' (Bowl, 2003: 130). This means that HE as a sector (albeit constrained by societal structures) has failed to address socioeconomic inequalities, and the 'best' institutions remain the preserve of middle-class, traditional students (Archer, 2007). Institutions have been able to retain the insulations that differentiate them from each other, in some cases voicing a commitment to widening participation, but expressing this inconsistently and in certain cases demonstrating a more powerful and strongly framed discourse of exclusivity, with some institutes remaining exclusive by their nature of social status historically.

Policy, even with the best intent to WP, will not always eradicate social and economic inadequacies. The failure of many initiatives to impact on practice is due in part to an unsophisticated understanding on the behalf of policy makers that meaningful change must involve practitioners. Swann & Brown (1997) argue that the idea of humans as active constructors of policy is not widely accepted in policymaking circles. Social interaction is the process via which ideas and structures are mediated, and subsequently reproduced and transformed. Such social interaction is subject to many diverse causal pressures that differ from context to context, rendering the notion of implementation highly problematic, and confounding attempts to impose uniform change from above.

1.4 The Political Landscape

This thesis is a snapshot in time (the timescale of thesis) and is presented in two phases. The first phase provides an overview of the literature; this involved searching the literature in general and a scoping review regarding HE and participation. The second phase presents the findings of a single case study, conducted using grounded theory as a methodology. The participants' accounts were analysed in two stages. The first stage of the data analysis used grounded theory (see Chapter Five) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1998) to generate theory. The second stage used a phenomenographic inspired approach to generate data (see Chapter Seven), and discuss any variation in the accounts of the phenomena studied (FGSs in the FS).

The focus is experiences of year one (first generation) undergraduate students with a home address in the UK who were under the age of 21 when they started at The Centre. During the primary research (fieldwork) semi-structured interviews (which took place between October 2011 and January 2012) were used to explore the experiences of fifty predominantly White FGSs aged 18-20 during their FS. (See Appendix Seven for a selection of pen portraits and Appendix Nine for demographic data regarding the participants.) This information is portrayed

in the context of The Centre; with reference to the previous and present government's widening participation agenda.

The premise of this inquiry came into being when, in November 2009, Peter Mandelson – Britain's First Secretary of State (and Secretary of State for DBIS) – made a speech that once again propelled the issue of WP in HE to the top of the Labour government's agenda (Curtis, 2008). In his launch of the Higher Ambitions report (BIS, 2009), Mandelson urged the HE sector to broaden the social makeup of its student body, to work more closely with business and industry and to offer more flexible modes of study (suggesting that in future, HE funding might be more closely linked to meeting widening participation targets). His speech drew on a key feature of New Labour's widening participation policy; an insistence that a diversified, mass HE system can contribute to both social inclusion and economic growth. The media coverage of Mandelson's speech was also a reminder to universities that Britain's HE sector could no longer afford to be perceived as elitist or out of touch with wider current, social and economic goals.

Ten years earlier, Gordon Brown (then Chancellor of the Exchequer), had publicly criticised Oxford University's decision to reject a state school pupil with straight A grade predictions (Jary & Thomas, 2000). Brown's criticism of the University's decision positioned the New Labour government commitment to opening up HE to a more diverse group of students; not simply advocating 'social justice' but also committed to a dynamic, forward-looking model of HE, at odds with antiquated, elitist gatekeepers. It is difficult to see how such an ambiguous approach to relationships between education and social inequality could widen participation in a profound way. Rather than representing a harmonious approach, the collocation of social justice and markets appears more reminiscent of the 'incremental dissonance' referred to by Loxley & Thomas (2001: 299). This could indicate that the concept of widening participation and New Labour's stated commitment to it was rhetorical. The lack of definition, and a breaking down of insulations between contradictory ideas, allowed difficult issues to be 'fudged' to take the controversy out of the debate and this served to make the Labour government's widening participation policies toothless and ineffective as a legacy policy.

The coalition (11th May 2010) came to power with the promise to make 'tough decisions', referring to significant funding cuts to the public sector. They claimed that 'This government is working to give all young people, regardless of background, the best opportunities to progress.' (Williams & Shepherd, 2010: 1). The policy focus shifted to being on students of 'high potential from disadvantaged backgrounds' (OFFA, 2011: 5.2). The interviews with FGSs at The Centre took place during this changing policy context.

1.5 Summary

This chapter provided background to the inquiry and tackled the problems faced by FGSs and universities when working within WP policy. Discussed was the focus, aims, context of the research and information regarding economic and social factors of the town in which The Centre (the university campus) is located and how it fits within the widening participation debate. The focus of the inquiry is a legacy (New Labour) policy and this may not continue within the present policy framework (post May 2010). The investment in WP may not have been the success policy makers and government envisaged to enhance social and financial status for FGSs; or contribute to the recovery of the UK's economy in the long term. Elitism could then be even more prevalent, excluding the more academically able from a disadvantaged background on grounds of cost and class.

2. Evolving a Literature Review. Using a Grounded Theory Approach

During the literature review period (2010/11) quantitative and qualitative data was collected regarding The Centre's student profile (2007–2011). This was used to gain a greater understanding of the profile of students who attend The Centre and the viability of undertaking the interviews (see Appendix Four). This data aided the development of the main research question and an understanding of the demographics of The Centre. A search of the literature identified key issues to consider in developing the subsidiary questions and formulating the data collection strategies. Bourdieu (1996: 1) states that 'A purpose of qualitative research is to uncover and understand human action and to... uncover the most deeply buried structures of the different social worlds that make up the social universe, as well as the 'mechanisms' that tend to ensure their reproduction or transformation'.

It should be noted that the literature review has been written before, during and after the analysis of the interview data. This is in accordance with grounded theory, the underlying methodology for this inquiry. It is important to understand the position of a literature review within the thesis. Charmaz (2006: 165) explains that:

'The intended purpose of delaying the literature review is to avoid importing preconceived ideas and imposing them on your work. Delaying the literature review encourages you to articulate *your* ideas' (italics in original).

This inquiry has followed the advice of Charmaz (2006) and an initial review of the literature was completed before the first interviews took place. The reason for an early review of literature was to learn whether any similar research had been conducted in this area and to satisfy the University's research committee requirements. This meant that the bulk of the literature review took place after data collection, in keeping with the use of grounded theory tools of analysis and theory generation. Grounded theory aims to identify and illuminate social processes and theories, which account for phenomena. For the theory to be grounded in data, it was important that the researcher was not overly influenced by other research findings or theoretical arguments. As the researcher did have some previous knowledge however, it was important to be reflexive to ensure that data were not forced into preconceived categories (Glaser, 2002). Charmaz (2006: 164) states that grounded theory is a unique methodology that suggests 'draft your literature review and theoretical framework in relation to your grounded theory. You can use it to direct how you critique earlier studies and theories and to make comparisons with these materials.' Glaser & Strauss (1967) as quoted in Charmaz (2006) did

not outright reject the use of a literature review, rather they caution that one should be careful in using existent materials so they do not restrict the development of the researcher's work.

Data must be related to the theories developed by the researcher and it must 'check out, correct, or amplify the researcher's emerging hypotheses' (Charmaz, 2006: 168). The researcher must first have generated some body of work and have some idea of their hypotheses before looking for supporting or contrary literary evidence. The constant comparative method can be used to integrate literature into the theory. While Glaser & Strauss (1967: 181) have not prohibited some preliminary literature work, they stated that the researcher 'can be even less concerned (about literature reviews) if one intends to use field materials for further verification'. Maxwell (2005: 47) considers there is value in literature reviews in qualitative research and points out that qualitative researchers often fall short when working with literature. This occurs when literature from a variety of sources is used uncritically. It is important to test emerging theories looking for both supporting and contradictory evidence.

Research that is valid and reliable is thorough, and by looking for supporting and contradictory data the researcher's theories evolve into well thought out theories that stand up to scrutiny. An extensive literature review was undertaken in an attempt to situate the theoretical model and conceptual frame within related academic fields. The researcher could not hope to describe all literature; therefore it was important to be selective to ensure that work cited had direct relevance to the case study. The intention was to find areas of resonance and convergence, but also to identify whether this research offered anything original. The literature review was structured to correspond with key aspects of the theoretical model and conceptual framework. Maxwell (2005: 35) warns qualitative researchers to avoid simply summarising literature or doing mini book reports. He suggests focusing specifically on 'relevant' research instead of 'covering the field', and to 'treat the literature not as an authority to be deferred to, but as a useful but fallible source of ideas about what's going on and to attempt an alternative way of framing the issues'. Maxwell (2005: 34) advises that in doing the literature review one should not ignore 'other conceptual sources that may be of equal or greater importance for your study'. Examples of other 'conceptual sources' include, but are not limited to, experts in the field, unpublished papers, dissertations and grants in progress.

Charmaz (2006: 167) advises,

'Weave your discussion of it (literature) throughout the piece... treat it as a challenge to do the following: clarify ideas; make intriguing comparisons; invite your reader to

begin a theoretical discussion; show how and where your work fits or extends relevant literatures’.

Differing opinions about literature reviews in grounded theory follow a continuum from not doing a literature review at all, to doing a minimal preliminary literature review supplemented by further literature as additional themes are discovered during field work, and at the opposite end of the continuum only doing a literature review at the end of the research process.

Strauss (1998) suggests that a review of the literature allows the researcher to become familiar with certain concepts of interest and could provide a general frame or lens for the research. Glaser (1978, 1992), suggests that the researcher should not cloud the research with preconceived ideas from the initial emersion in the literature (when scoping out the literature), and should approach the research with a mind free from any preconceived ideas about the research. Given these contrasting views from the originators of the grounded theory method, and being a novice in the use of this methodology, the researcher was presented with a dilemma as to what choice to make.

The researcher took the approach that a preliminary literature review did not direct the course of the inquiry. As themes were developed, the researcher simultaneously conducted literature reviews; as part of the constant comparison process. A preliminary literature review is not exhaustive or extensive due to the constructivist nature of grounded theory. The goal was to not let a literature review guide the process but rather clarify emergent theories. The literature review is presented in three sections and discusses boundaries the inquiry operated.

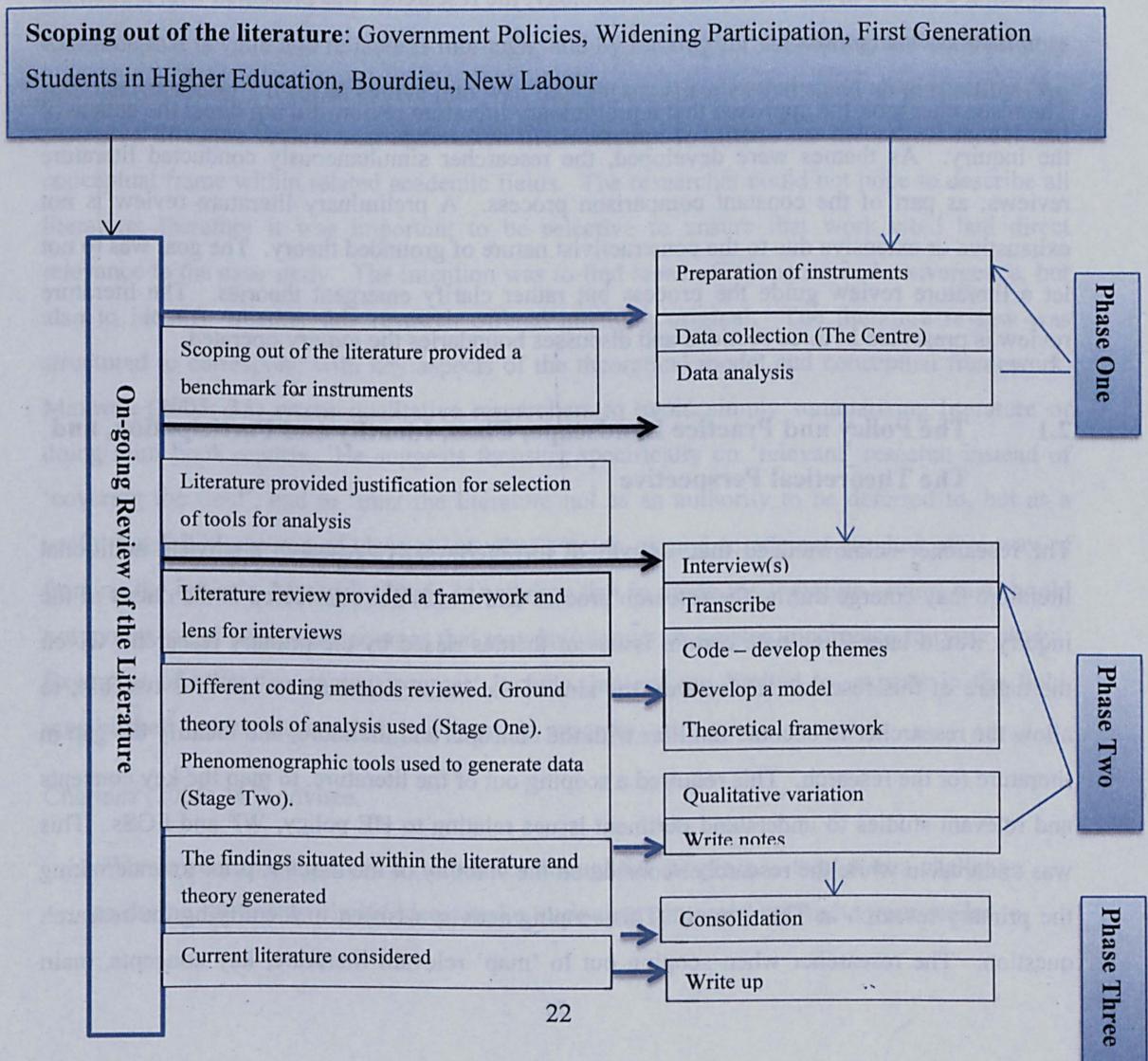
2.1 The Policy and Practice Landscape, Class, Identity and Participation, and The Theoretical Perspective

The researcher acknowledged that, as part of an interpretative research approach, additional literature may emerge during the research process and whilst not considered at the outset of the inquiry would later illuminate certain issues or themes raised by the primary research. Given the nature of this research (inductive), the aim of the initial literature review was twofold; to allow the researcher to become familiar with the concepts and literature, and identify the gap in literature for the research. This required a scoping out of the literature, to map the key concepts and relevant studies to understand pertinent issues relating to HE policy, WP and FGSs. This was undertaken while the researcher considered the viability of the inquiry, prior to undertaking the primary research at The Centre. This scoping activity assisted in identifying the research question. The researcher when scoping out to ‘map’ relevant literature, key concepts, main

sources and types of evidence available, summarised and evaluated the literature to show relationships between different studies and methodology. This showed where the inquiry stood in relation to past research and theories. The process of identifying and appraising previous studies allowed an insight into the major methodological approaches.

An extensive literature review was undertaken after stage one data analysis of the transcripts to situate the theoretical model and conceptual frame within related academic fields. It was important to be selective to ensure that work cited had direct relevance to the case study. The intention was to find areas of resonance and convergence, but also to identify whether this research offered anything original. The literature review was structured to tally with key aspects of the theoretical model and conceptual framework. The review of the literature, continued throughout the different phases as can be seen in Figure One below.

Figure One Review of the Literature



2.2 Cultivating Rough Diamonds. The Policy and Practice Landscape. Early Widening Participation Policies and Strategies.

Widening participation (WP) is a term which has become extensively used in recent years in relation to education, often in conjunction with expressions such as ‘social inclusion’ and ‘equal opportunity’. To fully understand WP as a concept, it is important to examine the literature to identify how it has developed and how FGSS fit within this. In the 19th century, new Polytechnic Institutes were established to improve the skills of local residents. At the opening of the Borough Polytechnic Institute (London South Bank University), Lord Rosebery made the following pronouncement:

‘the polytechnic will do its share towards perfecting a *valuable gem* found in the slums of London’. (Lord Rosebery, 30th September 1892, my italics).

These sentiments, embedded in the policies of the 1890s, echo the 21st century ideal of finding ‘rough diamonds’ or ‘valuable gems’. This ideal has exercised generations of policy makers, practitioners, teachers and academic researchers who genuinely strive to widen opportunity for groups of young people traditionally denied access to HE. Turning the ideal into reality has, however, always proved elusive. Undertaking this doctoral research has been equally troubling because this concept is still elusive within academic literature and policy development.

In the early part of the twentieth century ‘traditional’ students represented the majority of university students and came from socioeconomic groups 1-3. Traditional and non-traditional students are unequally distributed throughout the British HE sector, with large numbers of traditional students concentrated within the older and civic universities and non-traditional students concentrated largely in the post-1992 universities. This thesis is firmly located within the context of a ‘widening participation’ HE sector, where despite not reaching the 50% target proposed under New Labour, the Higher Education Initial Participation rate in 2010/11 for 17-30 year olds provisionally stood at 47% (DBIS, 2012). Indeed, this thesis suggests that WP has been ‘mainstreamed’ across HE, in that it serves as a vehicle for many different people to enter HE, not just those for whom it was initially conceived (entrants from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds).

The term ‘widening participation’ has multiple meanings and applications in literature and in a number of ‘terrains’ i.e. school, community, as well as HE, each contesting its exact meaning

and role (see Appendix Two timeline 1997-2011 of widening participation policy). The concept of WP in HE, as distinct from simply increasing or expanding student numbers, took root in HE and employability policy discourse during the Labour administrations 1997 – 2010. Whilst it is widely perceived to be a consequence of the publication of the Dearing Review of HE in 1997 (Maringe & Fuller, 2006), WP has a longer history that can be traced back to the early 1960s (Harrison & Hatt, 2009) with an emphasis on opportunity within secondary education (raising school leaving age) and later further education following publication of the Kennedy Report in 1997 (Parker, 2003; Jones, 2008). The Robbins Report of 1963 put forward a set of recommendations to try to broaden access to HE. This was based on the principle that ‘courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so’ (Committee for Education, 1963: 8). This ‘famous Robbins principle’ built on the Anderson Report of 1960, which had recommended that all full-time undergraduates should receive mandatory awards to cover fees, as well as means tested maintenance grants. This reflected the prevailing view that participation in HE should not be dependent upon the ability to pay (Davies et al., 1997).

There appears to be several different strands of widening participation reflecting a range of differing interpretations of the term. DfES (2003) recommends that HE requires reform to enable entry of more culturally and socioeconomically representative cohorts. Such reforms include development of responsive and flexible curricula, a more inclusive institutional environment, and practices and interventions to facilitate student progression and completion for ‘non-traditional’ groups (HEFCE, 2003a). The counter argument is that the HE sector is already capable of being culturally and socioeconomically welcoming and representative.

A range of studies (Edwards, 2003; Preece & Houghton, 2000; Thomas, 2001; Burke, 2002; Thomas & Quinn, 2007); highlight the difficulties faced by students who enter HE through widening participation initiatives. Difficulties range from feeling excluded from their immediate communities, to financial difficulties and a lack of support and encouragement from families and friends. ‘Choice’ of university is also traced and classed (HEFCE, 2003) with not all universities and disciplines being equally valued by society. Claims of ‘pointless degrees’ and questionable (post-1992) universities raise the spectre of the ‘authentic’ (Taylor, 1992) university, the ‘authentic’ student (Reay, 2002) and ‘authentic’ subject (Bourdieu, 1988) of study. Although WP is debated in the literature in quite polarised ways this is a reductionist pragmatic view, however it does help to illustrate the potentially contrasting positions of HE WP policy. It is suggested that a policy focus on widening, and not just increasing, participation

places an emphasis on social justice and equity (Watson, 2006; Greenbank, 2009). Watson (2006: 2) states that ‘succeeding at it (WP) contributes to social cohesion’.

The aim of WP appears to be participation in HE which mirrors the characteristics of the generally young (18–30 years) population. Ultimately, this is presented as a ‘problem’ with policy makers instructed to address under-represented groups in HE. There have been changes to the student population entering HE over the last twenty or so years. This however remains a rather complex picture. Dolton & Lin (2011) find that the university entrance rate remained relatively static for males between the late 1960s and the early 1990s. There is evidence, according to David (2005), that the massive expansion of HE has tended to increase opportunities for all students, on a relatively differentiated basis in relation to social class, and that one of the key features to this expansion is the increasing proportion of females in the student body. The growth in female participation in HE has impacted on the social composition of universities, with women comprising approximately 54% of students in British universities (HEFCE, 2010).

Whilst evidence continues to highlight disparity in participation rates across social groups (HESA, 2006, 2008, 2009), there continues to be a small number of young people from socioeconomic groups 4–7 who do choose to go to university. There is a body of literature that identifies issues connected to social and academic fit for such students (c.f. Rose, 1989; Law, 1995; Mahony & Zmroczek, 1997; Reay, 2001; Walkerdine, 2003; Lucey et al., 2001) and in particular their ‘fit’ within institutions perceived as elite. There has been a massive change over the last sixty years in patterns of HE progression; the most dramatic of these is the increase in the number of graduates in the UK and that overall women now outnumber men. However, unsurprisingly, given the history of the development of the HE sector, while there is an increase in lower socioeconomic and minority ethnic students going to university they are going to ‘different universities to the middle class counterparts’ (Reay, Davis & Ball, 2005: 9). Leathwood (2004: 31) suggests ‘the hierarchy of universities both reflects and perpetuates social inequalities. The Centre was built specifically to encourage WP students to progress to HE and is an example of the policy initiative to compensate for difference and social inequality.

A key focus in WP research and evaluation in HE, as in other areas of education, has been on the quantifiable outcomes of activities in terms of increasing participation activity amongst underrepresented groups (Gorard et al., 2006). The ‘audit culture’ (Colley, 2005) in education generally and focus within WP on ‘proof’ of impact has led to a preoccupation with numbers and progression into HE. This audit society (Colley, 2005) has diverted attention from useful

exploratory research focusing on measuring outcomes within institutions. This inquiry aims to reveal what is actually taking place at The Centre in respect to the perspectives of FGSs.

The New Labour government's interpretations of WP (Hodge, 2002) compounded the need for quantifiable outcomes to provide proof of increased HE participation by focusing on new types of qualifications, which are increasingly offered outside traditional HE environments. In 2002 Patricia Hodge, Education Secretary suggested that WP would occur through foundation degrees and sub-degree qualifications. (Many of the programmes at The Centre are foundation degrees and vocational based degrees.) 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 & O'Connell, 2003). Others link access within this new mass system to the relatively 'advantaged' within communities of disadvantage (Forsyth & Furlong, 2003).

University choice is a complex educational game where young people can be selected out. Acceptance of the rules of the game and acquiring a 'practical sense' for 'adjustment to the demands of the field' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 66), requires a shift in habitus for 'working-class' students. Students must embrace the values inherent within the field to occupy their space with any degree of certainty. Being able to choose a university is an act of consumption, but it is important to choose the right institution. Although specifically related to the consumption of cultural goods in the form of art, music, drama etc., strategies of distinction are equally applicable to university choice, particularly in the sense of a marker of class. The choices that people make are 'predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences' (Bourdieu, 1986: 7).

Discourses of 'who might fit where' in HE can be more or less explicit but are nonetheless 'socially prevalent' (Read et al., 2003: 263). This could lead a prospective student to search for a university where the applicant expects to feel comfortable and to 'belong' (Read et al., 2003: 264). Learner identities are shaped thorough post-16 choices (Ball et al., 2000) and a sense of belonging has been found to make an important contribution to persistence on a course regardless of students' backgrounds (Hausmann et al., 2007). Read et al. (2003) like Boud (2004) refer to the importance of the student experience after enrolment.

Historically entrants to HE have been from mainly the top three socioeconomic groups (middle class). There has been research concerning WP per se (Gorard, 2007; Bourdieu, 1997; Reay, 2010) that has revealed a number of factors likely to influence student experiences. Much of the debate about problems facing the progression of FGSs into HE has tended to focus either on

technical questions about different assessment systems and curriculum content, or concerns about changes or threats to personal 'identity'. A concern of HE institutions is to reduce rates of student attrition (non-completion) of degrees. The UK in 2007 had an overall non-completion rate of 13.9%, which is far lower than most other countries (National Audit Office, 2007: 5). However, this masks differences in the type of students who did not complete. Data suggests that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds fail to complete courses at a much higher rate than those from higher socioeconomic groups (HESA, 2008). WP has wide-ranging aims of endeavour, from attracting more students from disadvantaged backgrounds, to improving their chance to complete their chosen course of study. WP was seen by HESA as fundamental to change in HE, social change and mobility.

Staetsky (2008) argues that there are three main major improved outcomes for WP to HE:

- 1 WP is beneficial to the economy, and brings a positive contribution to national productivity and competition.
- 2 WP is favourable to society in terms of employability and social justice.
- 3 WP is advantageous to the individual such as realising potential, raising income and increasing social mobility.

It is apparent that 'widening participation' has become more 'mainstreamed' within the world of HE, in that the policies emphasised the twin goals of up-skilling the nation (for economic purposes) and social justice (c.f. Fryer, 1997; NCIHE, 1997; DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2003). WP was not only aimed at those groups who had been under-represented in HE in the past (working class and ethnic minority participants). It was aimed at a much larger audience; Dearing suggested that everyone with the potential to benefit from HE should be able to (NCIHE, 1997). This is a view shared by the proposals for HE reform in the Browne Review (Browne, 2010). In this sense, WP today has become much more part of the fabric of HE than was evident in the 1980s.

Widening participation was a key government policy initiative, and a major focus for university activity due to financial incentives and expectations from HEFCE. It is a complex area of debate, informed by economic, social exclusion and inclusion discourse. It requires 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 & Brehony, 2005).

Widening participation policy can be challenged in a number of ways, including the way it has been linked to the requirements and needs of the 'knowledge economy'. 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 realising individual potential rather than on the potential for learning that remains untapped within particular social groups. Unless WP 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. There appears to be a gap between government policy and rhetoric, (which tends to portray WP with a positive spin), and the reality of achieving these ideals on the ground. A key issue is the continued power of certain social groups to progress into HE, and the continued difficulty for other social groups to access these opportunities despite initiatives to promote this.

The Sutton Trust (2010) report found that independent school pupils are fifty times more likely than free school meals (FSM) pupils to gain a place at Oxford or Cambridge. At the most selective universities of all, including Oxbridge, less than 1% of students are FSM pupils compared with nearly half the intake from independent schools. This gap between the most privileged students and the rest has remained constant during the last decade despite increasing access efforts (Lampi, 2012).

The current Conservative-led coalition government formed in 2010 appears to be promoting social mobility. The White Paper, '*Students at the Heart of the System*' (DBIS, 2011) and Milburn's (2012) report both continue to promote how education and in particular HE, can be powerful engines for social mobility.

'For any given level of skill and ambition, regardless of an individual's background, everyone should have a fair chance of getting the job they want or reaching a higher income bracket... Higher education can be a powerful engine of social mobility, enabling able young people from low-income backgrounds to earn more than their parents and providing a route into the professions for people from non-professional backgrounds.' (DBIS, 2011: 54).

'For education to be a leveller of opportunity, all those with ability, aptitude and potential need to have equal access to what it can offer'. (Milburn, 2012: 12).

Despite the continued rhetoric of HE being an engine for social mobility (DBIS, 2011; Milburn, 2012), Hart (2013) suggests that the coalition's policy is not a 'magic bullet' to help achieve this.

'Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, without a family history of HE, are more likely to go to less prestigious institutions. Thus, there is a 'sorting' process that goes on at entry to HEI's in relation to different places of study, subject areas, types and level of qualification. Rather than increasing social mobility, current CEP may be reinforcing class and social hierarchies in the working population of graduates. This creates two sets of tiered social hierarchies, one for all social classes without a degree and one for all with one' (Hart, 2013: 178).

Hart (2013: 194) considers WP as more than just about increasing HE participation amongst those from lower socioeconomic groups. She argues that we need to better understand the structural inequalities that exist and the 'injustices associated with social class, gender and ethnicity (that) are deeply embedded in the culture and histories of British society. Smith (2012: 11) has also commented on this phenomenon, whereby despite an increase in participation, HE is no more equitable:

'It is certainly the case that a university education is now open to more people who might never previously have thought about attending, but we need to ask serious questions about the type of university experience that they have. Evidence suggests that despite increased access to HE, universities are still internally stratified according to social characteristics based largely on class...'

It appears that despite rhetoric about the importance of social justice across the current government, its continued rejection in HE policy means that, whilst the university sector promotes fair access and fosters social mobility, it also reinforces inequality. Hart (2013) has implied WP can only be part of the solution in addressing inequality and promoting social justice.

2.3 The Socioeconomic Gap in Higher Education

Since the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), the spotlight has been on social class as the focus for efforts to widen participation in HE. The proportion of young people progressing to university from 'working-class' (lower socioeconomic 4-7) homes was (and remains) a fraction of those from middle-class (higher socioeconomic 1-3) homes, a phenomenon that became known as the

'social class gap'. Narrowing this gap was perhaps the primary policy objective throughout the 2000s (e.g. DFEE, 2000; DfES, 2003; HEFCE, 2007), with the Aimhigher initiative created to achieve this aim by using targeted information and interventions to raise aspirations among under-represented groups.

Data on the occupation of young students' parents is collected from applicants, coded by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and then, after passing through universities' student record systems, is given to the Higher Education Statistics Agency. From there, it forms the basis of the government's official statistics for youth participation in HE (Kelly & Cook, 2007). Recent studies question the process of NS-SEC data collection and coding (Harrison & Hatt, 2010) and the legitimacy of parental categorisations as a fair representation of a young person's social class as it relates to educational decision making (Waller et al., 2010).

A key problem is that despite the investment of hundreds of millions of pounds through Aimhigher and other initiatives, the participation levels of NS-SEC groups 4-7 barely moved from 2002 (DBIS, 2009). The narrowing of the social class gap in HE could be due to a decline in demand from the middle classes. A report from the National Audit Office (2008) came to this conclusion, as did Harrison (2011) using aggregated institutional data. This apparent policy failure was one of the rationales for ending the Aimhigher funding in 2011. However, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) showed that improvements in admissions from neighbourhoods that previously had low participation rates had been startling (HEFCE, 2010). Their POLAR dataset shows that admissions from neighbourhoods with the lowest historic participation rates had grown by 32% between 2004 and 2009, compared to 12% overall.

In Lawton & Moore's (2011) study, Aimhigher was shown to be a much more significant influence for students in receipt of an educational maintenance allowance (EMA), with 43% stating that Aimhigher activities had moderately or strongly influenced their future plans. This figure for non-EMA students was considerably lower at 19% (Lawton & Moore, 2011: 7). An HEFCE & OFFA report (2013: 7) alluded to evidence that the outreach delivered through Aimhigher was successful in raising learner aspirations and encouraging applications to HE.

Quinn (2004: 71) states that despite the confident policy assertion that 'education is the best and most reliable route out of poverty and disadvantage' (DfES, 2003) drop out indicates that the value of university study to those meaningful 'working-class' lives seems as yet contested and unproven. The UK has historically had a low level of student 'drop out' from HE (Dearing,

1997; NAO, 2007). NAO (2007) provided data stating that 91.6% of full-time students starting university in 2004/05 continued into their second year and 78.1% were expected to complete their degree. Johnes & McNabb (2004) argue that when the HE sector expanded, the rate of non-completion rose. They analysed students entering and leaving the 'old' (pre-1992) universities and distinguished between 'voluntary' drop out and 'involuntary' drop out i.e. failure. The analysis found that students from a lower socioeconomic background were more likely to drop out voluntarily.

In the UK there are two measures of retention which are similarly narrow, and these are translated into institutional performance indicators. These indicators are contextualised by a 'benchmark' for each institution, which takes account of students' entry qualifications and subjects studied, and suggests what the completion and continuation rates ought to be. These factors are also used to allocate funding to support the retention of students in HE via the core grant from central government.

The first is the 'completion rate', the proportion of starters in a year who continue their studies until they obtain their qualification, with no more than one consecutive year out of HE. As HE courses take years to complete, an expected completion rate is calculated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency. This is a more immediate measure of retention as the proportion of an institution's intake, and is the enrolment in HE in the year following a student's first entry to HE. This is the 'continuation rate' (National Audit Office, 2007: 5). International comparisons show that the UK's entry rate for tertiary-type A education stands at 55%, close to both the OECD and European averages but well below that of Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America and the Nordic countries of Europe (OECD, 2009). Restricted entry has far reaching implications. It affects the content and delivery of HE as providers expect entrants to be able to:

'make effective decisions about learning... and to operate more or less as autonomous learners.' (Rivis, 1996: 3)

The relation between selection and retention is not coincidental; the belief is that selection restricts admissions to those who are likely to be well prepared for HE and more likely to be retained. Within this context, admitting students without A level entry qualifications and from a wider range of social backgrounds has been considered a 'risky' strategy for institutions, a view acknowledged by Sir Howard Newby, the Chief Executive of HEFCE, with the words,

'as the sector has expanded over the last couple of decades, and as we have taken in more students with a much wider range of social backgrounds and academic qualifications, universities have taken more risks at admission' (House of Commons, 2001: Section: 5).

The perception that students from a wider range of social backgrounds pose a greater risk to the institution is an interesting one. In a transformative model of HE (Jones & Thomas, 2005) diversity would be valued, participants would not be required to adjust to the HE culture and the institution's activities would all be informed by learning from difference. The contention that a diverse student body can contribute positively to excellence and enhance the quality of the student experience (Shaw, 2009) rests upon evidence that curriculum development supports diversity (Gorard et al., 2006), that changes to accommodate diversity can be beneficial to all students (Powney, 2002; J.M. Consulting, 2004). US evidence suggests that a diverse student body prepares graduates for future employment (Barron et al., 2007). If diversity enhances the benefits of HE to the student, then it will also boost the institutional reputation. There are fears that the admission of students from diverse backgrounds represents 'dumbing down' and that might increase the numbers of students leaving early and impair the institution's reputation as retention rates fall.

The government White Paper, *'The Future of Higher Education'* (DfES, 2003) addressed the need to increase numbers and widen participation of those from non-traditional university backgrounds. The rationale for this was economic and social, both to meet the skills required of the workplace and to 'reduce the gap between the social classes involved in HE' (Bainbridge, 2005: 1). Bainbridge (2005) stated that inequalities still existed between the social classes. Having been set targets for WP, HE institutions are in danger of seeing this as a 'quality assurance' imperative rather than a step towards social justice and equity. As such, measures to implement, monitor and calculate successful integration and WP can become box ticking exercises that override the need for critical debate. These measures provide technical bureaucratic answers but do not address the relational factors of power, voice, pedagogies and 'what counts as knowledge' (Youdell, 2006). Field (2003) believes that the impetus was to increase rather than widen participation in post-compulsory education and that this was not itself sufficient for it to fulfil WP's aims.

Armstrong (2007) believes that the audit approach means that questions of equity, rights and participation are subsumed in the technical responses to diversity, with a focus on meeting performance criteria rather than a commitment to 'transformation change'. Armstrong states that institutional procedures and requirements are barriers to engagement with issues which

exclude or discriminate. *The Higher Education in the Learning Society Report* (1997) encouraged this to an extent in its Recommendation 2, which called for priority in terms of allocating funds to be given to:

‘...institutions which can demonstrate a commitment to WP, and have in place a participation strategy, mechanisms for monitoring progress, and provision for review by the governing body of achievement’. (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997. Ch1)

DBIS (2009) statistics regarding participation by socioeconomic group show that 41.2% of 18–20 year olds came from the top three socioeconomic groups, compared to 21% from the bottom. Critiques of the achievements of WP work are often based on statistical information and focus on the lack of progress in changing the numbers of lower socioeconomic students accessing university (Gorard et al., 2007). Amongst practitioner research, this focus on numbers has often become central, with much research focusing on identifying quantitative and qualitative evidence of shifts in orientation to university following attendance at WP events and activities. Hodkinson & Macleod (2007) suggest that the focus in research on the outcomes of learning such as test results, the ‘static products of learning’, is indicative of seeing learning as acquisition. This critique is also applicable to the focus on outcomes in research around WP. Viewing learning as acquisition is not the most useful way of conceptualising learning in WP contexts.

David (2010: 6) points out the need for a nuanced understanding of teaching and learning in relation to questions about WP:

‘the development of social scientific understanding of teaching and learning in different settings and of how diverse learning occurs over the life course and across contexts is therefore critical to these questions’.

Stuart (2006: 181) identifies that the WP debates have been ‘too focused on classroom activity’ and suggests that ‘more informal learning such as social learning has not been sufficiently investigated’. Post-1992 universities do not have the same perceived status as traditional universities (Archer 2003; Leathwood, 2006; McNay 2006), and attract more students with lower A level grades than traditional universities. Consequently, post-1992 universities have become associated with lower socioeconomic individuals, which contributes to the view that traditional universities are the ‘preserve of the elite’ (Bowl 2003: 145). Whilst there is a lack of academic fit, a lack of social fit has also been identified (Wilcox, Winn et al., 2005). When

students establish a sense of 'otherness' they establish their own position in social space in relation to others (Bourdieu, 1998). The social space or distance between individuals represents, in Bourdieusian terms, levels of capital (Bourdieu, 1998) and along with habitus, are important tools for existing and participating in university life.

University choice is a complex process where there is much at stake. Going to university involves much more of an emotional and psychological shift for FGSs. Although students are perceived as active consumers within an HE market (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005), the process of choice is not equal across social groups. In effect, 'classed capitals and dispositions engage with classed policy regimes' (Ball, 2003: 4) with inequitable results. University choice is associated with individual identity, reflecting both social status and academic ability. The ability to choose high status institutions reflects much more than previous educational experience and it is indicative of wider social and structural inequalities and class-based practices. The act of consumption, closely linked to a strategy of distinction has a particular logic that is class related (Bourdieu, 1986). Determined by the habitus, university choice brings about a unique integration, dominated by the earliest experiences, statistically common to members of the same class (Bourdieu, 1990a: 60).

Bourdieu (1986: 1) recognises that in practising distinction, a 'social hierarchy of the consumers' is produced which 'predisposes tastes to function as markers of 'class''. The practice of consumption brings with it a code to be deciphered. Anyone who 'lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason' (Bourdieu, 1986: 2). In relation to the 'middle classes', 'working classes' are 'discursively constituted as an unknowing, uncritical, tasteless mass from which the middle classes draw their distinctions' (Reay, 2001: 335). There is no place for 'working-class' consumption patterns to be considered legitimate, instead, consumption patterns of the dominant classes are normalised through persistent consumption practices and as such legitimated through their dominant position in the field.

2.4 The New Labour and Higher Education Policy

UK higher education policy between 1997 and 2010 was framed by the New Public Management model adapted and developed from previous Conservative regimes which demonstrated by a regulation-deregulation paradox (c.f. Brown, 2010; Mahony & Hextall, 2000). Universities became intensively regulated by central government agencies (e.g. HEFCE and QAA), and benchmarked against performance standards in a style of central government

control which became coined in academic literature during the 1990s as ‘managerialism’ or ‘new managerialism’ (c.f. Deem & Brehony, 2005; Parker & Jary, 1995; Pollitt, 1990; Randle & Brady, 1997).

Marketisation in the UK higher education system is not a pure, unfettered market of perfect competition between private corporations, but a hybrid which some authors have labelled a ‘quasi-market’ (c.f. Brown, 2010) or ‘market-state’ (Ainley, 2004). The principle of market competition between universities was increased as a result of the 1998 Education Act (following Dearing’s recommendations in 1997) with the introduction of student tuition fees and market infrastructure such as league tables, labelled by Ball (2003) as the ‘policy technologies’ of marketisation and ‘performativity’. These ‘policy technologies’ or ‘market frameworks’ (Naidoo et al., 2011) have an impact on curriculum and pedagogy in higher education.

The Labour government was elected in 1997 with the self-labelling term ‘New Labour’. The New Labour title is strongly associated with Blair’s leadership, and was designed to indicate a break with a Labour Party that many associated with tax and spend as well as poor management of the economy during the 1970s (Giddens, 2002). Giddens (2002: 33-34) suggests that the name and the ideology of ‘New Labour’ were drawn from the ideas of the ‘New Democrat’ think tank in the United States:

‘They included a self-conscious break with the party’s past, symbolized by a name change; the determination to become ‘the party of the mainstream’; a retreat from tax and spend; an emphasis upon ‘opportunity, responsibility and community’; a stress upon responsibilities as well as rights in welfare reform...; tax credit schemes to help poorer individuals and families; targeted antipoverty and urban regeneration schemes... ; and a tough approach to crime and punishment.’

However, this ideological position was arguably undeveloped at the point that New Labour came to power. When Blair was elected in 1997, one of his main advisers admitted that he (the adviser) did not have a ‘coherent set of political ideas’ (Giddens, 2002: 33). Smith (2004: 244) suggests that there was little agreement, even amongst senior members of the Party, about how New Labour could be defined. Smith suggested that New Labour was ‘hydra headed’ and difficult to define because it is full of contradictions and ‘possesses a head to suit the occasion’. Smith (2004: 224) argued that it is impossible to say that New Labour was either left or right wing on the traditional spectrum,

‘Labour is not Thatcherite, because it has a strong faith in an interventionist belief. Yet it also questions some of the traditional social democratic canons... It is also difficult to see New Labour providing a third way, because it does not really have a coherent ideology that provides the principles behind a whole tract of policies.’

One of the defining features of the early New Labour ideology (not least in its approach to WP) was perhaps the potential for contradiction that it displayed. However, Smith (2004: 215), for example, does not necessarily see this as a sign of weakness. Smith suggests that like all parties, New Labour needed to appeal to ‘median votes’, and to do this the Party was required to draw on what seemed to be neoliberal or Thatcherite policies. Smith points out that it is possible for opposing parties to share policies, while seeing the world in different ways and having different ends in mind.

New Labour’s rhetoric largely made a virtue of working within the parameters of the existing market system, and at times Party leaders appeared to conform to Conservative policies that many on the left of the Labour Party found difficult to accept. New Labour’s rhetoric has tended to promote equality of opportunity, rather than equality of outcome, and to adopt the principles of meritocracy, ignoring some of the structural inequalities that prevent social mobility (Lister, 2001). In terms of WP in HE, there are a number of contradictions that arise from this tension between neoliberal and socialist policies.

From the start of the New Labour administration in 1997 there was a strong political drive to expand the HE sector in the United Kingdom. In 1997 the Dearing Review of Higher Education, which was originally commissioned by the outgoing Conservative administration, was published. The Dearing Review (1997) was the first review of higher education since the Robbins Report (1963) and made neoliberal orientated recommendations that were implemented by the New Labour government during its term of office. New Labour pledged within its 1997 election manifesto to make education its first priority. A target of 50% of all 18–30 year olds in HE was stated as a necessary goal, for the UK to compete with other EU and G7 countries. To achieve this policy aim, tuition fees were introduced to help fund the expansion of the HE system. A scheme was implemented to help raise the aspirations of students from non-traditional backgrounds (Excellence Challenge which later developed to become Aimhigher), and there was an expansion of degrees and foundation degree level qualifications (Dearing, 1997).

The New Labour government cited HE as ‘a force for opportunity and social justice, not for the entrenchment of privilege’ (DfES, 2003: 67). The New Labour government created a Widening

Participation Committee that would be run by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) complemented by the Directorate of Lifelong Learning within the Department for Education and Skills (Layer, 2005: 1). In 2004, Charles Clarke (Secretary of State for Education and Skills) submitted '*The Future of Higher Education*' White Paper to Parliament. This outlined central government's policy towards HE in the UK, which recognised that universities were no longer educational institutions for the elite but opened their doors to hundreds of thousands of students each year. In the early 1960s, only 6 % of students under the age of 21 went to a university, whereas in 2004 around 43% of 18 to 30 year olds in England entered HE.

As well as the economic imperative that underlies Dearing (1997), his report does include social wellbeing as a key aim of HE. As illustrated below:

'HE is fundamental to the social economic and cultural health of the nation. It will contribute not only through the intellectual development of students and be equipping them for work, but also by adding to the world's store of knowledge and understanding, fostering culture for its own sake, and promoting the values that characterise HE: respect for evidence; respect for individuals and their views; and search for the truth. Equally, part of the task will be to accept a duty of care for the wellbeing of our democratic civilisation, based on respect for the individual and respect by the individual for the conventions and laws which provide the basis of a civilised society'. (Dearing 1999: 8)

Tuition fees were introduced by the 1998 Teaching and Higher Education Act and these became payable by all but the poorest students. The Higher Education Act of 2004 permitted charging higher tuition fees. Universities were only allowed to charge these 'top up' fees if they signed an 'Access Agreement' with the Office of Fair Access, with a view to increasing the proportion of pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that each institution should be aiming to admit. A 'utilitarian' approach to develop new vocationally orientated programmes of study featured in New Labour's strategy. It is assumed that new provision will meet the needs of both employers and those from groups that are under-represented in the HE community. The 'transformative' approach does not feature in strategy documents and is overlooked in practical guidance on identifying potential.

The literature regarding economic equality suggests that although New Labour may have been seen as promoting equality of opportunity, it was less successful in promoting economic equality, with the inequality gap growing during their time in government (Orton &

Rowlingson, 2007; Smith, 2010). In relation to higher education, the approach taken by the Labour government recognised that HEIs were not one homogeneous group. Rather than impose rigid widening participation measures across the board, institutions were allowed certain autonomy to develop their own approaches, reflecting their particular structure and circumstances. This approach was illustrated by the widening participation strategies introduced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which were intended to make institutions think more coherently about widening participation (Lewis, 2002). These strategies were submitted by each institution to HEFCE and used to inform their funding decisions (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 1998). This approach suggested that it was HEFCE's role to look at widening participation in the long term, rather than focusing on medium- or short-term measures (Watson 2006). If this was the case, it implies that widening participation was intended to become an established, long-term element of higher education provision.

2.5 The Coalition Government and Higher Education Policy

During the primary research at The Centre, the United Kingdom was a country grappling with economic and political issues, having to acclimatise itself to a coalition government (Conservative and Liberal Democrat), a government that, from the outset, applied stringent funding cuts across all services, especially public services, including HE. Universities faced challenges imposed by the coalition government and their proposed and planned funding policies, as part of a strategy to reduce the country's financial deficit. The coalition government came to power (11th May 2010) with the promise to make 'tough decisions', referring to significant funding cuts to the public sector. This has had serious implications for WP. Arguably, it may mean an end to WP in England, with universities increasingly becoming sites of selectivity, marketisation and competitiveness.

Despite outcries that current policies are likely to exacerbate patterns of inequality in HE, the coalition government claimed that 'This government is working to give all young people, regardless of background, the best opportunities to progress' (Williams & Shepherd, 2010: 1). They claimed that by 2015 it will be spending nearly £1 billion a year trying to attract 'disadvantaged' students into HE. The coalition reframed WP in hyper meritocratic terms, possibly intensifying the stratification, diversification and selectivity of HE sites as the focus of policy is now on students of 'high potential from disadvantaged backgrounds' (OFFA, 2011: 5.2). The proposed funding changes which were put forward in the Browne Review (Browne, 2010) and adopted in 2011 by the coalition government in the form of the HE White Paper,

'Students at the Heart of the System' (DBIS, 2011), came into existence at the beginning of the 2012/3 academic year. The introduction of increased fees may slow down, or even halt the expansion of HE, which in turn may slow down the credential inflation of HE qualifications.

Collins (2011: 235-6) charts the journey of the phenomenon:

'As credential inflation rises (i.e. as it takes more years to produce the educational degree currency usable on the job market), costs of either private investment or public subvention in supporting the production of educational currency rise, to some point at which counter pressures slow down, stop or even reverse the expansion of education'.

The funding changes in the UK HE sector, which are driven by the need to make public sector financial cuts and to shift the emphasis of how HE is paid for (Browne, 2010) provoked much societal debate, including major protests and even riots on the streets of central London in 2010. These changes may stifle the expansion of HE and credential inflation, in that 'individuals can drop out of the contest for credentials, caught between the cost of education and what pay off they can get (or expect to get) on the job market' (Collins, 2011: 236). Despite the promises that the principles of WP and fair access will be maintained, it is arguable that many potential students, particularly those from 'widening participation' backgrounds are more likely to be dissuaded from HE, being caught between the increased cost and limited benefit of HE pointed to previously by Collins (2011).

Entering UK higher education today offers no simple guarantee of security or stability. The future of the UK HE sector is at the time of this thesis clouded in uncertainty and insecurity, with respect to the changes in funding methodology for HE institutions (most visible being increased tuition fees for students) which commenced in September/October 2012. This can be viewed two-fold in that students are voicing their disagreement, by applying to HE in fewer numbers than in 2011. The application rate for 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas in England decreased slightly in 2012. There was a larger decrease in the application rate from the most advantaged areas. These decreases follow a trend of annual increases since 2006 (UCAS, 2012). UCAS (2012) reports there was a year-on-year fall of 6.6% in applicants to HE from 700,161 to 653,657. HEIs are concerned with this fall in student numbers, which varies considerably across the HE sector.

With this in mind, the next few years are clearly going to be 'game-changing' for the UK HE sector and it remains to be seen what impact these changes will have upon the shape and landscape of HE in future decades. It is unclear as yet (at the time of writing) how the increase

in tuition fees and the government's new scholarship initiative will affect participation by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The risk is that despite these new measures, students from poorer backgrounds, including FGSs, will be deterred from applying to university because of the prospect of incurring large levels of debt. This inquiry was conceived and commenced before the coalition government came to power, therefore the issue of increased fees has not been addressed in detail.

Post-2010, the Conservative-Liberal coalition has extended and deepened the regulation-deregulation paradox by simultaneously increasing both the regulation of the state universities and the deregulation of higher education (HE) sector governance. The coalition has extended criteria for performance benchmarks to 'employability', measured using post-six month graduate employment destination statistics by degree programme (HESA, 2012). Conversely, unprecedented levels of privatisation are also now appearing in the HE sector, resonant of the US model (Slaughter & Rhodes, 2010), including the emergence of new proprietary universities, such as the BPP College of Professional Studies (2010), the New College of the Humanities (2011) and Pearson College (2013).

2.6 Summary

This chapter explored the policies of both the Labour and coalition governments that affected the landscape of higher education. Factors such as geographic location, finances and support mechanisms may influence where this cohort of students chose to attend university. Wider participation policies could, ironically, exclude the very socioeconomic groups that they were aimed at aiding. The aim of such policies was for groups such as FGSs to embrace HE as a means to improve both their financial and social aspirations for a greater choice of career paths and higher potential earnings in the future. These factors may have influenced the FGSs in this inquiry in their desire and pathway to study in HE.

3. Class, Identity and Participation

For many students (not just FGSs), family, work and other commitments impinge directly upon the time available for study and on the students' attitudes and motivation for study (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Crozier et al., 2008; Heath et al., 2008; Elliot & Brna, 2009; Hager & Hodkinson, 2009) and external factors such as prior experiences and cultural capital also mediate students' decision making (Thomas, 2002; Hounsell & McCune, 2002; Read et al., 2003; Byrne & Flood, 2005; Vermunt, 2005; Houston & Lebeau, 2006; Case, 2007; Brennan & Osborne, 2008; Case & Marshall, 2008; Hockings et al., 2008). It is not only external factors that affect students' participation; the institutional context also influences much of the student experience in the way that teaching is organised, assessments are set and marked, departments are structured, documentation is provided and support services are delivered and promoted (Hounsell & McCune, 2002; Brennan & Osborne, 2005; Mann, 2008; Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009).

3.1 Participation and Social Class

The relationship of social class to education is a complex one; some contemporary researchers have viewed education as a 'market' and as a site for class struggle (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 2000; Ball, 2003; Beck, 2007).

Roberts (2011: 3) views class as important as a unifying concept, despite the area of focus:

‘...class positions have consequences in all parts of people's lives. Class analysis reveals links between the economic, the political, the social and the cultural.’

Class analysis through much of the twentieth and indeed the beginning of the twenty-first century has been measured quantitatively using both the Registrar General's social class system and then the NS-SEC scheme, a version derived from the analysis of Goldthorpe et al. (1987) which has been used to analyse HE class participation since 2001. In this system, participants are allocated to particular social classes from information provided by their parents' occupations (Roberts, 2010).

Whilst this method of classification has been used to analyse HE participation it has been argued by Waller et al. (2010) that this crude method of 'occupational' classification may not always be helpful in measuring social class, particularly of HE students and that it may not accurately reflect the 'lived lives' of their participants.

The bond between social class and educational achievement is both powerful and strong and is acknowledged by Harris & Ramson (2005) as a significant issue within governmental policy. What success means in terms of participation in HE is also a matter for debate. Should success be measured in terms of numbers participating, retention rates, graduations or graduate level employment? Thomas & Quinn (2007: 47) maintain that access, without the opportunity to succeed, made claims of WP insincere, and called for more exploration of how access to financial, cultural and social capital related to success and the extent to which HE systems and institutions were able to facilitate the success of students from non-traditional backgrounds.

Socioeconomic status and family background continue to be constant influences in all areas of British life, including HE. This is not to say that these issues (and our understanding of them) have not undergone changes in the last fifty years. Archer et al. (2003) and Thomas (2001) claim that they remain a major determinant in the life chances of citizens. Jovchelovitch (2007) argues that in Britain they remain significant factors in comparison to other countries, saying that the force of class in Britain is stronger than in any other comparable industrialised western society. Jovchelovitch (2007) describes how academics around the world refer to it as the 'British hang-up' and how it is rooted within a complex web of signifiers including accents, manners and overall impression management, and it is a sign system that can be difficult for non-British people to understand. Jovchelovitch (2007) further states that:

'Class here is an attitude, something you believe in or you do not, something you argue passionately about, something you feel in your gut and you understand, as well as the language you speak. Quite apart from different positions people occupy in the class system and the different experiences they have in relation to it, there is widespread and immediately recognisable shared knowledge about class'.

The impact of social class on HE participation is a reoccurring theme in the literature. Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964; Robbins, 1993; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994) dealt with issues related to social class extensively. Several studies combine social class and participation to argue that while the absolute number of students entering HE has risen, the relative proportion of students from 'middle' and 'working-class' backgrounds has remained unchanged (Blackburn & Jarman, 1993).

There has been a variety of studies concerning how young people make 'choices' and much research points to the importance of informal relationships as providing young people with information. 'Hot' knowledge is described by Ball & Vincent (1998) as the 'the grapevine knowledge' that, in their research refers to the knowledge parents have access to. This

knowledge is described as 'immediate', and as more important to the students in their study than 'the 'cold' formal knowledge' produced by schools. 'Grapevine knowledge' is described as 'socially embedded'; the socially embedded nature of these sources is at the root of it being viewed as more trustworthy and reliable than other more removed sources. Studies (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Ball et al., 2000; Archer et al., 2003; Reay et al., 2005) identify that 'working-class' students and their parents rely more heavily on 'hot' sources of information, grapevine knowledge, than their 'middle-class' counterparts who more easily access official or formal sources.

One such potential source of 'hot' knowledge about university is friendship groups. Reay, David & Ball (2005: 154) provide examples of how peers or individuals can influence student choices; the mature students in their study 'seemed to be swayed by personal recommendation unsupported by other evidence'. Stuart (2006) explores how friendship groups are explicitly responsible for providing the information and support necessary for students from lower socioeconomic groups to decide to progress to HE in the first instance. This reliance on 'hot sources' limits 'working-class' students' horizons. Stuart (2006: 175) describes how vital friendship groups are to 'provide support and knowledge' as there are 'few academic supports in their lives.' Stuart (2006) further suggests that 'teachers and tutors do not seem to fill this gap' and so it is students' friendships that 'powerfully affect these students' lives'. Reay et al. (2005: 161) identified 'overlapping circles of individual, family, friends and institution all influence university choice'.

Pugsley (1998) found class matching in a study of decision making. Taking class as a multidimensional concept (parental occupation, education, postcode), Pugsley (1998) found that 'working-class' families relied on formal systems to advise young people on options and displayed a reluctance to 'interfere' with professional advice. 'Middle-class' parents appeared to know how to 'read' the market: they could 'decode' and interpret available information, understanding its implications for the graduate labour market. There were also differences in attitudes to location of study: 'working-class' families preferring children to study locally and 'middle-class' families putting a greater premium on independence and moving away from home.

Brooks (2002) also addressed the theme of social embeddedness in decision making. Garland & Paczuska (2007) suggested that student ambassadors can become trusted sources of 'hot' knowledge that is accessed and believed by prospective students and a useful source of 'cultural capital'. However, Brooks (2003a; 2003b), reveals that for the groups of lower middle-class sixth form pupils in her study, friendship groups were not comfortable places for discussions

about HE decision making. Brooks (2003b: 237) explored how such conversations tended to be avoided as they highlighted 'significant difference between friends and the wider peer group'. The friendship groups of pupils and the wider peer group powerfully operated on pupils' HE choices in different ways. Brooks (2003a) suggests that the academic hierarchies where pupils viewed themselves served to define their selection of type of HE institution and, in some cases, choice of subject. Brook (2003a) also identifies pupils' self-perceptions, developed early on during the course of their deduction, with 'high achievers' being significant.

Reay & Ball (1998) identified what they described as a working-class discourse of 'child as expert' where parents were reluctant to challenge their children because of the formal setting in which children had been advised. According to Reay et al. (2005: 152) it is not just the 'working classes' who are influenced by 'hot' sources of information, the most affluent and privileged students and their parents also 'gave primacy to hot knowledge'. They were privy to more elite 'hot' sources than their more 'working-class' counterparts. The lower middle-class students in Brooks (2003a) study were generally the first generation to access HE. Brooks (2003a) identifies contexts where their parents worked as contributing to their knowledge about HE and HE hierarchies. Ball, Davies, David & Reay (2002) explored the issue of social class in terms of 'choices' and 'decisions'. They argued that both concepts were invested with certain class related meanings. 'Choice' for example, implies multiple options and the opportunity to make informed judgments. 'Decisions' are restricted, take it or leave it responses to pre-set conditions: to enrol or not to enrol, to stay the course or to leave to find a job? Ball et al. (2002) have proposed: 'Choice suggests openness in relation to a psychology of preferences'; (while) 'decision making alludes to power and constraints'.

Ball et al. (2002) claim that for some groups in society the concept of 'choice' is misleading, for it assumes 'a kind of formal equality that obscures the effects of real inequality'. Despite this, understanding the implications of 'choice' are essential if the inequalities in the HE sector are to be addressed. Through a 'subtext of choice' Ball et al. (2002) claimed that universities perpetuate the 'social gap' between students from different social and cultural backgrounds. For Ball et al. (2002), each institution possesses its own habitus (this was evident at The Centre from the interviews with the participants). This in turn, attracts (or moulds) like-minded students endowed with similar social and cultural predispositions (Ball et al., 2002). Like Bourdieu (1994), Ball et al. (2002) conceptualise HE as a 'classed' experience, one that retains and serves a predominately middle-class ethic. Accepting that individuals from a lower socioeconomic background may also derive benefits from HE, their involvement is likely to be as consumers rather than 'owners'. Students from a lower socioeconomic background remain

Bourdieu's 'lucky survivors', the 'social and cultural exceptions or the least disadvantaged of the most disadvantaged' (Ball et al., 2002). It could appear that Ball et al.'s (2002) argument is slightly deterministic. Rather than allowing students to construct their own identities through interaction with others, Burr (2000) (in Ball et al., 2002) argues the implication is that students are defined, to a greater or lesser extent, by their social class. The use of concepts such as 'normal' and 'choice' biographies make little allowance for the 'retrospective rationalisation' which according to West (1996) can occur when people reflect on their biographies.

Mohanty (2003: 392) suggests that what is required from a researcher is 'a workable notion of how a social group is unified by a common culture, as well as the ability to identify genuine cultural differences and similarities across groups'. Mohanty (2003) warns against 'universalising' student experiences, particularly, in this case, the 'experiences' of students from underrepresented groups. Mohanty (2003: 393) claims that within the literature, two approaches to group identity exist: 'essentialism', based on the view that group identities are both stable and (more or less) unchanging; and 'postmodernism'. The postmodern stance 'insists' that identities are both 'fabricated' and 'constructed'. Experience, being unstable and 'constructed', can never be a source of objective knowledge. Mohanty (2003: 393) suggests a third position exists:

'the epistemic status of cultural identity, in other words, experience, if properly interpreted, can yield reliable and genuine knowledge, just as it can point up instances and sources of mystification: Experiences can be true or false, can be evaluated as justified or illegitimate in relation to the subject and his world, for experiences refer very simply to the variety of ways humans process information'.

For Mohanty (2003) there are different ways of 'making sense' of an experience, indeed making sense of an event can lead to the creation of new experiences. Added to this, the 'constructed nature of experience' suggests that experiences do not have, necessarily, self-evident meanings. Nor, due to the constructed nature of experience, will it by necessity lead to a common sharing of values or beliefs. 'Essentialist' definitions have tended to dominate the literature on student experiences. Tight (2003) argues that the 'bulk' of research into student experience in HE has tended to focus on 'young, full-time undergraduates'. Read (2003) acknowledged this by warning against the dangers of stereotyping. Students, in Read's et al. (2003) view, are not 'passive receivers' of academic culture, but can be seen to engage in and even challenge these discourses of 'otherness'.

A legacy of Aimhigher is the continual recruitment by universities of student ambassadors as part of their WP strategy. The use of undergraduate student ambassadors for outreach work

with school pupils became popular within HEIs. Ambassadors were held to be effective in aspiration and attainment raising work and cited as role models for pupils by policy makers and practitioners (three of the FGSs in this inquiry were student ambassadors).

Marx & Roman (2002) suggest that there are 'some important benefits to comparing oneself to a similar and outstanding other'. Role models can be seen as aspiration (Tesser, 1986; Lockwood, Jordan & Kunda, 2002), enhance self-evaluations and motivation. Major et al. (2002) & Chen et al. (2004) suggest that despite constraints on opportunities to meet adults, naturally occurring mentoring relationships continue to be part of many young people's lives.

Spencer (2007: 101) finds that naturally occurring mentors include extended family members and non-familial adults in a professional role, people connected to young people informally such as boyfriends or girlfriends, or a family member or friends' parents or sibling. A range of benefits for young people are attributed to naturally occurring mentoring relationships with adults. The social support provided is thought to be valuable, this social support has been identified to include instrumental support, emotional support and companionship support (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Research also finds that mentors drawn from families can actually serve as negative role models that can act to compound difficulties faced by young people (Sanchez, Reyes, Potashner & Singh, 2006).

Ball et al.'s (2010) notion of an intermediate, liminal class (in a study of working-class childcare) problematises the fluidity and fuzzy nature of the middle and working classes. Ball et al. (2010: 2) comments upon this intermediate class as being '...difficult to talk about sociologically and introduces an awkward fuzziness into the middle/working class binary.' The fuzziness and the betwixt- and-between nature of the intermediate class implies that they are difficult to locate (Ball et al., 2010) within a society where there is a 'demand for strict classifications, groups with strict frontiers, clearly defined as regards their name' (Bourdieu, 1984: 344). Ball et al.'s (2010) idea of an intermediate class represents, in some senses, what Byrne (2005) describes as the missing middle in sociological research. The participants in this inquiry whose parents were economically stable² were in some senses similar to those in Ball et al.'s (2010) study in that they saw themselves as better off and supported, due to their levels of economic capital, but their working-class backgrounds meant that they lacked the cultural capital of a middle-class student.

² It is worth noting that not all participants had economically stable parents.

3.2 Social Mobility and Higher Education Participation

Ainley & Allen's (2010) assessment of the importance and value of the 'degree' (or in the words of one of the respondents '*a golden ticket*') in today's society cannot be underestimated and it is against this economic and cultural backdrop that the first generation students in this inquiry negotiated their FS in HE. Although all the participants occupy this cultural-economic space, they are arguably located differently within it. Hanley (2011) denounces the conceptualisation of social mobility as a myth, and suggests that a degree is a proper leg up. Hanley (2011: 34) emphasises the importance of education as a vehicle for promoting social mobility and contemplates the alternative:

'To deny the power of social mobility as an idea suggests that there will always be a working class and that its members should continue to know their place. Simply working to make conditions within the working class better, rather than striving for the transformation of society as a whole so that individuals are not bound by the circumstances of their birth, suggests that people are essentially happy with the status quo'.

Dorling (2012: 147-8) states that social mobility may indeed be improving, and he reported a breakthrough occurred in the final term of the Labour government (2005-2009). He comments:

'...that after years of effort children from poorer areas are going in growing numbers to university. Many more university places have been provided in the last few years. For the first time ever recorded, children living in the poorer half of British neighbourhoods have taken up the majority of those additional places. This will probably be seen in future years as the greatest positive social achievement of the 1997-2010 governments. Participation at universities had been widened in such a way that no one lost out and those who had been most badly served in the past saw their chances improved the most'.

In addressing class through a Bourdieusian lens, the emphasis focuses on how class is created through practice (Bourdieu, 1977; 1987; 1990a; 1990b; 1992; 1998). For Bourdieu, unlike the concern of traditional class analysis to explain class consciousness and exploitation, the focus is on the structured and structuring practices generated by habitus. The concept of habitus, which is central to Bourdieu's attempts to transcend the duality of structure and agency, promises to illustrate how 'class' is lived and experienced through individual subjectivities. The intention of habitus is a means of 'escaping both the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical

reaction 'without an agent' and the subjectivism which portrays actions as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention...' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 121).

Habitus generates the 'feel for the game' or the 'natural' response. Individuals develop a habitus through their position in social space, which disposes them to make certain choices. With the development of a classed practice paradigm, habitus has been most fully and effectively utilised to explain the feelings of discomfort and awkwardness experienced by young people from a lower socioeconomic background in relation to the field of education.

Social psychologists have asked their participants to categorise themselves according to social class categories such as 'working class' and 'upper class' (Horberg et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2008, Study 2). This is a subjective methodology; however, social psychologists have provided an explicit acknowledgement of the subjective component of social class in their recent definitions. Kraus et al. (2009: 992) state that 'social class comprises both an individual's material resources and an individual's perceived rank within the social hierarchy'. This dualist perspective on social class fits nicely with Bourdieu's (1985, 1987) perspective on social class. He proposed that the similar objective conditions, or habitus, in which people from different social classes live, including their differing access to social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital, gives rise to subjective identities that embody and reify social classes.

During their interview the FGSs in this inquiry were asked a promoted question if the information did not come out in their account regarding their parent(s) occupation(s). Nine of the participants wished not to discuss the family's occupation or possible lack of it, twenty of the participants were from families who had no adult working, eight of the participants were from families who had one parent in employment (retail/tourism), and two were from families engaged in fishing. One of the participants had one parent who worked as a mechanic. The participants were asked what class they saw themselves as belonging to, all of the participants saw themselves as being working class.

Studies on the WP student experience tend to focus on cultural differences. Several of these draw upon the work of Bourdieu (Reay, 1998a; Reay et al., 2002; Warmington, 2003; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003), particularly his constructs of habitus, field, symbolic capital and symbolic violence. Britton & Baxter (2001) carried out a longitudinal study with WP students at a 'new' university. Their aim was to document the different types of 'risk' to which students were exposed. For Britton & Baxter (2001: 88), risk has become 'central to contemporary theories of modernity' in this; they draw heavily on the work of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1994) and applied the concept of risk to illustrate how, in a period of 'late modernity',

social life is characterised by the continued collapse of once fixed 'signposts' such as 'community', 'class', and 'gender'. In this scenario, biographies do not simply unfold 'according to customs and traditions'. Instead, identities have to be 'forged' out of competing and contradictory possibilities, to be developed and redefined over time (Giddens, 1991, quoted in Britton & Baxter, 2001: 88). For WP students, one of the first 'risks' to be experienced is the risk of redefined relationships in the home.

According to Britton & Baxter (2001), participation in HE leads to 'inevitable' transformation of the 'working-class' habitus, which can cause tension and strain in domestic relationships with family and friends. As Britton & Baxter (2001) argued, 'Habitus refers not merely to the external markers of social position, such as occupation, education and material wealth, but also to embodied dispositions which generate thought and action' (Britton & Baxter, 2001: 89). Enrolling in HE was found to challenge previously 'taken for granted' gender divisions of labour and responsibilities. From this led feelings of 'being different', coupled with what Britton & Baxter (2001) termed, 'the imputation of superiority', or feelings of being better educated than others. HE also led to a transformation of students' social identities, leaving many 'working-class' students feeling uncertain of their class identity.

As Britton & Baxter (2001: 87) concluded, 'In this process of becoming a different person, gender and class interact to produce specifically gendered and classed experiences of this painful transition'. Ainley (1994) and Ainley & Allen (2010) draw attention to the importance of educational credentials as a perceived (or real) protection against downward mobility (Beck, 1992; Ainley & Allen, 2010) and a route into employment. Ainley (1994: 23) suggests:

'the importance of educational credentials... in achieving or sustaining cultural distinctions in the absence of clear-cut divisions between the formerly manual working class and the traditionally non-manual middle class'.

The rise in the importance of educational credentials coupled with the rise of post-industrialism where new, higher skill jobs were being created (Ainley & Allen, 2010), has caused uncertainty in society. The meteoric rises in social mobility in the post-war decades of the 1950s and 1960s, referred to by Ainley & Allen (2010), were evaporated by a relative lack of mobility in the remaining decades of the twentieth century and indeed the beginning of the twenty-first century. As Ainley & Allen (2010: 80) suggest:

'The fact that young people need to gain more and more qualifications simply to maintain their place in the occupational order is a reflection of this insecurity, where

the aim is to avoid downward mobility into a new 'underclass' of temporary employment on minimal pay as much as it is to aspire to move upwards. Though still aspiring to join the professional/managerial elite at the top of the occupational structure, most people remain trapped in the working-middle of society'.

Although, Ainley & Allen (2010) argue, there is limited scope for significant upward mobility, it is clear that the value of HE for the participants in this inquiry (and indeed a large majority of university students) lies in the protection that it provides against downward mobility. Ainley (1994: 23) neatly suggests:

'The lack of any certification is a virtual condemnation to the dependency of the 'underclass' and exclusion from the new, respectable working-middle of society'.

Between 2000/01 and 2010/11, the total number of undergraduates at UK institutions increased from 1.54 million to 1.91 million. Although the number of overseas students has increased significantly over this time period, most of the increase in numbers at undergraduate level has come from greater participation among students domiciled in the UK: the number of these students increased by 19.4 % between 2000/01 and 2010/11 (HESA, 2011).

According to HEFCE (2010), the growing numbers in HE are attributable to both demographic changes and an increase in the take-up rate among school leavers. The participation rate of young people in HE has increased steadily between 1995/96 and 2009/10, rising from 30% to 36%, although wide differences remain in the participation rates of individuals from different economic backgrounds. HEFCE (2010) reports that participation among young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds increased from 13% to 19% over this period, while participation among students from the wealthiest neighbourhoods increased from 50% to 57%.

Goldthorpe (1987: 67) states that in postmodern Britain the definitive Marxist based class structure has been weakened. How people define their class is often founded on a subjective response meaning that a person with a 'middle-class' profession may have a traditional 'working-class' identity. Reay (1997: 24) argues that the 'middle classes' in Britain have long held a hegemonic advantage, or dominance over the education system which ensures and protects their social privilege. According to the Marxist/Weberian model of class, the 'middle classes' enjoy an advantage over the 'working classes' due to their increased market capacity because of their non-manual skills (Bilton 1996: 146). The 'middle classes' have a hegemonic advantage, or know how to culturally reproduce, exercising the method of 'choice', as the key component of a meritocratic society.

Brooks (2003a: 283) urges caution over identifying ‘middle-class’ students within one bracket and argues that to understand the ‘decision making process’ of the ‘lower middle classes’ is important to developing a ‘more nuanced account of how young people think about their futures’. It is interesting to note that the majority of parents of the sixth form pupils in her study were not university educated, but that several pupils progressed to elite institutions. Brooks (2003a: 185) stresses the correspondence between pupils and their views of HE, and that pupils and their parents were ‘actively attempting to change their habitus’.

Mortimore & Whitty (1997: 9) commented that ‘one of the depressing findings is the relative performance of the disadvantaged has remained similar even when the absolute performance of such groups has been improved’. Students from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds (4-7) tend to do less well in their Year 11 and post-16 exams than those from a higher socioeconomic background (1-3). Reay (2001: 336) states that 80% of pupils with the best GCSE results are from social classes 1 and 2.

The DfES (2003: 68) evidenced that 43% of those achieving two A levels or more were also from classes 1 and 2. Further statistics (Reay, 2005: 5) show that 77% of those from social classes 1 and 2 with two A levels go onto HE, whereas only 47% of those from social class 4 and 5 with the same qualifications progressed to HE. In recognition of these statistics, the New Labour government sought to increase post-16 participation and increased the number of non-traditional qualification options available to students such as BTECs, Specialised Diplomas, and Access to HE courses. The HEFCE (2003) report ‘Schooling Effects on Higher Education Achievement’ found that students from state schools are more likely to do better in their degree than those with similar A level results from independent (privately managed) schools. Table Two below shows the difference UK wide between three school types and the final degree results. It shows that although independent school students typically achieve three A level grades that are higher than state pupils; there is only a 3% difference in the achievement of gaining the highest degree grades.

Table Two Results at A Level and Degree Level by School Type

| School Type | No. of Entrants | Median A level Grades | Proportion gaining a 2.1 degree or above. |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|
| State Sixth Form | 43,480 | CCC –BCC | 53% |
| FE College | 22,877 | CCC | 50% |
| Independent | 12,658 | BBB | 56% |

(Adapted from HEFCE, 2003:11)

Table three below shows the proportion of students with AAA at A level (the highest possible grade), achieving an upper second degree (2.1) or above at three selective universities. It shows that even at the most selective universities, students from a state school background with the same A level grades as independent school educated colleagues can gain higher degree classifications.

Table Three The Proportion of ‘straight A students’ Gaining a 2.1 Degree or Above at Three Selective Universities.

| Institution | State Schools | Independent Schools | % Difference between State and Independent |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------|--|
| 1 | 89% | 86% | +3% |
| 2 | 89% | 85% | +4 % |
| 3 | 91% | 86% | +4% |

(Adapted from HEFCE, 2003: 22)

HEFCE (2003) outlined two hypotheses for the difference between state and independent school educated university students. The first being that state school pupils do not show their full potential during their A levels, and when they arrive at the level playing field of HE they blossom and achieve more highly (HEFCE, 2003: 25). The second theory is that independent school pupils find the social life at university much fuller than their experiences at school, meaning they make their degree a lesser priority. Calendar’s research into the HE student experience found that 95% of independent school students said that the best aspects of university were ‘the social life and meeting new people’ (HEFCE, 2003: 31).

Research by Vignoles found that more than 60,000 of the highest achieving students who score in the top 20% in GCSEs drop out of education at 16 and do not aspire to study at university (Curtis, 2008: 1). It could be that if these pupils progressed to HE, the participation rate would break the 50% target, leading to effective and widened participation. HEFCE (2005: 126) stated that UK HEIs have a greater percentage of students completing their degree courses compared to the rest of Europe, with 87.4% of students completing their studies with a non-completion rate of 12.6%. HEFCE (2005) data suggests that HE institutions, which have a larger proportion of students from socioeconomic groups 4-7, also have lower retention rates. There is a negative difference of 6% in completion rates for students from socioeconomic groups 4-7 (working class) when compared to those from groups 1-3 (middle class) (HEFCE, 2005: 126).

Thomas (2001) classifies universities into four types:

- 'traditional elite' (ancient)
- 'quasiold' (early 20th century/red brick)
- 'quasinew' (former polytechnics modelling themselves on quasiold)
- 'realnew' (former polytechnics aiming to broaden their student profile).

Research (Reay, 2007) has shown that the first two types of university struggle to attract the WP cohort, and imbed WP activities, compared to the latter two. Reay (2007: 2) states that of the 300,000 school children from the lower socioeconomic groups 4-7 (working class), only 4,200 progressed to one of the top thirteen universities in the UK.

Leathwood & Hutchings (2003: 141) state that, despite the fact that the binary system of HE ended in 1992, the older elite universities retain their high academic reputations, and continued to promote the academic A level or International Baccalaureate. The newer universities (post-1992) are keener to recruit students with different types of entry qualifications. A concern is that the different entry routes are differentiated by class as the majority of A level entrants are from social classes 1-3 (middle class), while the majority of students on the alternative programmes (vocational) are from social classes 4-7 (working class) (Leathwood & Hutchings, 2003: 146).

Beck (2007: 38) argues against various forms of class and cultural reductionism:

'so as to be better placed to develop effective and viable ways of politically contesting other challenges of our times, such as the growing power of increasingly interlinked economic, political and cultural elites and the anti-democratic tendencies that are associated with their widening influence'.

Beck's (2007) view that there are 'other challenges of our times' that need addressing, such as powerful elites that are interlinked in economic and political ways, as well as culturally, is opposite in view of the previous Labour government's long-standing commitment to widening access to higher education for non-traditional students, who historically possess neither political nor economic power.

However, with the election of the Conservative/Liberal coalition government (in May 2010) and its commitment to reducing the national fiscal debt, it was seen likely that 'other challenges of our times' would include more reductions in higher education funding. With a corresponding reduction not only in the number of students that higher education institutions are allowed to recruit but in the number of courses available.

3.3 Psychological Models of Student Engagement in Higher Education

Psychologists started to accept, approximately fifty years ago, that self-reports on how well life is going, built on positive emotions and feelings of wellbeing, and could provide important information on an individual's underlying emotional states. Wellbeing is not the same as happiness, but can be thought of as a broad phenomenon that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions and global judgments of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999). Life satisfaction is a person's evaluation of life as a whole, over and above judgments about family, friends, work or school (Huebner, 1991). Ryff (1989) suggested that wellbeing comprises of six dimensions; self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth.

Fattore, Mason & Watson (2007) found wellbeing to include a positive sense of self, autonomy, the capacity to act in ways consistent with being oneself, feeling safe, secure and valued, and an adequate home environment with a decent, but not necessarily luxurious, standard of living. Psychologists have found personality to be the strongest and most dependable factor underlying differences in wellbeing between people (van Hoorn, 2007), though some demographic variables such as health and socioeconomic status appear to be important (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). However, the variance that can be accounted for by demographic factors, such as age and income, is not large (Diener, 1984).

External locus of control, ascribing influence over one's life to an external source, can be quite detrimental to wellbeing (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). The internal locus of control appears to mediate life stressors with the result that those with high internal locus of control may possess a good sense of wellbeing regardless of the level of their stressors (Zika & Chamberlain, 1987). As well as internal locus of control, high self-esteem is a strong predictor of wellbeing (Diener, 1984) but in the final analysis, wellbeing is determined more by how life is perceived than by objective circumstances (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998).

The dynamic between structure and agency is the concern of sociology; psychology is more concerned with the individual level. A key psychological model regarding student retention by Bean & Eaton (2000) is based on four psychological theories: attitude-behaviour theory, coping behavioural theory, self-efficacy theory, and attribution theory. According to Bean & Eaton (2000), undergraduates enter HE with an array of psychological characteristics, which interact with the institutional environment and evolve as a consequence of this interactive process. Psychological consequences such as positive self-efficacy, reduced stress, increased efficacy and internal locus of control increase students' scholarly motivation and lead to academic and

social integration, institutional commitment and intent to persist. The nature of students as psychological beings is placed at the foremost position because 'the social environment is important only as it is perceived by the individual' (Bean & Eaton, 2000: 58).

The student involvement theory constructed by Astin (1984, 1999) highlights the behavioural aspects of student experiences in HE. The key hypothesis in the student involvement theory is that students' learning outcome of an educational programme is determined by the quality and quantity of their involvement in it. FGS' withdrawal could be attributed to their lack of involvement into the HE experience, as a positive transition. Involvement means 'the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience' (Astin, 1984: 518). While acknowledging the importance of the motivational aspect of involvement, Astin (1984: 519) stressed the behavioural sense of involvement and argued that 'it is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement'.

3.3.1 Issues of Identity

Social structures as well as social networks within and outside of HE play a powerful role in shaping identities and the way individuals position themselves in the process. Wetherell & Maybin (1997: 245) argue that 'to define oneself is also to define the nature of social reality'. Individuals do not live in a vacuum; rather, the various communities they interact with influence them. Identifying who you are and where you belong is not a linear process, as roles and identities are not always clear cut but can change as part of individual and group memberships (Weeks, 1990; Wetherell & Maybin, 1997). In that, respect identity is not fixed, but rather it is fluid, fragile, and susceptible to external forces, it changes and grows along with the individual, and identity is part of a continuous dialogue with oneself and with others (Valimma, 1998; Deem & Brehony, 2000; Crossan et al., 2003; Barnett, 2007).

Constructing identity, in both theoretical discussions and in everyday discourse, would appear contingent upon both sameness and difference (Lawler, 2008); by sharing certain characteristics or attributes with others (social identity), according to Jenkins (1996), as well as having their own sense of uniqueness (individual identity). Jenkins (1996) notes the importance of identity as a relational phenomenon; that in the relationship between the common and individual, context and interactions are the driving force for identity changes and formations. Jenkins (1996: 30) goes on to conceptualise the self (and selfhood) as the 'individual's private experience of herself or himself' and to say that 'the person is what appears publicly in and to

the outside world'. For Smith et al. (2009: 343), the interactions of people as inherently active social beings provides an opportunity to focus attention 'on the ways in which personal and cultural realities are constructed, enabled, and constrained in relation to others'. For Watson (2007: 372), 'identity is not something inside us, fixed and unchanging, identity or better, the process of identification, is contingent and relational'.

Sabat & Harré (1992) use social constructionism to explain the negotiation of individual perceptions of self/identity (singular or multiple) as well as those imposed or assumed by others, particularly focusing on the role of agency and representation. Bowl's (2001) study explored the transition to university from the perspective of 'non-traditional' students. Bowl's research indicated that family situation, educational experiences and financial pressures had an impact on her participants' experiences of HE. The participants in Bowl's study had a common hope in studying at university, which was for a 'better life' after becoming graduates.

Crozier et al.'s (2008) study explored working-class and middle-class students' learner identities in four different HE institutions including an elite, red brick university and a post-1992 university. The working-class students attending the post-1992 university viewed their acceptance at university as serendipitous. For the participants in both of these studies a combination of academic and personal issues appeared to shape their identities as learners, which could be described as 'fragile' (Gallacher et al., 2002: 43). Many entered university lacking confidence in their academic capability and this was influenced by prior negative experiences of education.

Identity theory ties the notion of identity to the idea of social networks to which a person belongs, and to the roles occupied in those social networks (Howard, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000). This theoretical perspective focuses on the role behaviour as the basis of identity formation; it has sometimes also been called role identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000). Identity theory considers identities to be shared social meanings that persons attribute to themselves and to others in relation to a particular role (Burke & Reitzes, 1991).

Hogg, Terry & White (1995: 256) define role identities as 'self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply (to themselves) as a consequence of the structural role position they occupy, and through a process of labelling or self-definition as a member of a particular social category'. According to identity theory, each social role is related to a set of expectations and meanings about the way a person, acting in that role, should behave, feel and think. Identity theory sees identities as internalisations of those role expectations (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Identity is conceptualised as cognitive schema, as internally stored information that serves as a framework to interpret one's behaviour and experience in a certain role. Identity theory claims that persons have as many identities as social groups they belong to and interact with. Among the numerous identities an individual has, some are more important than others. Different identities are tied together to form the self which is understood as the hierarchical organisation of a set of identities ordered by centrality or salience (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). The salience of a role identity is determined by the person's commitment to a certain role (Hogg et al., 1995).

According to identity theory, identities are social products (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). That is, cognitive schemas about role expectations that a person comes to acquire about themselves and others. By observing others' behaviour in a role an individual creates an idea of a standard behaviour in that role, that thereafter becomes integrated into one's cognitive space. Stets & Burke (2000) emphasise that some negotiation is involved in the formation of role-based identities. People do not just copy the behaviour or thinking and feeling style of others in the same role into their understanding of a role (i.e. role standard), they try to combine and connect the expectations and meanings obtained through interaction with other roles they possess and come up with a unique set of role based identities. Identities are still considered to be symbolic, that is they share a common meaning for many people and they call up in one person the same responses as they would call up in others (Burke & Reitzes, 1991).

HE students' identities go through a series of transitions and transformations, always as a process of adjustment, always being in a state of 'becoming'. "These transitions can occur between types, forms or levels of learning, and occur in other life spheres as a consequence of their learning (Field, 2006: 6). Central to understanding FGS' learning transitions is the interplay between individual agency and identity, circumstance and social structure (Wyn & White, 1998). The construction of identities continues through life (Giddens, 1991) as a social project linked to people's memberships of various communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and these identities are grounded in people's individual histories, personalities and work-related experiences (Busher, 2005).

Identities can be understood as encompassing: an individual's sense of their place in a network of roles and relationships; their interpretations of their personal history; and their ideas about how they would like to be in the future (Bobbit-Nolen et al., 2005; Wenger, 1998). For some authors identity is seen primarily as an experience of being in the world (Wenger, 1998) whereas others see it as a set of stories or narratives about an individual, from which a sense of identity arises (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Sfard & Prusak (2005) note that learning is the means by which an individual may close the gap between their understanding of the person they

currently are and their views about the person they expect to be. These perspectives suggest that identities may help define what an individual finds meaningful or relevant. Identities are central to understanding how middle-class and working-class people are able to negotiate educational systems. Identities and inequalities of social class, race, and gender structure, the resources and capital (cultural, economic and social) available to working class groups, these in turn mediate their potential and their likelihood of their participation in HE (Archer, 2003: 175).

Wenger (1998) notes that identities can be understood partly in terms of individuals experiencing a sense of familiarity and/or competence in certain social contexts but not in others. In Wenger's view, people partly define who they are by which communities that feel familiar to them or with which they have a sense of unfamiliarity or lack of competence. Overall, it seems plausible to suggest that a student's sense of who they are and where they are going is seen as framing what they value as worthwhile in their studies and what they imagine themselves capable of doing. This potentially makes theories of selfhood very relevant to understanding students' willingness to engage.

There are evident problems with suggesting that students are 'rational' choosers of education who are positioned equally to compete with a marketised system (Hodkinson, Sparkes & Hodkinson, 1996; Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000; Hutchings et al., 2003; Reay et al., 2005). However, there are many structural constraints impacting on and constraining the ability of lower socioeconomic students. There has been much criticism of the labelling of students as 'non-traditional' (Burke 2002, 2006; Hockings et al., 2010). Hockings, Cooke & Bowl (2010: 195) present 'a multifaceted view of student diversity', which extends 'beyond the structural relations or divisions of class, gender and ethnicity'.

Cooke & Bowl draw on theories of intersectionality (c.f. Crenshaw, 1989; Mirza 2008). This has relevance in the shift beyond polarising constructions of identity frequently found in media discourses relating to educational attainment. The current media focus on White working-class male student under-achievement frequently leads to unhelpful discourses of competition between the sexes and different ethnic groups. White male failure is often juxtaposed against ethnic and female success, yet the whole picture is evidently complex and the superficial media discourse merely serves to stereotype.

Butler's (1988: 8) theorisation of identity as being constructed through 'sustained social performances' provided interesting conceptual tools for analysis. Hey (2006: 452) suggests that this conception installs 'the vital idea of identity as intensely relational'. It is this 'relational' aspect of identity construction that has been of most interest in this inquiry. Butler (1988: 8)

identifies the value of this approach in exploring 'the dynamics of social difference'. It is evidently vital to struggle against the systems and structures that clearly confine and define young people's identities, though this is largely beyond the scope of this inquiry. It is also important for HEIs to consider how exactly it can be 'ensured' that 'young people are properly informed' and to interrogate what 'being informed' actually means in the practice of decision making (Bridges, 2005). It could be that the barriers to participation are built into the structure and fabrics of the institutions, with the focus being on making students 'fit'.

Mann (2001) considers most students entering the new world of the academy (HE) are in an equivalent position to those crossing the borders of a new country. As students deal with the bureaucracy of checkpoints, or matriculation, they may possess limited knowledge of the local language and customs, and are alone. The student's position is akin to the colonised or the migrant from the colonised land, where the experience of alienation arises from being in a place where those in power have the potential to impose their particular ways of perceiving and understanding the world, resulting in a form of colonising process.

Travis (1971) stated that 'an attitude is an idea charged with emotion which predisposes a class of actions to a particular class of social situations' (Gable 1993: 6). Gable divides this definition into three components, cognitive, affective and behavioural. These components make up a system of attitudes which are defined by Aiken (1980) in 'Attitude Measurement and Research'. Attitudes conceptualised as learned predispositions to respond positively or negatively to certain objects, situations, concepts or persons possess cognitive (beliefs or knowledge), affective (emotional, motivational), and performance (behaviour or action tendencies) components (Gable 1993: 6). According to Anderson (1981), attitudes and beliefs can be changed and altered, however values are more enduring and stable, meaning they are more likely to be difficult to alter or change over time.

Students from a 'non-traditional background' are seen in comparison to the 'norm' and are studied in terms of 'difference'. Anderson & Williams (2001: 7) believe that '...the identity of 'students' is a totalising category which obscures the complexity of differences experienced by those so labelled'. The specific targeting by central government makes assumptions based on the homogeneous categorisations of students and students are assumed to have a fixed identity that is defined by traditionally, accepted social structures.

Hall (1992: 227) states that:

‘...the fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead, as the systems of meaning or cultural representation multiply we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with at least temporarily’.

The classic sociological concept of identity is formed in the interaction of self and society. In this view, the subject has an inner core, or essence, which is formed or modified by the ‘...cultural worlds ‘outside’ and the identities which they offer’ (Hall et al., 1995: 276). A postmodern concept of identity contends that there is no fixed, essential, permanent identity, different identities are assumed at different times and as such, a person or a group’s identity is continually shifting’ (Hall et al., 1995). Weeks (1990: 88) claims that, ‘identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others’.

Bradley (1996) argues that identity can be about ‘belonging’ and the way we locate ourselves in society, giving us a social identity, but it is also about the psychological, our own construction of ourselves, that also contributes to personal identity.

‘Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others... Each of us lives with a variety of potentially contradictory identities, which battle with us for allegiance: as men or women, black or white, straight or gay, able bodied or disabled, ‘British’ or ‘European’. The list is potentially infinite’. (Weeks, 1990, in Bradley 1996: 24).

For Anderson & Williams (2001: 9) HE is a ‘key site’ for the construction of identity. They point out that it is very likely that the process of HE may change students’ subjectivities and their identities change ‘as they embrace new discourses concerning studenthood, learning, the meaning of university life and the status of qualifications’ (Anderson & Williams, 2001: 8). Edwards (1997) points out that establishing a student identity can be both important and confusing. It brings a sense of belonging. ‘A student is part of an institution... It is a ‘serious’ role which... provides grounds for affirming a particular identity’ (Williams & Abson, 2001: 13). This raises the question as to whether the student ‘norm’ applies to all. Anderson & Williams (2001) believe that it is highly predictable that student perceptions will shift and identities change as they are exposed to new ideas and as they embrace what university life and a degree can mean for them. For Castells (1997) identity is people’s source of meaning and experience and, as such, identity is distinguished from the roles that people play. For Britten the, ‘...notion of identity (is) not just... a labelling process, but also... an announcement on the

part of the individual about his interpersonal and structural location, his situation' (in Mol, 1976: 64). The diversity amongst individual students needs to be acknowledged (c.f. Arksey et al., 1994; Pollard, 2003). The subtleties and nuances of personal experience lead to very different outcomes for something as complex as an individual's learning identity' (Waller, 2006: 127).

Gee (2008) has pointed out how the gain of an academic discourse always involves some personal loss; these students seem to be stranded in a no man's land of identity that is 'no longer at ease' at home but also not fully engaged in the new environment. Bloomer & Hodkinson (2000) developed notions of learning identity (dispositions) and learning career (positions) which can be used to theorise about FGS' formative experiences (such as education). The HE experience can inform their identities and the dispositions they hold towards learning as they move through different social contexts and statuses and the transitions that FGSs experience through participation in HE. Dispositions not only provide a framework through which individuals can understand the world, but also provide opportunities for learners to make sense of their previous experiences, in the present, and inform the development of future action, identity and learning (Lawy, 2000).

Being and becoming a student is a process of struggle, resistance and reconstruction (Busher, 2012). The construction of identities continues through life (Giddens, 1991) as a social project linked to people's memberships of communities through which they learn what constitutes successful technical and membership practice (Wenger, 1998; Andrews & Lewis, 2007), in this case as FGSs in their FS. These identities are grounded in people's individual histories, personalities and work-related experiences (Goodson & Numan, 2002). However, in developing as learners, students are confronted by powerful policy contexts, organisational processes and cultural structures, some of which challenge their existing personal identities and some of which enhance them.

Crozier, Reay & Clayton (2010: 185) suggest that students whose parents had not attended university 'start out with little or limited knowledge of what is expected of them' as well as 'little understanding of the structure and overall requirements of their course'. Bridges (2005: 9) argues that we should respect and value 'people for who and what they are'. Bridges (2005: 10) suggests that there should be attempts to make sure that young people have access to information about different options: 'We should try to ensure that young people are properly informed about routes through and to HE as well as other life and career options'.

How students reconcile any ‘gap’ between notions of themselves as learners and what is expected of them as students is an important issue in understanding the undergraduate experience. Studies suggest three explanations for how students reconcile such gaps: rejection of ‘old’ identities in favour of ‘new’ (Skeggs, 1997); or the development of ‘dual’ or multiple identities to suit the particular circumstances (Grossberg, 1996, cited in Crozier et al., 2010) or gradual (and often disrupted) change over time as students negotiate the world they study (Crozier et al., 2010). Behind these explanations is the tension between the concept of ‘transformation’ (changing to something else) and ‘becoming’ (building upon existing foundations).

Identity is also seen as playing a crucial part in constraining the choices of some individuals about where they study (Crozier et al., 2010). Here, identity is seen as being constructed through discourse, material factors and structural inequalities; the student is ‘always becoming’ but within boundaries and hierarchies of inclusion, exclusion and power. These arguments are summarised by Grant (1997: 105):

‘For student-subjects, then, while some positions are made more likely, others are made more ‘difficult’. For example, it is often easiest for the young, white, middle-class male to be constituted as the ‘good’ student because the characteristics of this position sit most snugly with his other subject positions’.

The crucial point is that identity is not singular or fixed. As Lawy (2003) argues, identity is neither a product nor an outcome of change but affects the processes that produce change. Identity is fragile in the way it responds to (new) risks, such as finding oneself at university for the first time. For some students, then, participation in the (socially constructed) world of HE is more problematic than for others. Drawing heavily on the theoretical work of Bourdieu (1997) the link is made between ways a student’s holding of social, economic and cultural capital impact on their engagement with their education (Weil, 1986; Reay, 1998a; Reay, 1998b; Bowl, 2003).

Learner identities are complex and do not develop in any predictable or linear way because learners’ identities are fragile and contingent, vulnerable to external changes and pressures as well as to internal revisions (Crossan et al., 2003). A number of key personal, interactional and institutional factors (Johnston & Merrill, 2009) can affect identities. Students are surrounded by the apparatus of support which Ecclestone (2007: 11) describes as:

‘...counselling and mentoring, the elicitation of biographical narratives, the smoothing of learning cultures and relationships and the insertion of requirements to develop ‘learning to learn’ skills or self-awareness’.

If life is an endless series of transitions then transitions become a natural state and Ecclestone is sceptical about what she sees as a preoccupation with ‘...identity shifts and threats to identity, which lead to a view of transitions as risky, difficult and threatening to one’s very sense of self’. This view of transitions in turn leads to the idea that students need support during transitions but Ecclestone (2007: 11) questions a curriculum and pedagogy of the self which ‘erodes educational goals and practices in favour of being supported and managed through a seamless, endless set of comfortable transitions’. Ecclestone has extended her argument (Ecclestone et al., 2009: 10) by stressing the importance of connecting the pathologising of transition in policy, professional and academic concerns to a broader cultural preoccupation with emotional and psychological aspects of life and learning. Ecclestone (2009) argues that this can lead to a blurring of ‘the spheres of public and private thought and action’, which some students may separate to maintain different identities. Quoting Quinn, Ecclestone speaks of the fluid nature of transitions and the ‘multiple identities involved in navigating them’ (Ecclestone et al., 2009: 6) along with the need for institutions to look at flexibility in enrolment and funding and the ability of students to move in and out of the system.

To achieve a socially just system of access in HE is evidently highly complex and would involve large scale structural changes within the system. What appears to be important from the research discussed, for this inquiry, is that issues of identity are central to (successful) transition and equitable WP. There is a need for an appreciation of the different aspects of identity that constitutes the participants, so that the young people are at the centre of the debate. The key point here is that identity is not singular or fixed.

3.3.2 Defining Self-Perceptions

Participating in HE can provide a distinct social experience, a rite of passage, as well as academic and, for some, professional learning (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). This idea of social integration ‘include(s) self-esteem and the quality of relationships established with teaching staff and peers’ (Rhodes & Nevill, 2004: 181). However, it could be argued that social integration depends on issues of academic identity, confidence, and participation. For FGSs to gain a sense of being socially integrated they must share some common identity with their peers,

confidence in their abilities as students and share academic endeavour with others. Achieving this level of integration is harder for some students than others and this could be influenced by a range of factors including class, ethnicity, gender, prior educational experiences, living arrangements and motivation to study.

To explain self-esteem, it is helpful first to clarify what is meant by self-concept. At its simplest, self-concept is the sum total of all that an individual perceives him or herself to be. It is an abstraction that all humans develop to describe themselves and includes among many things the attitudes, competencies, personality traits, physical appearance and activities they possess and pursue. An individual's self-concept may well be different from the view that others have of him or her. Self-esteem is associated with how individuals feel, how they think, and how they behave, and is generally considered to be the evaluative aspect of self-concept, and can be thought of as an evaluation of one's self-worth (Huebner, Gilman & Laughlin, 1999).

Global self-esteem is an evaluation of the entire self and can be described as an individual's general self-acceptance or their general positive or negative attitudes towards themselves. Crocker & Wolfe (2001: 594) pointed out that there are also domain-specific self-evaluations –

‘A contingency of self-worth is a domain or category of outcomes on which a person has staked his or her self-esteem, so that person's view of his or her value or worth depends on perceived successes or failures or adherence to self-standards in that domain.’

– and some of these contribute to the judgment of one's overall self-worth or global self-esteem. People vary in the values they attach to specific domains but they need to satisfy their contingencies if they are to believe that they are people of worth and enjoy good self-esteem; self-evaluations may be either positive or negative. High self-esteem implies that individuals see themselves as people of worth, although low self-esteem is more an absence of positive rather than the presence of negative attitudes, as people do not generally hold unfavourable beliefs about themselves (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

People with high self-esteem tend to be more confident and happier than others (Martin, 2005) and better able to cope with stress (Zimmerman et al., 1997). However, high self-esteem is not believed to be positive in all cases. It can also be associated with being conceited, arrogant and self-centred (Baumeister, 2004). It may also involve overestimating one's ability, resulting in

overconfidence and failure (Baumeister, Heatherton & Tice, 1993) and some suggest it may also be a cause of poor social skills (Colvin, Block & Funder, 1995).

The roots of modern day theories of self-perception are based on historical conceptions of the self, the most influential construct being James (1890–1963). James distinguished between the ‘I’ self (or the self as knower) and the ‘Me’ self (or the self as known). The ‘I’ is the active thinking processor, the self that is doing all the thinking and living, and the self that is the seat of experience, is a core construct within the person. The ‘Me’ is the self as an object one can think about and reflects the structure of experience. James (1890/1963) saw the ‘Me’, the known self, as being comprised of many ‘Me’s’ or ‘constituents’ which together reflect a person’s overall self-evaluation or self-concept.

These constituents include the material self, the social self, the spiritual self, and the pure ego. James saw these as being arranged in a hierarchy according to their worth. The material self was seen as the least precious, the social self more so, the spiritual self even more so, and the pure ego (personal identity) as the most precious of all. For James, the material and social selves are comprised of multiple material and social selves. Associated with these selves are the feelings and emotions they arouse (self-feelings), the actions they prompt (self-seeking: providing for the future as opposed to maintaining for the present), and self-defence (or self-preservation). The ‘Me’ reflects a sense of self, which is formed from our experiences, social encounters, and environmental interactions.

Central to James’ (1890–1963) theory of the self was the conceptualisation of self-esteem and it is widely accepted that this is the oldest recorded definition of this construct (Mruk, 2006). James (1890–1963: 310) wrote ‘...our self- feeling in this world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be and do.’ James developed a formula:

$$\text{Self-esteem} = \text{success/pretensions}$$

James (1890/1963) saw self-esteem as the ratio of an individual’s actualities (or achievements) to their potentialities (or expectations, i.e. their hopes, desires and aspirations) which could be improved by increasing successes, avoiding failures or, in the face of failure, by lowering expectations (Baldwin & Hoffman, 2002; Mruk, 2006). James defined self-esteem and self-concept in terms of action, particularly action that is successful or ‘competent’. However, James stressed that self-esteem/self-concept cannot be predicted purely from objective assessments of success or failure and that it is competence in areas deemed important to the

individual, rather than their general or overall competence, that determines whether success (or failure) has meaning for a person.

James' (1890/1963) ideas about the self-system form a basis for subsequent developments in self-esteem and self-concept theories. Not only did he conceive of the self as a total representation of one's self knowledge, which is typical of current representations of self-concept, but he anticipated the multidimensional and hierarchical nature of self-concept that was to be a major focus for later theories. James's representation of the self in terms of competence, and as both multidimensional and hierarchical, is also characteristic of self-efficacy, a relatively recently theorised self-construct.

Development of self-esteem is a complex process involving a person's innate characteristics, family, culture, peers and other social experiences (Block & Robins, 1993). In attempting to assess the origins of self-esteem in children, Coopersmith (1967) found that the most important factors were that the child received unconditional love, that parents provided clear and well-enforced standards, and that parents respected their children's actions within well-defined limits. The bedrock for self-esteem appears to be laid down early in life (Coopersmith, 1967) and it affects how we see others and how others see us for the rest of our lives. Kobak & Sceery (1988) found that adolescents with a difficult home life tend to experience lower self-esteem.

Individuals differ in their reasons for wanting to achieve. Some possess a clear idea of the benefits they will accrue from getting a degree and may value practical skills within a degree because of their career value. Others are driven by a need for achievement, perhaps expressing a psychological need to feel academically competent (Deci & Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory). Need for achievement may also arise from a need to prove oneself, to enhance or maintain self-worth (Crocker et al., 2003c). Students with a stronger orientation to the future do not necessarily possess a stronger achievement orientation. They are more likely to look towards what can be achieved through getting a degree and become engaged in their studies rather than being focused on the present university experience (Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007).

Having achievement goals is not enough to succeed; it is also necessary to exercise personal agency, an ability that Bandura (2001) sees as the essence of being a human. This involves taking responsibility for one's actions, and applying effortful exertion to gain desired outcomes. Individuals differ in the extent to which they believe they can exercise personal agency. Pintrich (2004) asserted that while monitoring and control of study activities is possible, not all students can or will do so. Rotter's original (1966) concept of locus of control and Trice's (1985) 'academic' instrument used here define an internal/external distinction based upon

individual beliefs about the extent to which personal effort as opposed to the situation or other external influences lead to success or failure.

3.3.3 Defining Social Motivation

Psychological motivation theories aim to explain how people are energised to choose tasks, decide how to approach them and how much effort and persistence to apply. Several theories in the academic domain (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) mostly using empirical evidence from US and Australian schools have been developed. These include expectancy-value models (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), and achievement goal theory (Elliot & McGregor, 2001). These theories overlap in part; Seifert (2004), Eccles & Wigfield (2002), and Maehr & Simmons (2004) argue for the development of coherent multidimensional models to capture the complex interplay of factors.

Much motivation research is founded on concepts which focused upon goals directed only on academic achievement. Jacobs & Newstead (2000) note that such goals (academic achievement) are abstracted to the level of why achievement is desired rather than the student's goal. There has been little research about the actual goals that students seek to attain whilst at university. Each individual student has a set of reasons for being at university and UK universities attract a diverse group of undergraduates. Diversity is seen in terms of age, prior educational experience, family circumstances and responsibilities, living arrangements and the need for part-time paid work whilst studying. This diversity is reflected in the often multi-faceted reasons given for studying, although a strong common factor for many is the hope that it will lead to an appropriate graduate-level job. A range of reasons and specific goals for FGSS studying at The Centre are explored alongside more abstract and generalised aspects of motivation.

An approach to understanding student motivation and expectations is the psychological contract (Mullins, 2005: 37-39). A psychological contract is not a written document but an implied series of mutual expectations and satisfaction of needs arising from the relationship between people and the organisation they are linked to. The psychological contract is about the exchange or sharing of beliefs and values, expectations and satisfactions. This is because it is perceived as fair by both the organisation and the partners in the individual contract. The psychological contract could be a useful model to understand and set out the expectations of students and the institutions where they study.

Social motivation can be defined and operationalised in a variety of ways. A psychological approach involves theories of how individuals understand and negotiate their paths to a goal within social structures and relations, whereas a sociological approach focuses more on the constructed nature of both goals and motives. These dominant discourses and institutional processes serve to facilitate or hinder an individual's path in life. The idea of social motives is shared by both approaches, although their origin and consequence might be viewed differently. Social motivation is viewed as a driving force that derives from the social context of a person's life.

This thesis proposes that social motivation is a dynamic process occurring through transactions between a person, their lived experiences and environment rather than arising independently from structure or agency. Theoretically, social motivation can be seen as constructed and constructing through interactions, which in turn are both constructed and constructing. In Archer's (1995: 194) terms, 'the 'parts' and the 'people' shape and reshape one another through their reciprocal interaction over time'. Social motivation can be explored in psychosocial terms, to consider both social structures and individual interpretations of, and relationship to, those structures to offer a more 'holistic analysis' (Kettley 2007: 344).

Social motivation is a slippery construct for which 'a clear and universally accepted definition of the term remains somewhat elusive' (Forgas et al., 2005: xvii). It could refer to the psychological consideration, and subsequent acting out, of social behaviour (Forgas et al., 2005) or to the effect of the presence of others either positively (social facilitation) or negatively (social loafing, social anxiety) (Geen, 1991). The reasons why people make particular choices or act in a certain way are viewed as bound up with identities that are constructed in and shaped by social and cultural milieu. Social lives can be an important source of motivation to the extent that they are 'pivotal elements' of identities (Ball et al., 2000: 59). Weiner (1994: 557) distinguishes between social and personal motivation where the former but not the latter 'requires the psychological presence of another.' Sociologists explore the impact of social norms and dominant discourses on people's lives. Psychologists view social motivation with an emphasis on predictable effects in the form of patterned responses to particular situations.

Graham (1996: 348) believes that:

'By highlighting broad socialisation processes, that is, the influences of close friends, peer groups, and teachers on student academic adjustment, we have moved our field a step closer to a needed integration of the study of personal motivation and the study of social motivation in achievement settings.'

Bell (2004: 39) argues that:

‘Many sociologists have long contended that ascribing all human motivation to interest, the desire to achieve self-regarding ends, is too narrow a view. As humans, we are equally motivated by sentiment, the desire to achieve regarding ends revolving around our norms and social ties.’

The majority of work regarding motivation has focused on the psychological. Seifert (2004) finds four key theories in academic motivation; self-efficacy, attribution, self-worth and achievement goals. Put simply, these refer respectively to ‘I am able to...’, ‘the reason for my success or failure is...’, ‘I am a valuable person’ and ‘my aim is to be’. Although the origin of these ideas about self and identity is not offered, they are all candidates for social construction. To widen access, changes to secondary level assessment procedures and to the level of support all serve to raise efficacy beliefs, more securely in some than others because of attributional and self-worth aspects.

The term ‘social motivation’ implies the existence of social motives. Fiske (2004) refers to five core social motives: belonging, understanding, control, self enhancement and trust. Of these, belonging provides a basis for the other motives and is related to ‘subjective wellbeing’ (Fiske, 2004: 16). People feel better about themselves when they perceive themselves to be coping with and part of their social environment. Many would challenge the ‘inherently individualistic’ (Winn et al., 2006: 79) nature of such theorising and advocate an approach to student motivation that places greater emphasis on the effect of the social and cultural context, as we need to feel accepted by others, as part of a group, to be fully human. There are lay concepts of ‘community’, which are overlaid with nostalgia for places where ‘everyone knew everyone else’ (Bennett, 2008). Whether these ever existed in any substantial form is a moot point. It could be that belonging to a community is tied up with knowing and being known by other people giving rise to this sense of belonging as part of a group. Belonging has been described as a feeling of a bodily/embodying fitting in (Ahmed, 2007: 158). There is evidence (Thomas & Webber 2001), that staying on post-16 is more dependent on peer influences for males (group inclusion) and confidence in ability for females (perhaps linked to avoidance of anxiety).

Discourses, aside from and as part of widening access/participation policies, promote the value of HE, communicated formally or informally through families, friends, peers, schools, colleges, universities and employers. HE is likely to be demoted if not culturally valued. One study (Leathwood, 2006a) found that cultural values and goals were important when making decisions about applying for university. For example, common sense was perceived as important but

lacking in students or graduates, an attribute that could be threatened by attending university; females in particular perceived university as a way to improve themselves; some males saw university as 'an unwelcome challenge to their masculine identities' (Leathwood, 2006a : 21).

One goal that is promoted as personally and socially valuable is 'getting a degree', likely to be an important though not exclusive reason for applying to university. Watson & Church (2003) found that 90% of pupils in their national survey (N=1018) believed that university would provide skills for a job. Dweck & Leggett (1988) distinguish between learning and performance goals, whereby learning goals involve the overcoming of challenge whereas performance goals are associated with higher self-esteem when the outcome is favourable in relation to others or when little effort has been expended. Of the two, performance goals are more obviously socially motivated.

Maehr (1983) outlines four goals: task goals (involving mastery and challenge), ego goals (social competition), social solidarity goals (with the purpose of pleasing others), and extrinsic rewards (e.g. money, kudos). The first of these is akin to learning goals, whereas the others are more related to performance. McCollum (2006) discusses social goals as part of motivation in education, for example, sharing and helping with academic or personal problems. Miller et al. (1996) refer to social goals of pleasing the teacher or pleasing parents, and suggest the latter is counterproductive to academic engagement. Since few if any of these goals are mutually exclusive beyond a snapshot of time, there is likely to be conflict within the individual. For example, an immediate goal of earning money could conflict with the long term aim of completing a degree.

Sociocultural differences may occur in the value of goals. For example, one study indicated that pupils from Scotland viewed HE as more valuable for future financial gain than for personal development (Bartley, 2004) compared with a survey of students (N = 1033) from Russell Group universities who rated social and life skills as the most important gain, although economic benefits were also valued (Furnham & McManus, 2004). Whilst research indicates that there are trends in terms of social groupings, it is important to bear in mind, the heterogeneity within larger social groups including 'intra class difference' (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005: 92) and friendship groups (Brooks, 2003). The 'nature' of a person in motivational terms could be contested: An emphasis on structure could divert attention away from particular tendencies, such as laziness, or serve to highlight the present constructed nature of motivation. Even a temporal analysis does not resolve this issue and motivational issues in education might be seen as contemporary concerns arising from policy and practice.

The use of the social networking site, Facebook, by students at Michigan State University has been investigated and one advantage is suggested as maintaining previous bonds as well as developing new ones as part of social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). Networking technology theoretically could facilitate transitions by providing informal support, or hinder them by serving as a reminder of the stronger bonds already formed in other communities. The concept of social capital, as a resource of 'trust and shared norms' (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1996: 1) offers an instrumental view of an academic community that rests on the social motive of belonging as highlighted by integration models such as Tinto's (Tinto, 1998).

This review of relevant theory and research highlights key points that are important to include in a working definition of social motivation in relation to student transitions. Firstly, motives can be said to be social if the outcome relates to belonging. Belonging has been suggested as a core social motive (Fiske, 2004), and as a human need (McClelland, 1985; Turner & Stets, 2006).

In the first instance educational transition research that emphasises integration is based on the concept of belonging (e.g. Tinto, 2002; Winn et al., 2006). Secondly, social motivation has been linked to identity and self. 'Self' can be defined as the experiencing, reflective person, the 'I', whereas, for some, 'identity' is the perception of enduring characteristics that form that person (Audi, 1999). What students choose to do in (higher) education in the shorter or longer term has been strongly influenced by identities (Ball et al., 2000; McFadden & Munns, 2002). The experience of living those choices can serve to reinforce or challenge identities, and is particularly poignant in transitional experiences. It is also likely that the multiple identities students possess could provide both a source of conflict and an opportunity to engage with different people and circumstances. Thirdly, goals have been identified as important to motivation (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; McCollum, 2006; McCollum & Kahn, 2006). Multiple goals, e.g. academic and social, can lead to conflicting priorities, likely to be influenced by a person's identity and life circumstances. Fourthly, social motivation refers to a complex system that involves exchanges between internal and external 'worlds'. As Weiner (2000: 2) states, 'the boundaries between the intrapersonal and interpersonal motivational systems are fuzzy'. It is envisaged that FGS' experiences in this thesis would reflect what occurred at the boundaries of self, other, and inevitably involved fuzziness.

According to Mackie (2001), while individual factors such as motivation are important to students' decisions to persist, institutional experiences such as teaching and learning, support, sense of belonging, can greatly influence the integration process. Social motivation is broadly defined to include the following: decisions to do or not do something that (appear to) depend on the immediate or enduring social circumstances of a person, and rely on sociocultural

constructed goals. It is a dynamic process occurring through transactions between a person and their environment rather than arising from structure or agency independently.

To capture these different aspects, transitional experiences were explored in relation to social contexts against a backdrop of the widening access and participation agenda in society and at The Centre. If academic motivation is viewed as a result of a transaction or reciprocal determination between individuals – constructions of what is possible or desirable and the broad social context that surrounds individual students' lives including lecturers, family, friends, employers – then the social motives of making sense of and negotiating a way through the social environment are paramount.

3.4 Parental Influences: Families and Universities

'Parents' are often represented in the literature as homogeneous; this ignores their race, class and gender identities. Research has overwhelmingly shown that mothers are the most active parents in relation to their children's school education (David, 1993; Okpala et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2002) and that White working-class, Black, and minority ethnic parents of school aged children have the least success in becoming involved in and developing their relationships with schools. These parents are frequently described as 'hard to reach', yet research has shown that it is the schools themselves which are 'hard to reach' (Bhatti, 2003; Cork, 2005; Crozier & Davies, 2007). This research revealed that White working-class and Black and minority ethnic parents do not possess the most 'useful' social capital (networks and contacts), or educational capital (knowledge of the education system), to forge effective relationships with schools. Crozier (2000) found that teachers also saw middle-class parents as interfering and pressurising. These parents are perceived as 'involved' because they ensure that their children are acculturated as 'good' pupils in keeping with school values and expectations.

There is little research into the support offered by parents to students in HE. As more students choose to live at home whilst studying (HEFCE, 2009) the ways families support or hinder students in their studies merits investigation. Families bring obligations as well as support, and there is room for enquiry into how family circumstances shape FGS' experiences once in HE. Several studies explore the issue of families on patterns of participation. Miles (1999) observed that mothers were 'moral guides and inculcators of ambition', desiring upward mobility for their sons. Miles' (1999: 335) had the idea that if education could be likened to an infectious disease, 'women have acted as important carriers'. Kelsall et al. (1972) stressed the importance of maternal support for HE for educational success.

Gorard, Rees & Fevre (1999) claimed the critical factor in the creation of 'learner identities' in HE was the influence of families. Family, they argued, plays a vital role in the 'transition from initial to post compulsory education', claiming that the influence of family is neglected in studies of participation. Gorard et al. (1999) illustrate that the family can play an important role in influencing students' perceptions of educational opportunities.

A key aspect in the literature is how family background shapes attitudes towards, knowledge about and propensity to participate in HE. Factors in the family shape later attitudes towards and success in education (Gorard et al., 1999b) and there is a growing understanding of the need for early targeted support in strategies to widen participation (Gorard et al., 2007). Building on this understanding of the influence of families on early educational experiences and how these shape later attitudes to education, the literature has concentrated on how families are involved in the processes of application to university. Gewirtz et al. (1993) discuss how middle-class families are able to negotiate the landscape of HE and appreciate its implications for outcomes later in life. Brooks (2004: 495) describes finding mothers and fathers involved in discussing HE options with their children and notes that young people consult their parents more than any other source of advice and information. Osborne et al. (2004a) identified the fragility of decision making, shaped by four considerations: 1) national policies, 2) national and regional economics, 3) labour market conditions and 4) policy and practice of HE institutions. This is helpful in highlighting the impact of external factors on individual decisions.

Two themes stand out from this literature: the tension between social structure and individual agency, and the extent to which decisions are both conscious and apparently rational. When decision making is seen as a class-based, socially constructed process, the decision whether or not to participate in HE becomes more situated. At the same time, the decision itself becomes less consciously made (Keane, 2008) and more determined by horizons of possibility. There was little conscious decision making about participation in HE by a young person growing up in a town with low participation, where employment patterns and educational attainment levels suggest that university is not for the 'likes of them' (Archer et al., 2007a). Brannen & Nilsen (2005) argue that we are not wholly free agents able to choose our biographies: class, ethnicity and gender shape our 'choices'. They highlight what is not said, as much as what is said, and suggest that placing emphasis on individual agency may encourage the labelling of individuals with failings for not progressing.

In this inquiry, most respondents reported some kind of discussion or view from parents although these sometimes differed between mothers and fathers and could be broadly positive or negative. Negative comments, indicated a 'limitation' on choice rather than a desire to prevent

participation in higher education. In general most parents are in support of participation in higher education and see that this will provide enhanced opportunities often in terms of employability. Some respondents noted that although their parents were supportive, they lacked knowledge of higher education but were in many cases quite supportive in practical terms. Some parents had attended open days and discussed choices in the light of these experiences. Parents perhaps most significantly do give their children advice regarding general location and this seems to relate to the places that parents consider 'safe' and proximity to home. Diane's mother wanted her to stay at home. *'She didn't want me to move away to be honest... she hates the thought of me not being at home'*. Scott considered moving away, but chose to study at The Centre; he reflected on his decision: *'It kind of made me think; well if I do stay closer I will still have my family, which is important to me'*.

3.4.1 First Generation Students

This thesis considers the term FGSs to represent a sub-population of students whose parents/guardians did not engage with higher education. Thomas & Quinn (2006: 50) state that FGSs are those individuals where 'neither parent has had access to a university education and completed a degree'. FGSs are increasingly drawn to an expanded HE system in the UK that is focused on delivering a skilled workforce for the 21st century and enhanced employment opportunities for graduates (Purcell et al., 2008). At the same time, many universities are intent on providing opportunities for students from families with little or no previous experience of HE.

The literature states that FGSs possess a lower socioeconomic status, educational aspirations and levels of engagement, and lower social capital (knowledge, resources and information to promote success in higher education). FGSs are a population of interest to HE institutions and academics due to low retention and graduation rates. Although the number of FGSs participating in HE has risen substantially in the past 30 years (Thomas, 2001), there is still a trend of under-achievement. What is significant about the increase is that it is drawn almost exclusively from the upper strata of the working classes and from the middle classes (Archer et al., 2003). Many of the students who make up the additional student numbers recruited in recent years are the first people in their family to access HE, but an analysis of their backgrounds suggests that they are predominantly from the upper end of the working classes and lower end of the middle classes and not drawn from the most disenfranchised groups (ibid.). This factor has particular resonance at The Centre where there are clear economic indicators of social deprivation and disadvantage across the campus town (see Appendix One).

There is a propensity for working-class students to attend post-1992 universities, where there is an emphasis on encouraging applications from non-traditional students, whilst middle-class students attend pre-1992 universities, which tend towards a more elite atmosphere (Reay et al., 2010). In terms of not having parents or family members with experience of higher education, Thomas & Quinn (2007: 65) found first generation students were 'structurally and culturally restricted by lack of knowledge about universities and how they worked, because their families had not had the opportunity to build up this store of experience.'

Being the first generation in their family to go to university can result in prospective students being unsure about what their role as a student will involve, how many hours they will be expected to study in a week, how to structure their learning and have low confidence levels about their ability to cope. A parent's experience can influence children's attitudes to HE and not having a family history of HE has been identified as a factor in reducing a person's chances of entering and succeeding at this level of the education system. Gorard et al. (1999) claim that almost half (46%) of the people in their study who were lifelong learners had parents who were also lifelong learners, whilst more than half (61%) of those who were not participating in education had parents who were also not participating. The authors claimed that this emphasised that patterns of participation in education often tended to run in families.

Lido, Morgan & May (2009) make the distinction between student groups that are often inappropriately grouped together. They argue that 'first generation students in higher education should not be conflated or confused with students from lower socioeconomic groups'. Their research sought to examine non-traditional students' progression from undergraduate to postgraduate study, being a large scale survey of over one thousand UK students, as well as qualitative focus groups with students, some intending to continue to postgraduate study. Lido et al. (2009) found that demographic factors such as age group, occupation (of parent(s) or self), and geographic location could also act as barriers to postgraduate study. Feinstein, Duckworth & Sabates (2004) developed a model of the intergenerational transmission of educational success which revealed major influences on children's attainment in the education system as 'parental education and income'. Feinstein et al (2004), concluded that:

'the intergenerational transmission of educational success is a key element in equality of opportunity. There are substantial benefits of education that accrue to individuals and society in terms of what education enables parents to pass on to their children'.

Thomas & Quinn (2007) reiterate this in their large scale study of ten European countries, and state that having parents who successfully completed HE is the most significant factor in raising

aspiration for, and finding success in, HE across geographic and cultural boundaries. Interestingly, and in contrast to the above studies, Hatt, Baxter & Tate (2005) argued that parents within their study were ill equipped to assist their children to succeed in HE, even if they had previous experience within the system themselves. The authors conducted a longitudinal study of more than five hundred Year 10 schoolchildren in the South West of England, which involved over two hundred parents completing a questionnaire on both their academic and career history. The findings from these questionnaires highlighted that parents who had professional and managerial jobs developed their career before the 'massification' of the HE system, and may have lacked the knowledge and skills developed within the HE system. The authors claimed that in this way, these parents are similar to those from lower socioeconomic groups, and ill equipped to assist their children with their HE.

FGSs not only face barriers to their academic and social integration on campus, they also confront obstacles with respect to cultural adaptation. As a number of research studies and personal accounts have shown (c.f. Reay, 1998), FGSs often experience discontinuities between the culture (i.e. norms, values, expectations) of their families and communities and the culture that exists on college campuses, which they often describe as 'worlds apart.' The extent to which FGSs can participate in and transition across these worlds, which can be aided or impeded by relationships at home and on campus, and this, has a significant impact on whether they can be successful in HE

Researchers highlight issues around FGSs needing to learn the 'rules' within HE, whilst also identifying other potential problems for these students, such as money issues, lack of time and possible discriminatory practices (Bowl, 2002), and that all students new to HE must learn these rules. It has been identified that FGSs lack some of the social capital that non-FGSs may have inherited from their parents. Issues around socioeconomic status and social class, as well as FGSs, are all clearly important factors when endeavouring to uncover what impacts on student experience, and ability to succeed within their studies.

Once at university, students with fewer financial means are more likely to need part-time employment to cover their outgoings, and this can have a negative impact by reducing their capacity to integrate fully into student life and concentrate on their studies (Metcalf, 2003). Meeting accommodation costs has been found to cause difficulties for financially disadvantaged students. These individuals are more vulnerable in terms of the accommodation choices they are forced to make (Christie et al., 2002). There is also a tendency for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to live at, or close to, home to remain in a familiar setting (Christie et al., 2002; Reay et al., 2010). These forms of disadvantage may limit students' initial choice

of institution and course. This may subsequently mean they do not immerse themselves fully in the university environment, and miss opportunities due to the time spent in part-time work or spent with family and friends from outside university.

This thesis highlights the factors which affect the FGSs' cultural capital and informal learning of the university culture (at The Centre), which potentially leads to a more negative learning experience and lower academic achievement. The tendency for FGSs to attend a relatively local university increased with the introduction of fees. Post-1992 universities tend to have a higher proportion of 'local' students and this has implications for the transitional experiences of FGSs (c.f. Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005).

FGSs in this inquiry often lacked confidence in their academic capability, and talked about struggling through academic and/or personal difficulties to achieve their goals. Although proud of being offered a place at The Centre, many did not view themselves as successful and, like Crozier et al.'s (2008) working-class students; they viewed their offer of a place at university as '*luck*'. By comparison, the middle-class students in the Crozier et al. (2008) study felt a strong sense of entitlement to go to university. The FGSs had in the main a positive prior experience of education and believed their past academic success indicated to them their capability to achieve at university level. The participants did not fully resonate with the characteristics of a strong learner identity, although some had enjoyed school and had done relatively well academically in spite of 'family issues'.

3.4.2 Educational Transitions

Much of the literature on the transition to and from HE in the UK (Cook & Leckey, 1999; Lowe & Cook, 2003) and in Australia (McInnis, 2001) presents the process of moving from one educational establishment to another in terms of the mismatch between pre-existing perceptions of what HE is about, and the requirement to develop new knowledge while studying at university. Foskett & Hemsley-Brown (2002: 1) argue that regardless of the context, inherent in transitions is a process of choice:

'The choices an individual, group or an organisation make results in changes to the world they occupy, and in so doing changes the environment of choice for every other individual, group or organisation'.

Change is a key element for understanding transitions within an ecological framework that sees the actions of the individual and the environment as directly influencing each other. In relation

to the organisation, transitions have an important role to play in making the necessary adjustments to maintain the ecological balance (Keenan, 2006, cited in Currant & Keenan, 2009). Similarly, the degree to which an individual is willing to adapt can be based on epistemological and ontological grounds. When an FGS attempts to understand their learning this may imply a degree of change in the way they see themselves, their own understanding of the self, and their interaction with their surroundings. Transitions involve a complex and dynamic process of negotiation, discovery, and re-discovery of oneself or what Mercer (2007: 21) refers to as a 're-negotiation' of the self. To this end, understanding the way that transitions can influence students' perceptions of themselves can provide us with 'a benchmark of the developing process and a starting point for establishing knowledge deficits' (Foskett & Hemsley Brown, 2002: 158). It seems that inherent in transitions is a process of learning about not only subject-specific knowledge, but also the impact such learning can have on the way the self is perceived as a result of the knowledge gained.

The process of transition is further complicated by the fact that affordances and discourses often clash, and pull the student towards different requirements of different discourse communities. Affordances are the substance of learners' identities, which they acquire and enrich by exploring, benchmarking, creating, reconfiguring and hopefully mastering new coping strategies, against the demands of a range of often conflicting communities, and a range of complex transitions (based on Norman, 1988). Acquiring new affordances is one form of transition; but resolving conflicting affordances (or learning to live with them) is a lot more complex, and it requires shifts in identity which students often find very unsettling. The student who succeeds in this type of transition becomes more 'mature' in the sense that they can stand above, or stand aside from, conflicting discourses and appreciate that different affordances are appropriate in different contexts. This is a transition from tolerating, to appreciating, to valuing a diversity of perspectives and discourses, and the uncertainty and instability that initially accompanies it.

Transitions are about changes in the environment and in social and educational practices that involve transformation, dislocation, or growth, that substantially change the way meanings and practices are constructed, and the way they are experienced by the student, in the physical, social, and educational environment. The impact of the transitions vary as they can sometimes be disruptive, or they can be quiet and insidious. As a result not all students will react to the transitions in the same way. Some may perceive them negatively while others may view them as a challenging opportunity. It may be that transitions incorporate the following characteristics: they are continuous, they are part of a process of cognitive, emotional and social changes, and

they often involve a sense of reconfiguration in terms of knowledge and self-regard for analytical purpose.

The role of boundaries or critical incidents is significant in transitions, and this can lead to a process of re-evaluation of one's position. During the process of self-development, and negotiating entry to new communities and discourses, individuals can be quite vulnerable, especially when they find themselves within a process that can be simultaneously positive and negative, which may exacerbate the uncertainty. Palmer et al. (2009) call this the 'betwixt space'. Palmer et al. state that 'students can be suspended between one place (home) and another (university), which can result in an 'in-between-ness' a betwixt space which in turn creates this lack of belonging or sense of placelessness' (Van Gennep, 1909/1960: 38). Lack of preparedness can make university transition a struggle (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003; Reay, Ball & David, 2002) due to a complex set of factors that are characterised in terms of class, ethnicity and gender (Reay, 2002; Reay et al., 2002), a lack of confidence in personal abilities, and due to a range of institutional difficulties (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003).

Much of the research regarding transition is focused on the beginning of secondary school where there is often a 'honeymoon' period (the first term) during which children express excitement regarding new friends, new classes, lockers, and new activities (Harter, Whitesell & Kowalski, 1992; Galton, Gray & Ruddock, 2003). In time, the reality of success or failure, either academic or social, sets in, and this is likely to affect students' school behaviour and attitudes. Transfer programmes typically aim to reduce pupils' anxiety about new routines, rather than helping them to learn new ways of learning and studying. While the practical difficulties associated with transfer tend to resolve themselves and are mostly short lived (Galton, Gray & Ruddock, 1999), there is a general consensus that students find the disjunction between learning styles at primary and secondary school difficult to manage (Galton & Morrison, 2000).

Galton, Edwards, Hargreaves & Pell (2003) found that school enjoyment remained at about the same level before and immediately after transfer and then dipped, with the result that by the end of the first year, pupils found school less enjoyable than before. The most common and noticeable responses to transfer is a sequence of reactions moving from declining self-perceptions of competence to lowered motivation, boredom, increased absence and decline in school engagement.

Post-1992 universities have found that many students come from non-traditional backgrounds and wide access institutions, and there are difficulties associated with supporting and fostering

learning where students' prior educational experiences are very varied (c.f. Bamber & Tett, 2000; McInnis, 2001; Zeegers & Martin, 2001). Many non-traditional students come from further education (FE) environments and often feel lost and abandoned in the large lectures and the vast buildings common to HE institutions. For most institutions, the successful transition to HE study hinges on using the first year of a degree course as a time for students to adapt to the styles of teaching and assessment required in tertiary education. Allen (2001) noted an argument for shifting the emphasis towards retention and achievement rather than access. Retention and achievement could be helped by flexibility and adaptability in teaching, which would generally improve the learning experience for students from non-traditional backgrounds and those with disabilities. This would enable as Allen (2001: 16) states 'ensuring that existing students graduate'.

The first year experience of university has been a particular focus of interest at a time when most adjustment is needed. In the UK, the HE Academy commissioned a report to review the literature regarding 'First Year Experiences', this states in its executive summary that:

'The key to success is to work with students, building on their strengths, rather than do things to students on the basis of a deficit model that emphasises inadequacies. This requires an approach that sees the first-year experience as holistic and evolving and that attempts to match changing student expectations with their experience. It is important to take first-year student perspectives seriously and evaluate the students' satisfaction with their total experience'.

Kantanis (2000: 8) proposes that 'The role of social transition issues underscoring the success of academic transition cannot be underestimated.' Gollins (2005: 55) sees 'one of the challenges for students is how to make effective use of a greater amount of unscheduled time that has previously been available, with the result that more time is spent socialising than studying', a problem that Leathwood (2001) identifies more amongst male than female students. This seems to be more complex than simply preferring to socialise than study as there is also the aspect of being self-directed; as Gollins (2005: 56) notes, first year students (especially male students) were used to being 'managed by their previous institutions' and so have to learn and the skills of independent self-directed study.

Winn (2002: 453) argues that, apart from the lack of structure to daily life and work, students are also affected by a lack of verification or scrutiny of the learning activities, summarised as 'it's easy not to do it'. If students were asked to read a chapter before a seminar, it was clear that they were not likely to be 'found out' if they did not read it. In Winn's analysis, the

implication is that some students are driven only by the extrinsic motivation of assessment, and that teaching and learning activities may need to accommodate this. There are alternative interpretations; Thomas' (2002: 432) student framed a presumably similar experience as the tutor 'not giving stuff' and had been disinclined to work in such circumstances. Thomas (2002) presented an alternative response as, 'If someone cares about my work, I'll go out and do that extra bit of research or look into this.'

There is a tendency to assume that moving on will in some way be moving up. 'Our present state is conditional, precarious and imperfect, fit only to be maintained as a temporary way station on the ever upward path towards perfection, which is always brought nearer by the next reform' (Neave, 2006: 1). In the same way, moving successfully from one educational institution to another or from living at home to living independently or from school to work can be seen as normative and a sign of healthy personal development (psychologically) or of facilitative social structures (sociologically). The transition to university will inevitably be affected by where one is transiting from, the particular circumstances people (students) find themselves in and the ability or willingness of all agents (individual or institutional) to adapt. Joining a university involves more or less adjustment to the dominant cultural norms of an institution, in spite of inevitable variation in acceptance of those norms by students.

Glaser & Strauss (1971: 117) state that 'Because there are multiple agents, there is always the possibility of divergent views about the most desirable shape of collective passages'. This will be particularly true if there is greater diversity of agents. Multiple transitions can take place, for example, moving away from home, living independently and adjusting to a new institutional regime (Fleischer et al., 2008). Some students experience many transitions, others less. Educational transition research in the main focuses on the impact of a new institutional structure on those who join it rather than questioning the structure itself (c.f. Harley et al., 2007). The research emphasis is on what it is about students that makes the adjustment easier or more difficult. One aspect could be a mismatch between ideas of what a university might be like and what it turns out to be. For example, although based on a small sample from an élite Scottish university, Christie et al. (2006: 364) found that new undergraduates were concerned about a reduction in support in a 'more impersonal' environment in contrast with their further educational (FE) experiences but they were also excited about new opportunities. Some of the participants hoped for 'a more intellectually stimulating environment' (Christie et al., 2006). Another aspect could be the effect of student characteristics on their adjustment, e.g. students' relationships with parents (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000) or friends at home (Paul & Brier, 2001). It

could be that also the amount of social support available to students, such as making friends, is important (Wilcox et al., 2005).

Personal tutoring is another source of support for students, although this can be increasingly strained by the pressures associated with mass HE (Stephen et al., 2008). Support strategies that target individuals or groups of students include texting them to encourage engagement and keep students informed (Harley et al., 2007). To ease the transition from sixth form/FE into HE, Cook & Leckey (1999) found that it was essential for staff in HE to possess an informed view of the diversity of backgrounds, needs and aspirations of their students. It may also be beneficial for student expectations to be understood to achieve this (a smooth transition into HE). There also needs to be a greater awareness among academic staff of the qualities and skills which new students bring to their university studies as well as explicit statements of the qualities and skills desirable to assist new university students to study effectively (Cook & Leckey, 1999: 170).

As vocational qualifications now form a significant percentage of all entrance qualifications to HE courses, it is important to address not only how well or poorly prepared these students are for HE study, but how well prepared the HE institutions are to cater for the requirements of a range of students. MacDonald & Stratta (2001) found that staff tended to place the emphasis on helping students to adjust to the existing undergraduate provision rather than engaging in a radical re-think on possible approaches more appropriate to a more diverse student population. Biggs (1999: 21) noted, 'level 1 teachers thought that differences in learning were due to differences in students' ability, motivation and other student-related factors'. In a study of staff perceptions relating to student non-completion in HE, Taylor & Bedford (2004: 390) discussed similar findings where staff thought that remediation of students' perceived deficiencies would solve the problem of managing student diversity and stated:

'This view matches well with the generalised opinion of staff in this study that initiatives to address non-completion should focus on helping students to change, rather than changing our course design, teaching or institutional practices'.

Research has attempted to take a more holistic view, that incorporates staff practice and students' backgrounds. Hultberg et al.'s study (2008) that refers to the technique of 'scaffolding' in relation to enabling successful transitions for all students. They discuss the LearnAble project in a Swedish university, where a combination of structured introductory sessions and a parallel course in pedagogy in HE for teachers resulted in a meeting point for students' approaches to learning and teaching practice thus 'scaffolded instruction' (Hultberg et al., 2008: 51). However, to be effective, a clear understanding of the level of knowledge and

skills of the learner is required, which can be difficult to achieve if teaching is largely impersonal, as, is likely to be the case in large departments and where support systems are separate from academic transmission. Hultberg et al. (2008) point out, if such projects are an 'add on' to courses, they can become an additional burden for both students and staff. Practical difficulties for universities to integrate in scaffolding students as part of their transitional experiences are noted by Green (2006: 285) who suggests:

'unless the locus of students is clearly understood, targeted and effective, pedagogical thinking cannot take place, to the detriment of both lecturers (who will continue to be frustrated by what they perceive as deficits of skill and knowledge in their students) and the students themselves (who will struggle to realign their existing skills and knowledge) within an imperfectly understood paradigm of subject and of study environment'.

In researching the transition from primary to secondary school, Comber & Galton (2002: 87) reported that:

'in a number of cases, teachers went beyond a simple lack of knowledge of or interest in the pupil's former educational experience, revealing a stereotyped view of the primary classroom. The implication behind this was that the teacher in question did know what they did in primary school and, what is more, disapproved of it.'

It is reasonable that this perspective is not restricted to primary to secondary transitions and to acknowledge that it could occur for reasons that are more benign. Although interpersonal relations have been highlighted, they are only part of a broad canvas of experiences that help or hinder negotiating a new environment. Koizumi (2000) refers to three environmental aspects, the physical, interpersonal and sociocultural, and discusses the importance of having an anchor point. Koizumi (2000: 176) views an anchor point as:

'an element of a person in environment system which facilitates transaction between the person and the environment (and) can be information, knowledge, skills, family, friends, physical bases for activities, institutions, organisations, etc.'

When entering a new environment, anchor points are likely to be sought that enable the person to find a link with the new environment. They are internal (e.g. drawing on previous experiences of changing schools or starting a new job) or external (e.g. using a social networking site, Facebook, Bebo, MySpace), and may or may not be associated with the campus or the university. This calls into question the requirement to be socially and academically

integrated into a university to make a successful transition, particularly if students' lives outside the university community are of equal or greater importance.

The interpersonal and sociocultural aspects of anchor points can also be viewed as a form of social capital, that is resources available through connections with others (Putnam, 1993; Smith, 2007). The importance of social capital as part of a resource base for young people is highlighted by Furlong et al. (2003: i). They found that 'at all stages in the transitional process the resources available to the individual such as qualifications (particularly), family knowledge and connections were central to effective management of transitions'.

Furlong et al. (2003) also argue that inextricably linked to resources are aspects of agency.

What we refer to as the mobilisation of capacities incorporates structural resources (such as economic, social and cultural capital) as well as capacities that tend to be regarded as signifying personal agency (such as motivation, persistence and determination)' Furlong et al. (2003: 5).

Transitions are more or less difficult depending on the individuals' circumstances, prior experiences and consequential expectations in combination with the characteristics and resources of the new environment. Indeed, 'lack of preparedness for HE and incompatibility between the student and their chosen course and institution' (Wilcox et al., 2005: 708) explain a significant proportion of decisions to withdraw. Preparedness and compatibility can refer to social and academic aspects, either separately or in an interrelated fashion. Transitions can be potentially troublesome and experience, at least for some, 'threatens to strike at some of the foundations of self' (Measor & Woods, 1984: 9).

Glaser & Strauss (1971: 89) identify that:

'The degree of desirability of a status passage depends both on the degree to which a man (sic) is socially integrated into groups and on the social circumstances that provide such desirable passages (and) provides the motivational basis for actions that shape the passage.'

The increased numbers continuing in education by progressing to university depends on the motivation of individuals to participate in education at that level. Glaser & Strauss (1971) suggest the motivation to, in this case, attend university, relates to social structures, in turn influencing the transitional experience. However, that depends on characteristics of the individual students as well as the collective cohort, for example the balance of student 'types'

(male/female, mature/younger, ethnic group, economic background). There is a complex interplay between what is perceived as a desirable activity, why it is desirable, how accessible it is and how it is experienced. A motivational system is at work, any part of which is subject to change with more or less impact on other parts.

Movement or transition from one field to another implies the notion of crossing boundaries, with all the difficulties and conflicts this may entail. Transition brings into contact the 'rules' of differing fields and cultures of learning, each of which operates according to its own expectational codes and systems. The interaction of these expectational codes and 'rules' takes place, under constructed social conditions, within individual agents as they move from one field to another. From this perspective, relative difficulty or ease in transition is seen primarily as the result of how effectively and closely the 'fields' interrelate. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that, however closely they are connected, the movement from one field of education to another inevitably involves the student in some form of internalised conflict.

Such a notion is clearly germane to the experience of students making the transition from school to university. Movement from one learning environment to another, even if the new environment is familiar and shares to a large extent the values and expectations of students' previous experiences, can lead to the creation of tensions. For students to experience effective transition these tensions must be overcome. However, Bourdieu's theoretical framework tends to reduce agents (in this case FGSs) to the status of puppets at the mercy of a plethora of 'objective' forces all seeking to impose politico-pedagogic power over the individual. Bourdieu's analysis seems open to charges of determinism (Jenkins, 1992). This element of determinism Bourdieu sought to overcome by recourse to the notion of the 'habitus' (see 5.7).

3.4.3 Becoming and Being a University Student

Students entering university are embarking upon a major change in life experience. They need to form new social relationships, rebalance existing relationships, perhaps take a greater responsibility for themselves, and be more responsible for money and time management. Psychologically, this is a time of intense self-development, as those who enter HE possess their own motivations, established ways of studying, interpersonal skills, and self-concept. The new experience of university may change all of these on past values, ways of doing things and areas of established competence are all tested by the demands and pressures of university life. The success with which this transition is negotiated is likely to have a significant impact on university achievement.

When students start university, not only do they need to cope with understanding an institution's rules and regulations, and getting to grips with their subject and learning how to study, they also must learn how to live and work with other people. Macfarlane (2007) discusses the term 'academic citizenship' in relation to the integration of academic staff into university life; this phrase could be equally applied to the students' integration into university life. Each student experience should be seen as unique, and the context in which the student finds himself or herself will affect that student's engagement with the learning process. As Stuart, Lido, Morgan & May (2009: 23) state: 'the context for learning today is shaped by power, socioeconomic and cultural position, with differing effects for diverse student groups'. Field (2005) elaborates this idea, and suggests a typology of formal and informal learners in the United Kingdom. This typology involved four types of learners as follows: permanent learners who study throughout their lives for pleasure, traditional learners who seek formal course learning, instrumental learners whose reason for learning is to improve their career prospects, and non-learners who, for whatever reason, do not enjoy learning and avoid organised studying (although still learners, as everyone is involved in informal learning). The type of learner a person 'is' was found to be related to their social and cultural position as well as their life experiences. This is an important issue because a person's approach to learning may affect their experience and outcomes, by the way they engage with the university overall. It is important to note that there has been an increasing number of students, particularly those from a lower socioeconomic background (social classes 4-7), who chose to study at a local university campus (HEFCE, 2009). (See Appendix Three for Socioeconomic Classifications.)

Researchers highlight the complexities of studying what is now a diverse body of individuals within HE. Substantial literature highlighting different aspects of the undergraduate student (c.f. Tinto, 1988; Woodfield, 2002; Thomas, Quinn, Slack & Casey, 2002; Hatt, Baxter & Tate, 2005; Stuart, Lido, Morgan & May, 2009) explain the complexity particularly well. They argue that the social context for learning is overlaid with different groups' processes of identification, excluding access to power and access to those taken for granted elements of society that define where different identities are located. It is vital to consider students' educational history and its interpretation –their social and cultural background, attitudes to learning, the community context they live in, their stage in personal development and the political and economic climate. The success with which this transition is negotiated is likely to have a significant impact upon university achievement.

Researchers highlight the complex interplay of social, economic and cultural issues experienced by students from a lower socioeconomic background who attend university. These include the

students' knowledge of HE (Hutchings, 2006), the route from which they access university (Leathwood & Hutchings, 2006), funding issues (Jessop, Herberts & Solomon, 2005; Hutchings, 2006b), and concerns they feel about fitting in with the culture of the institution (Field, 2005; Archer & Leathwood, 2006). The complex relationship between these factors has sometimes been neglected but is examined within this thesis. The role of parents in encouraging their children to aspire educationally is likely to become even more important in the coming years in view of the increasing competition for university places. In 2010, UCAS recorded an 11.6% rise in the number of higher education applicants in the UK, whilst reductions have been made in higher education funding and tuition fees have increased (UCAS, 2010). In this situation, those from the least powerful social groups such as first generation students are likely to be at the greatest risk of missing out on higher education as they do not possess, or have access to the economic, social and cultural capital of the most dominant groups in society. The role of parents is significant for disadvantaged students as a source of support and encouragement if they are not to be deterred from going to university.

3.5 Summary

This chapter covered the notions of identity and the pre-disposition to fit in based on academic achievements, entitlement, social mobility, cultural differences and financial aspects. An opportunity for FGSs to study locally rather than having to move away from home could be seen as a big attraction. Social capital and the other aspects discussed are important regarding how to decode the environment of academia. Transition for FGSs is a steep learning curve with regard to decoding power constraints, family influence, reliable knowledge and making the 'right' choice. This makes a difference to what constitutes a good experience both academically for FGSs and for their social mobility. This leads to further questions: Are FGSs consumers rather than owners? Does their overall experience of HE change their identity and put them at odds with family, friends and cultural background?

4. Methodological Considerations

This chapter explains the appropriateness of the overarching ‘philosophical’ approach and specific data generation techniques. This thesis makes no claim to innovation regarding methods or methodology; rather it aspires to fit Plummer’s (1983: 1) description of research, which is ‘characterised by lack of pomposity and pretension about methods’. The use of qualitative research addresses the similarities as well as the ‘idiosyncrasies’ (Miller & Glassner, 2004) of individual students. It was not the researcher’s intention to impose pre-determined categories on respondents and create limitations in terms of possible responses. Instead the aim was to understand the individual motivations, drivers and barriers that influence choice, and not discourage the rich detail that can emerge from such investigations. Consequently, a qualitative methodology that stems from an interpretative paradigm was employed.

The participants’ accounts were analysed in two stages. The first stage of the data analysis used grounded theory (see Chapter Five) (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1998) to generate theory. The second stage used a phenomenographic inspired approach to generate data (see Chapter Seven), and discuss any variation in the accounts of the phenomena studied (FGSs in the FS). This approach was seen as a way to produce a deeper understanding of the experiences of FGSs in their FS at The Centre through the mapping of variation (c.f. Marton, 1994, 1996; Marton & Booth, 1997; Bowden & Green, 2006).

Table Four below compares the two data analysis methodologies used in this inquiry.

Table Four A Comparison of Stage One and Two Methodologies

| Subject of Comparison | Grounded Theory | Phenomenography |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Stage of Data Analysis | Stage One | Stage Two |
| Object of study | Understanding of phenomenon by constructing theory that is derived from an iterative description. | Understanding of phenomenon by categories of subjects meanings of a phenomenon. |
| Data collection | Interviews, Texts, Journal. | Interviews, Texts. |
| Analytical tools | Theory derived from data through interplay between the researcher and the data whereby the relational comparison of responses yields theory of phenomenon. | Interpretation of sections of text and whole accounts. |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| When does the analysis occur? | During data collection and post data collection. | Post data collection (may have follow up collection to verify expand meanings). |
| Relationship between data collection analysis and theory formulation | All three stages are 'fused', occur simultaneously and iteratively. | All three stages are separate but intuitive interpretation can help each stage and some iteration possible. |
| Generalisability | Extensive across populations. | Limited to similar populations. |

The inquiry's research design is summarised in Table Five below.

Table Five Overview of the Research Design

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Research Design | Interpretive Case Study | |
| Data Collection Method | Semi-Structured Interviews | |
| Research Approach | Qualitative Approach | |
| | Stage One Data Generation Grounded Theory | Stage Two Data Generation Phenomenography |
| Research Outcomes | The 'Transcultural' Model | The 'Transition' Model |

4.1 The Research Philosophy

The philosophical approach taken prioritised both the researcher's influences on the thesis and a willingness to embrace the 'subjective dimensions of human action, that is, the internal logic and interpretative processes by which action is created' (Gill & Johnson, 2002: 166). A grounded theory approach was used to generate patterns of student experience. Data collection was carried out by interviewing fifty FGSs on an individual basis to try to understand their experiences and how they comprehended those experiences. There was one pre-set interview question 'How did you come to be a student at [redacted]? and the data arose through analysis of FGSs' conversation. Initially the interviews were analysed in relation to four main themes: motivation (and reasons for study); choice (social network/distance from family home); experience of the curriculum; and the meaning of HE (to individual identities).

The FGSs were negotiating the process of studying for a degree in a context of change in HE and in wider society.. All had undertaken secondary education at a time when social, economic and technological developments played a part in shaping their experiences of education, as well as their life courses and the transitions between different stages within them. There is an increasing emphasis upon individuals to take greater control of their life courses, and to negotiate the stages of them without the same 'social markers' that historically governed their lives. The implications of these changes are significant in terms of the way students experience HE, and indeed the role it plays within their wider personal journeys.

A broadly evaluative exploratory, instrumental case study approach was used for this inquiry (Stake, 1995) further developed from the work of Ellis (2003: 52), who highlights the importance of the 'learning milieu' as part of an illuminative case study design. The learning milieu, in the terms of the complex interrelationships between cultural, social, psychological and organisational influences, was a central issue in the way FGSs understood themselves in terms of their experiences. This fits with the theoretical framework of Bourdieu regarding the complex interrelationships between habitus, field and social capital.

A grounded theory approach was initially selected at stage one of the data analysis, as it allowed the researcher to work inductively with data and to apply an iterative process of data generation and analysis. It was felt that it would provide a reliable method of exploring FGSs in their FS at The Centre without bias or pre-conceived ideas. In line with grounded theory's focus on an inductive style of theorising, interviews were conducted and recorded so the spontaneous feelings and thoughts of the participants could be obtained. A theoretical analysis of FGSs' experiences was developed, which places the research in the interpretative paradigm. The aim was not to generalise, but to understand and explore the perceptions and attitudes of FGSs at The Centre.

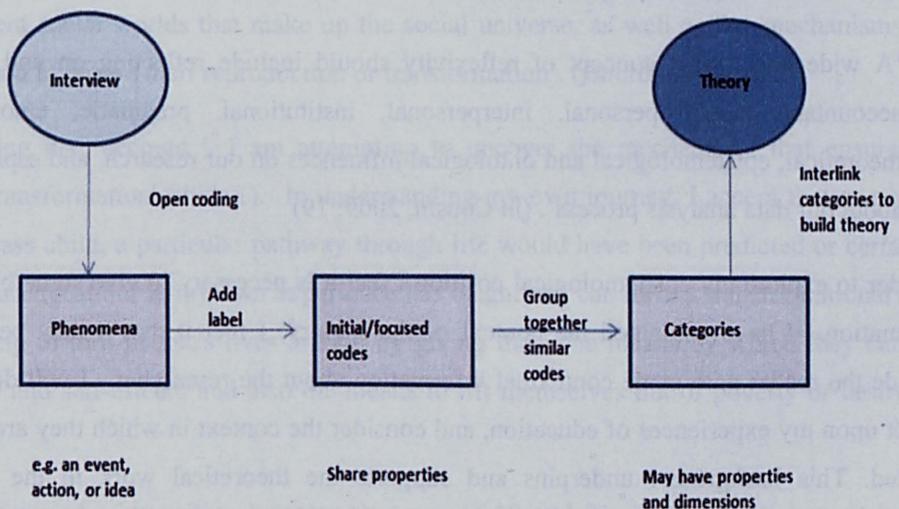
Eisenhardt (1989) contends that building theory from cases is particularly well suited to research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate, given its strengths as listed above. FGSs in HE as a research area is certainly not a new one (much of the research though is focused on FGSs as a small cohort within the WP percentage at institutions). The Centre is unique as it was built to encourage the participation of students who may not have previously considered HE. This made this inquiry suited to the combination of research tools and techniques: case study, semi-structured interviews, grounded theory tools (stage one) and phenomenographic tools (stage two).

In its most basic form, a case study tends to be associated with the intensive study of a particular location, ‘such as a community or organisation’ (Bryman, 2004: 49). Case studies can take many different forms and directions, and it has been suggested that this can pose a conundrum for researchers (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007). Bassey (1999: 12) offers some useful clarifications, which informed the use of a case study, by describing three different types of educational case study. These are theory seeking and theory testing; storytelling and picture drawing; and finally, evaluative storytelling. This inquiry is in the broadest sense evaluative; the case study approach is in the main exploratory mechanism.

Evaluations focus on current practice and usually occur in the current ‘policy space.’ The evaluation aspect is set in the micro context of ‘The Centre’ and the micro of government policy that is focused on widening access and participation in HE with regard to FGSs. The grounded theory methodology was used, which, through its constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), provided rigour to the research process.

The general process of how to code a transcript and develop a theory is depicted in Figure Two below. After coding several interview transcripts, a researcher can identify many issues that are of importance to the respondents. These issues are also known as phenomena and are assigned a conceptual label to become a code, also known as a concept (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Some codes or concepts will share the same or similar characteristics and can be pulled together into more abstract categories, which can typically be interlinked and build the basis for a theory.

Figure Two The Coding Steps in Grounded Theory



(after Strauss and Corbin, 1998)

A combination of grounded theory (Glaser & Straus, 1967; Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) approaches were used in this inquiry, which, in the researcher's view, enhanced the understanding and the application of the grounded theory approach in the research. The researcher adopted Morse et al.'s (2002) view of verification as being the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain, throughout the different steps in the process. Glaser & Strauss (1967: 28) suggest that 'the generation of theory through the comparative analysis both subsumes and assumes verification, and accurate descriptions, but only to the extent that the latter are in the service of generation'. The constant comparison method incrementally contributes to ensuring reliability and validity, and the rigour of a study, the mechanisms of which are integrated into every step to construct a solid product by identifying and correcting errors before they are built into the developing model and before they subvert the analysis (Morse et al., 2002). The researcher does not make any absolute truth claims about the theory, but does suggest that it presents a particular view, which could be practically useful to the HEI context.

4.2 The Researcher's Postionality

The researcher's personal beliefs and values as well as his or her intellectual goals, epistemological and ontological perspectives all influence the design and conduct of a research project (Maxwell, 2005). My personal life experience and professional background have contributed to the choice of this research topic and to the shape of its research design. These are reflected in the following paragraphs to achieve the 'knowing responsibility' described by Doucet & Mauthner (2002:134):

'A wide and robust concept of reflexivity should include reflecting on and being accountable about personal, interpersonal, institutional, pragmatic, emotional, theoretical, epistemological and ontological influences on our research, and especially about our data analysis process'. (in Cousin, 2009: 19)

In order to explore my epistemological position I feel it is necessary to give some biographical information. I have explained the context of the inquiry; I feel it that it may be helpful to provide the reader with some contextual information about the researcher. I will describe and reflect upon my experiences of education, and consider the context in which they are, and were situated. This background underpins and supports the theoretical work in the thesis and positions the researcher, providing a particular critical lens that informed the approach. It also

allows the reader to have an understanding of the researcher's ontology and how this inquiry was developed.

The focus of this inquiry on students who are first generation in higher education stems from a combination of personal experience and an emergent academic interest in the roles that social structure and human agency play in shaping individual lives (c.f. Giddens, 1979; Beck, 1998; Bauman, 1999). A number of biographical components, such as my family background, schooling and career pattern, have intersected and informed learning experiences, which in turn have shaped the ideas, values and beliefs underpinning the thesis. In order to assess the influence of these factors upon experiences they need to be located in their wider social and historical context. My personal, educational and professional backgrounds, described below, have also influenced my identity as a researcher in the data collection and analysis process. While acknowledging the potential impact of my biographical features, such as age, gender and ethnicity, on my field identity as a researcher, I would like to address my positionality as a concept that is always in flux and created in the research process. This is because, as argued by Cousin (2010), researcher reflexivity is negotiated in context rather than fixed. I am the first in my family to complete a degree. My own journey into higher education (HE) took place in the early 1990s and where there was a very different social and political context which shaped education policy. I present my story here in order to position myself within the inquiry, but also to illuminate the way in which institutions and social networks informed the decisions I made.

Bourdieu states that:

'... the goal of sociology is to uncover the most deeply buried structures of the different social worlds that make up the social universe, as well as the 'mechanisms' that tend to ensure their reproduction or transformation'. (Bourdieu, 1996: 1)

In presenting my 'account', I am attempting to uncover the mechanisms that ensured my personal 'transformation' (ibid: 1). In understanding my own journey, I accept that as a young working-class child, a particular pathway through life would have been predicted or certain for me. Higher education, as my own experience has taught me, can have a transformational effect and can help to turn people's lives around by giving them the means by which they can gain confidence and self-esteem and also the means to lift themselves out of poverty or destructive lifestyles.

During the period of transition between the ages of 19 and 21, academic attainment became increasingly important to me as a way forward and out of the directionless path my life was

taking. As Reay (2001) points out, for working-class individuals education is a tool for escaping or for self-improvement (or indeed a mixture of the two). I understood that an increase in education qualifications could potentially secure me a more stable future. I now believe this was the motivation behind my progression onto a degree.

My positioning as a White woman from a working-class background, who could be viewed by participants in the study as middle class and professional, was both at the same time helpful and distancing. Bourdieu's theories mainly focus on the ways in which education processes ensure social reproduction. This approach explains outcomes for the majority of working-class young people but does not satisfactorily account for the small number of young people, identified as being fewer than one in five students (Connor, Dewson et al., 2001), including myself, who do go against the grain and move beyond what is expected or typical for people from working-class backgrounds.

Baker (1982) (in Silverman, 1998: 109) offers the view that the participants of this inquiry are likely to respond to the researcher (me) in particular ways: 'we take into account who the other is, what the other person could be presumed to know, 'where' that other is in relation to our self in the world we talk about.' There has been much discussion of the importance of matching the background of interviewers and interviewees (Skeggs, 1997; Maynard, 1998). It is interesting to note that in Skeggs' (1997) ethnographic approach to researching the lives of young women at the further education college where she taught, despite the similarities in her own background to those of the participants of her study, she identifies the differences that being educated to degree level and beyond imposed. Skeggs (2002: 363) suggests that her positioning as like her participants provided her with some 'epistemological authority'.

It may also be the case that the participants of this study are more likely to discuss details of their personal lives with researchers who are similar to them and could be perceived to be likely to understand their perspectives. However, this proximity may be conceived as equally problematic for participants as such proximity may make them feel positioned in particular ways and so lead to a reluctance to articulate views that are contrary to expectations. It is important to emphasise that different researchers are likely to discover different insights from the same participants but that these insights are no less useful for being different.

Prior to commencing my social science degree I had, to a certain extent, internalised my previous educational 'failure': locating the problem within the individual. But engagement with sociological and educational theories and research led to a reinterpretation of my experiences, and a consideration of the influence of such theories upon them. When studying the sociology of

education and theories of consensus and conflict, I was surprised at the extent to which individuals' educational careers could be determined by social structures. I became interested in theories of education which rendered it socially divisive; both maintaining the existing 'social order' and reproducing social and economic inequalities (c.f. Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Anyon, 1980).

This view of education was in conflict with the values and beliefs held and espoused by my teachers at school. During my primary school years in particular (in the mid-1970s), I often felt marginalised as aspects of my cultural background did not conform to the moral and social agenda implicit in the school. I was once labelled at six as the naughtiest child the school (Mother was called to see the Head Teacher), when I refused to re-read books at my new school (we had moved counties) I had already read at my previous school (we had moved house and school types from a Church of England School to a County Primary School), and instead tended to 'wander' mentally and physically as the rest of the class had not started them yet. I left a local (village) comprehensive school in May 1985 with a variety of CSEs grades (still don't have a Maths qualification) and started work on a YTS placement in a pet shop. My lack of educational achievement was due to being labelled a 'slow learner', 'disruptive', 'chaotic'. I found that being over 19 and able to pay to do A levels meant it did not matter what grades you had from school or your labels. The fact I was able to buy into education meant I could attend the sessions at an FE college, and my identity was changed. I studied one year A levels (which were meant to be resitting classes for students who did not get the grade they wanted) in Economics, Psychology, Government and Politics, and English Language and Literature. After two years I went on to study a BSc Applied Social Science degree, in 1992, at a time of great change in higher education.

During the degree programme I was let into the 'secrets' of success; namely study strategies and approaches to learning. It came as a revelation to me that there were strategies by which one could plan work, accepted forms of discourse used in explaining material and judgements and justifications to be made about information. I was able to transcend my previous achievements by learning the rules and 'playing the game'.

During the social science degree I was made aware of theoretical and empirical work that challenged all my previous assumptions. I could relate a great deal of this work to my own experiences. Studying theories of curriculum (such as Purvis, 1985; Goodson & Dowbiggin, 1994) alerted me to the way in which girls and boys from working-class backgrounds have historically, by means of a differentiated curriculum, been directed and socialised into specific occupational roles. This led me to reconsider the notion of subject 'choices' made at secondary

school. I could also relate to the work of Becker (1952) and Keddie (1972) on the notion of the 'Ideal Pupil', as constructed by teachers.

I did not enjoy the benefits of widening participation through explicit interventions, but stumbled my way through the education system to the unfamiliar social territory (Plummer, 2000) of the middle classes. I know the rules of the game but may not always have the resources, or class-based habitus, to know how to act in defining moments (Ball, 2003: Ch. 1). In looking at my experiences, I can only conclude that individual agency in the form of personal aspirations had a significant influence. With this in mind, I am able to understand my own class transition as a complex interplay between habitus and field. My history is nothing more than a 'certain specification of the collective history of (my) group or class... (and) may be seen as a structural variant of (the) class habitus...' (Bourdieu, 1977: 86). That is to say, my life history is not typical for the majority of working-class young people but may be typical of a minority of my generation.

After completing my degree, a Masters course and a PGCE (FE), I worked for fifteen years in further education colleges. I decided after my fourth restructure in three years to take time out and research the experiences of students at The Centre as this was an institution that over the years I had signposted students to attend but was viewed by senior management at the college as 'not really going to university'. When working as a 14-19 manager I became interested in individuals' learning trajectories in relation to their academic and personal development, and their experiences of learning. I suggest that variations in perceptions of their role and knowledge at university indicate the possible influence of time and context. I argue that changes at personal and professional level can be situated within changes in institutional practices and the HE system as a whole. This is supported in the recent work of Bathmaker & Thomas (2009). In their study they differentiate between three interlinked levels of transition: institutions in transition (institutions that aim to reposition themselves within the HE field), transitions in institutions (changes in the structures and physical space of the institution), and students' experiences of transition (staying within the same institution or progressing to a different one), although in my inquiry I focus in particular on first generation students' experiences of transition during their first semester of study at a university campus.

4.3 Research Design Framework

Many of the decisions made regarding research design reside with the nature, experience and skills of the researcher, as well as with the nature and context of the research problem (Strauss

& Corbin, 1998; Levy, 2006), in accordance with Creswell's (2009) and Denzin & Lincoln's (2000) criteria for selection of a research design. Although the researcher recognised that their own experiences and preferences could influence some of the choices made, the researcher actively sought to allow the research in question 'the experiences of FGSs at The Centre' to drive the selection of the methodology. As the research focused on a single institution the case study approach was seen as an integral part of an appropriate methodology.

A narrative enables individuals to construct their identities in a specific frame, relating themselves and events in their lives to others and differing contexts (Hardy 1977; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). It is important to restate that given the nature of the inquiry, a quantitative or quasi-scientific approach (with an emphasis on hypothesis testing and measurement of 'facts') was not suitable. The workings of an underlying ideology, and its relationship to WP policy and practice in respect to FS FGSs at The Centre, required an approach that is able to detect subtleties and ambiguities. Gubrium & Holstein (1997, cited in Silverman, 2001: 39) suggest that qualitative researchers inhabit 'the lived border between reality and representation', indicating that qualitative research offers opportunities to probe social issues that may sometimes seem intangible.

The interpretivist approach is seen to risk the introduction of researcher bias, given the close nature between the researcher and the researched, and the interpretations that may either be forced upon informants or inferred from their responses. Although bias cannot be completely removed, this inquiry aimed to minimise bias. The sampling process ensured that a range of perspectives was solicited across the different programmes of study at The Centre. Patterns were allowed to emerge from the data, using the approaches described earlier. Evidence was sought that both confirmed and contradicted any pre-existing views considered equally.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

Most writers on research methodology make a strong point about the need to take account of ethical issues. Informed consent is an issue discussed in some detail, for example by Greig & Taylor (1999) who describe this as the participants knowing they have a choice in whether or not they participate, that they know exactly what their role is and that they can withdraw at any time. Before consenting they also need to be aware if the research is likely to be published at any stage. These issues are enshrined in the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Guidelines (2004), where it is stated that informed consent should be obtained and, amongst the

other requirements noted, there should be an understanding of the aims and purposes of the research.

In considering the research question and area of exploration, the key ethical tenet was to be clear and explicit. The aim of this approach was to empower and support the participants, and not disempower them. An ethical approach to the research was taken from the outset; in particular the code of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004) was incorporated into the design, as were the requirements of the Data Protection Act. Ethical considerations were paramount in this inquiry and the rights and sensitivities of the individuals involved were protected.

A methodology was employed in this inquiry that was fit for purpose as this was crucial to ensure findings produced are valid and insightful. Ethical problems in interview research arise particularly because of 'the complexities of 'researching private lives and placing accounts in the public arena.' (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, & Miller, 2002: 1). Ethical issues go through the entire process of the interview investigation, and potential ethical concerns should be taken into consideration from the very start of the investigation to the final report. Ethical academic exploration operates with the intention of ensuring that the work has no detrimental effects for anyone involved in the research process, and that the principles of privacy and participation through informed consent are upheld. A deontological view is taken in this work (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2009) and a researcher must demonstrate 'academic integrity and honesty, and respect for other people' (Punch, 2000: 56), and attempt to maintain an 'ethic of care' (Heath, Brooks & Cleaver, 2009).

The need to respect and exercise a duty of care was paramount. The aim was 'to leave them somewhat better off for having talked to you' (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 40); or at least, to ensure they were not disadvantaged by their participation. Care was taken to ensure that the interview times did not interfere with their studies. As with most qualitative research, case studies involve delving into people's lives, personal views and circumstances. Frankel & Wallen (1990) underline the need to protect identities by not using actual/true names and the need to assure participants of confidentiality. Elliot (2006) argues that if we gave people a chance to tell their stories, and have their voices heard within the context of research, we needed to be able to attribute these stories. There was a need to treat the insights given with dignity and respect. To protect the identity and ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms have been used throughout the thesis.

Approval and consent by the two university Ethics Committees (the researcher's university and the case study site) was sought prior to the interviews (see Appendix Thirteen and Appendix Fourteen). Voluntary informed consent is considered a norm by which researchers will undertake research, and deception is to be avoided unless the research design specifically requires it (BERA, 2004). Potential participants were given information to allow them to give written informed consent. (See Appendix Five for a copy of the participant information sheet and Appendix Six for a copy of the consent form.) This included the aims of the research, their participation in a recorded interview and the use of findings.

Participants were informed about the dissemination of findings. They were aware that the findings would be primarily part of the PhD thesis. It was made clear that participation was voluntary and participants were informed (and reminded) of their right to withdraw at any time. Interviews were digitally recorded, with the prior consent of the participants. No one refused permission to record the interview and the presence of the recorder did not seem to concern the participants. During the interviews, it was important to consider Scott & Usher's (1999) observation that using a recorder signals that the interview is a public conversation, subject to the rules of public engagement and subsequently becomes framed in this way.

The benefit gained from being able to listen and share the conversation, as opposed to spending the interview trying to write everything the interviewee said, outweighed the disadvantages of the recorder. The accuracy of the text from a digitally recorded conversation could not be matched with written note taking. Efforts were made to ensure that the interviews carried out lasted no longer than one hour and only continued beyond the hour if the participant explicitly stated that he/she was happy to continue.

It was recognised that there was potential for participants to reveal personal, potentially sensitive, information. It was important to remain sensitive to the participants' emotional state and to offer to stop the interview in the case of distress. The participants who were affected emotionally wished to continue with the interview and were assured that apologies were not necessary. The participants were informed of this before beginning the interview and that they could refuse to continue the interview if they felt unhappy. Participants were told before, and reminded during, that they were not obliged to answer any questions and free to withdraw at any stage. In keeping with BERA's Ethical Guidelines (2004), all participants were offered the chance to check the transcript and to request changes to factual errors and any points that they felt had been misrepresented. When writing up the research, the campus and participants pseudonyms were used to protect their anonymity. Participants were reassured that these pseudonyms would be used throughout the thesis, and in any subsequent publications,

conference presentations or discussions which made reference to the data produced from their transcript. To increase the validity of the research and to ensure that the participants' views were accurately represented, the participants were emailed a copy of their interview transcript and asked to comment on the account. (See Appendix Seven for selected Pen Portraits.)

4.5 Gaining Access to the Centre

Negotiating access is an integral part of the research process. Most research proposals are designed on the premise that permission to undertake research at a particular research site, or indeed aspects of it, has or will be granted. Even in situations where permission has been granted prior to designing the research, difficulties may still be encountered. Negotiating access is not then a neat and tidy process, which ends as data collection begins. Burgess (1995: 34) points out that during his research:

‘Access could not be negotiated on a single occasion but involved negotiation and renegotiation in different phases of the research process with different members of the (institution)’.

Before gaining access to the ‘The Centre,’ agreement had to be obtained from that institution’s ethics committee, before undertaking the primary research. Prior to interviewing FGSs, the researcher became familiar with its institutional hierarchies and structural dimensions (in terms of its division into faculties and departments, which are based at ‘The Centre’ and the other university sites). This also concerned collating and examining data regarding The Centre over a three year period to discover demographic and achievement patterns (see Appendix Four).

The researcher, prior to applying to undertake this PhD, had worked as a 14-19 Manager in a Further Education college in the campus town, encouraging students to progress to HE (in many instances to ‘The Centre’). This meant the researcher was aware of whom to approach for permission to carry out the inquiry; and was very useful when negotiating possible gatekeepers. During the preliminary stages, access was negotiated informally with The Centre’s Director who assisted in contacting the Vice Chancellor of the university to obtain permission for access to The Centre.

Gaining permission to conduct research in an institution from those in positions of power and/or authority can be useful to researchers in terms of gaining access, but it is important that they are aware of the conflicts that may arise. The issue of power in research, although not always explicit, was one that required careful consideration. The issue of ‘trust’ between the researcher

and the researched was considered at the stages of negotiation and renegotiation. Although the participation of FGSs in this inquiry was voluntary, it was important that access by the researcher to The Centre via permission from the University was not viewed by the participants as anything other than a private piece of research. When asking FGSs to be part of the sample, it was stressed that although their university had agreed to the research, it was an inquiry for a thesis at another university. This dispelled the view that their university was scrutinising their campus 'The Centre.'

4.6 The Tools and Techniques used in the Inquiry

A definable group 'FGSs' were interviewed for this inquiry. This singularity was located in a 'definable, localised boundary of space and time' (Bassey, 1999) (September 2011 to January 2012), and carried out in a 'naturalised' context (The Centre). The following factors were used to identify suitable tools and techniques for the research: the theme of the inquiry; the preliminary research questions; resources; and the previous experience of the researcher. Deciding which research method to follow to gather data was one of the hardest decisions.

Qualitative research was considered the best method as Denzin & Lincoln (1994: 2) state:

'Qualitative research is multi-method in its focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.'

Qualitative researchers prefer to use their participants' words and use thick descriptions (Gall et al., 1996) to present the results of their study avoiding the need to present series of statistical tables and analysis (Armstrong, 1987). Data is analysed as closely as possible and presented in the form they were transcribed. In qualitative research, the researcher builds theory and depending on the finding, s/he may differentiate the original question and form it relative to the direction the study takes. This inductive procedure means that theory is built from data or is grounded in data (Neuman, 1997). With grounded theory, generalisations emerge out of data and not prior to data collection.

The focus of the interview was on the specific experiences (of becoming a student at The Centre, 'the phenomenon') of the participant. The researcher asked the participants to share their experiences and use the information to gain a better understanding of their transition to/and at The Centre. It is not easy for people to expose moments of their lives especially if these

moments had a negative impact. However, people may find it easier to speak about their feelings to a stranger rather than to a friend as the former has more possibilities not to use this information against them at a certain time. Consideration was given whether or not external factors such as environment, family, or school affected the participants' choice to study at The Centre and if so, to what extent they did and what effects this had in their present lives. Grounded theory techniques were at first the only method of analysis used in this inquiry, to allow the development of theory that 'illuminates the area under study' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 24). This qualitative research method 'uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990: 24).

Phenomenographic tools were adopted in the second stage of data generation for a deeper approach to the data. The phenomenographic approach is valuable in investigations involving individuals' conceptions as a collective (Gerber, 1993; Sandberg, 1994). Phenomenography aims to reveal and investigate the different ways people experience phenomena in their world (Dahlgren, 1993; Dall'Alba, 1996; Marton, 1996). Phenomenographical analysis focuses on the various ways people (in this inquiry the participants – FGSs) approach and experience a phenomenon, and their ideas and various ways of thinking about the phenomenon. The object of study in phenomenography is the variations in the ways that an aspect of the world has been experienced by a group of people (Marton & Booth, 1997). It is about describing the world as experienced, and revealing and describing the variation that exists (Bowden, 2005). Phenomenography takes the position that experience is relational, not purely objective, independent of people, nor purely subjective, independent of the world. Knowledge is then created from the relations between persons and in relation to the world. As Marton & Booth, explain, with reference to a learner (1997: 13):

'There is not a real world 'out there' and a subjective world 'in here'. The world (as experienced) is not constructed by the learner, nor is it imposed upon her; it is constituted as an internal relation between them. There is only one world, but it is a world that we experience.'

The reason for adopting a phenomenography approach was to present a set of logically interrelated descriptive categories, which not only described ways of experiencing but was also more efficient handling of the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). These objectives enable phenomenography to contribute effectively to this inquiry by identifying and explaining how FGSs negotiate entry to HE. By reanalysing the transcripts, to establish how experiences influence FGSs' desire and pathway to study at HE, and the factors that led the students to study

at The Centre, the phenomenographic approach facilitated the overall experience of FGSs at The Centre during their FS.

The nature of conceptions assumed in phenomenography determines its explorative feature. In investigating the social significance of young people (FGSs) taking the decision to study at university level, the need to depict individual trajectories as developing in social constellations is important to consider (c.f. Rose, 1989; Foucault, 1986, 1980; Wexler, 1992; Burkitt, 1991; Usher & Edwards, 1994).

Case studies can use a number of techniques to gather data including observation, narrative accounts, interview and surveying techniques (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000: 190). The technique a researcher chooses is dependent on the nature of the research questions, the unit of analysis and a number of other factors. Clearly, there are practical factors as well as methodological considerations to take into account. The power of case study research to offer symbiotic analysis of individuals, groups and historical context meant that it was confirmed as the most appropriate research form. Avis's (1997a) critique of an approach, which 'diverts attention from the political economy of educational relations in which educational processes are placed', serves as a warning, so the political economy of educational relations remains integral to the theoretical approach examining educational process, in tandem with the theoretical arguments in favour of case study provided by Hakim (1987), Yin (1993), and Stake (1995).

Avis (1997a: 13) wrote a critical analysis of educational relationships which located HE in its wider setting by recognising that 'educational struggles operate at a number of interrelated sites that range across and within the classroom, educational institution, the state, both local and national, within civil society as well as the polity' (Avis 1997a). It was with this 'firm problem' in mind that case study research using a semi-structured interview technique with a grounded theory and phenomenographic approach became the instruments adopted. These were felt to be the appropriate medium for identification and analysis of the forces informing FGSs' decisions to study at The Centre and their experiences during their FS.

The compatible properties of case study research are summed up in Hakim's (1987: 9) assertion that qualitative research per se 'can deal with causes only at the level of the intentional, self-directing and knowledgeable individual, whereas case studies can deal with a greater variety of causal processes.' According to Hamel et al. (1993) the goal of a case study is to 'reconstruct and analyse a case from a sociological perspective'. For this reason, Hamel suggests that a case study should be considered an approach rather than a method (Hamel et al., 1993). There were several reasons for adopting a case study approach in this research. Case studies can be

particularly effective when the goal of the research is to 'strive to highlight the features and attributes of social life' (Hamel et al., 1993).

Guba & Lincoln (1981: 378) warn that case studies can oversimplify or exaggerate a situation, leading the reader to erroneous conclusions about the actual state of affairs and that readers may mistake the account for the whole when a case study is but a slice of life. The slice of life which was investigated at 'The Centre' holds some clues regarding FGSs and how they view their studies. Only by understanding these issues can we understand the micro effect of social policy in relation to HE.

4.7 The Structure of the Interview

Writers on research methodology, such as Bell (1993) and Borg & Gall (1983), suggest that there are basically three types of interview; the structured interview, the semi-structured, guided or focused interview, and the unstructured interview. The highly structured interview is used to collect information based on fact or opinion, such as in opinion polls, where open-ended questions are avoided. Borg & Gall (1983) suggest that educational researchers are likely to use the form of semi-structured interview, where the researcher uses questions as this approach combines depth and objectivity to produce information which could not be gleaned by any other method.

Semi-structured interviews were felt to be the most appropriate as the researcher was able to probe deeper attitudes and perceptions but in a way that avoided interviewer bias. By using individual semi-structured interview methods, there is the opportunity and the choice to expand, clarify and ask additional questions based on the participant's story that will allow for a deeper and better understanding of the participant's experiences. In this inquiry participants were probed regarding their educational/occupational history; experience of HE in the family (the formal and informal curriculum); personal/biographical circumstances (familial/personal relationships/family background); financial/domestic situation; social network (hobbies/friends/family/part-time work); and meaning (the significance of HE to the individual).

Best & Kahn (1989) see the interview as a type of oral questionnaire, and emphasise the importance of preparation, especially of the questions to be asked. They point out that the written schedule will provide a structure for the interview and ensure the interviewer will get the required data. Gay (1987: 87) comments that the written guide should not only indicate the questions to be asked but the order in which they are to be used and that in the interests of obtaining comparable data from the respondents all the interviews should follow the same

format. Oppenheim (1992) underlines the important role of the interview schedule, especially in preventing systematic bias, emphasising the need for standardisation of the schedule and of the 'interviewers' behaviour' in preventing such bias and thereby ensuring validity as far as possible.

Prompts and probes are usually necessary as an adjunct to the main question. Drever (1995) describes both as subordinate questions and gives a very straightforward definition of each, making the difference quite clear. The prompt, he says, is used to encourage the respondents to answer and to say as much as they can or wish. The probe is used to elicit more detail from respondents or further explanation in their answers to the basic questions. Oppenheim's (1992: 91) definition of the probe is in accordance with that of Drever (1995), and he believes that the probe questions should be included in the interview schedule. He describes the probe as giving the interview one of its main advantages over the written questionnaire, but also sees it as one of the 'most serious sources of interviewer bias', presumably because it can slant the direction of answers. Cohen et al. (2000) describe the probe as allowing more depth to answers or clearing up any misunderstandings.

In summary, it seems from all the above comments that for this inquiry the use of the interview style with one key question, plus open-ended questions as prompts and probes, was fully justified as the principal means of data-collection for the major part of the investigation. It allowed a degree of control without undue rigidity. The interviews were designed as in-depth interviews taking account of the characteristics of grounded theory methodology.

The students were asked one question 'How did you come to be a student at the [REDACTED] [REDACTED]?' They were then prompted throughout the interview regarding their experiences at The Centre, perception of their social class, family background etc. Building up a sense of dialogue and trust whereby participants could talk freely during the interview about their experiences was important in to 'provide insights into the narratives they use to describe the meanings of their social world' (Miller & Glassner, 2004: 134). This consequently mirrors the interpretive and social process whereby stories are not transmitted, but rather are co-created and meanings are communicated. In the interpretive tradition, the interviewee is an active constructor and communicator of knowledge with his/her own views (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004).

Interviewing has been described as 'rather like a marriage; everyone knows what it is....and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets (Oakley, 1981: 31). For a researcher, however, there are therefore a number of problems that need to be considered and addressed to

ensure validity is not questioned. There is, for example, recognition that interviewing can present considerable scope for manipulation (Kvale, 2001). There can also be a 'complex play of conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings, fears, power, desires and needs on the part of the interviewer and interviewee' (Scheurich, 1997: 73).

Hitchcock & Hughes (1995: 165) believe that the personal characteristics of the interviewer are a main source of bias in interview responses. They quote the 'key variables of age, gender, class and ethnicity' as having a vital role to play here. Holmes (1998) also notes the limitations for the researcher which can be imposed by gender and ethnicity in particular. This is most unfortunate since the lone interviewer / researcher can do nothing whatsoever to alter or even 'soft pedal' any of these factors.

The location and time of the interview was considered important and the participants were seen at a time and pace that suited them. Powney & Watts (1987: 130) note that the conditions in which the interview takes place can have an adverse effect, causing bias in replies, and also, in some circumstances, being quite distracting for the interviewer. They list locations not ideal such as rooms that are noisy, liable to constant interruption, have little privacy and are not therefore 'conducive to the intimacy of an interview', or have other strong associations. Hitchcock & Hughes (1995) believe that the method chosen for recording information during the interview is most important and they, together with Powney & Watts (1987) and Oppenheim (1992), all strongly support the use of the tape-recorder for this type of interview. Oppenheim, however, emphasises the need to obtain participants' permission to use this method.

Disadvantages include possible constraints that respondents might feel when a tape recorder is used, as noted by Hitchcock & Hughes (1995), who suggest that it should be located as unobtrusively as possible. Graue & Walsh (1998: 118) warn of the many mechanical pitfalls in its use, like malfunctioning, and also that 'dependence on a recorder can lead one to be less attentive' than would be the case with hand-written notes. On the other hand, one of the main advantages of the tape recorder would be the far greater accuracy of data collected in this way, as opposed to the 'pencil-and-paper' method. Borg & Gall (1983) add that this can also help to avoid bias, since there is no fear of the interviewer subconsciously selecting the desired responses to record in writing. All the above factors are very important in establishing a rapport with the respondent, which is vital if the researcher is to get full and reasonably valid responses. Best & Kahn (1989: 187) believe that establishing rapport is 'the key to effective interviewing', and Gay (1987) sees considerable value in spending some time on establishing rapport and putting the respondent at ease. Oppenheim (1992) goes into some detail as to exactly how this might best be achieved, for example, by starting off with very general questions not necessarily

related to those of the interview schedule, such as asking the respondents to tell something about themselves. For this inquiry these general questions enable the researcher to gain a greater understanding of the background of the participants and were part of accounts analysed by the researcher.

For this inquiry the interviews were arranged at a convenient time and location for each of the students. These took place in number of settings (coffee shops, common room, and interview rooms at The Centre) and at different times of day. The interviews normally lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and notes and memos were made. At the beginning of each interview the inquiries aims were restated (see Appendix Five), and consent gained (see Appendix Six). All interviews were recorded following consent from the respondents. Ellis (2010) maintains that any participant in a study has the right to expect that he or she will not be identifiable when the findings of the research are made public. The students were informed at the start of their interview that any identifying elements would be removed from transcripts and that they would be able to withdraw from the inquiry at any time. All participants were emailed a copy of their transcript and given the opportunity to add comments or details, if they wished. None of the students chose to do this or exercised their right to withdraw or limit the use of the data.

During the interviews care was taken to ensure they felt comfortable in the interview context, and create a 'positive experience' (Kvale, 1996: 36) for participants. Attempts were made to ensure that the participants felt that they were 'competent' (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 125) and had something useful and valuable to contribute. The participants were emphasised with what they said through both linguistic and paralinguistic responses, such as verbal agreement, nodding and smiling.

Care was taken to use the participants' own expressions and vocabulary when checking understanding of what had been said. As part of this approach what the participants said was summarised, especially if they appeared to be losing confidence in their responses. This served two different purposes, it reassured them that they were providing useful information and it ensured that the interpretation of their account was accurate. Antikainen, Houston, Kauppilla & Huotelin (1996) argue that the way in which people articulate and interpret past experiences through narrative accounts is not necessarily fixed, but part of an on-going process of reflection. During interviews, the meaning that individuals attributed to specific events or periods in their lives can be influenced by their nearness to, or distance from, those events.

4.8 The Selection of the Sample

Literature in terms of student experiences of learning at university has pointed to the importance of the characteristics of the university which is seen in terms of institutional policies and procedures, the distinction between 'old' and 'new' universities, and response to governmental documents. In particular, it has been argued that the choices a particular group of students, described as 'non-traditional' make are classed, gendered, and raced (Reay et al., 2005; Ball et al., 2002; Bowl, 2001; Thomas, 2002), which in turn influence their experiences in HE. Punch (2000) mentions selection of sampling in terms participants, timing, location and access, as issues that need to be considered before setting up the research methods. Through using criteria such as status and tradition of the university (in terms of 'old' and 'new'), geographical location, reputation, and access, The Centre was selected as the case study site to carry out the interviews as the researcher was interested in the diversity of FGSs (unique characteristics/variations), why they had chosen to study at The Centre and their experiences of transition to and at the campus.

The selection of the participants was not based upon 'representative' sampling techniques. Instead, an approach was adopted which was informed largely by 'opportunistic' and 'convenience' sampling (c.f. Cohen & Manion, 1996; Goodson & Sikes, 2004). It was not the intention, or desire, to achieve a 'representative' sample of participants from which to 'generalise'. To adopt such an approach would be to assume that the experiences of an individual or group sharing similar characteristics could be representative of those of the wider population or a subgroup in it. (See Appendix Seven for selected pen portraits of the participants.) Owing to the time commitment and ethical considerations the researcher requested participation of students for this inquiry by requesting access to induction week activities at The Centre. This meant that potential participants were able to meet the researcher and those expressing an interest were given an information sheet to help them decide whether to participate that included the researcher's contact details. Those who decided to take part had an initial meeting arranged at a time convenient to them to discuss the research process. The initial meeting lasted approximately fifteen minutes.

The researcher lives and, prior to the undertaking, had worked at a local FE college in the town. This may have encouraged a positive reaction to the inquiry as the researcher was someone who was part of the fabric of the town and had in some cases taught relatives of some of the respondents. This may have caused the respondents to develop a trust in the researcher and a sense that inquiry had a value. Powney & Watts (1987) make comments on the question of personal presentation in general terms, pointing out that clothes, badges, jewellery etc., can all

send signals and could affect the respondents sufficiently to make them feel uncomfortable and influence their responses.

The criteria used when selecting FGSs was that they were year one undergraduates and willing to take part. Self-selecting sampling was chosen for ethical reasons, as there is less danger of participants feeling pressured to participate with this method. The primary concern of the researcher was to achieve a sufficient, appropriately balanced profile so that 'sufficient data are collected for researchers to be able to explore significant features of the case and to put forward interpretations of what is observed' (Bassey, 1999: 47). A balance needed to be struck to ensure feasibility in terms of time and resources available for a doctoral inquiry while retaining sufficient numbers of FGSs to enable meaningful analysis. As such, it was decided to approach, initially, twenty potential interviewees from a variety of programmes; this became fifty, through participants suggesting/introducing other possible FGSs. Fifteen of the FGSs were male and thirty five female. Twenty eight FGSs were undertaking a foundation degree, the other twenty two a mixture of BA/BSc joint and single honour programmes. Eight FGSs had previously dropped out of other universities and were recommencing year one at The Centre.

The aim of the interview was to encourage FGSs to describe and reflect upon their individual experiences. It was seen unlikely that a fixed sequence of predetermined questions would be suitable, because standardised interview schedules can constrain FGSs' responses as they rarely allow them to raise important issues that are not contained in the schedule. The issues raised from the interviews were located under initially broad categories, such as prior experience (i.e. educational/occupational history); experience of HE in the family (the formal and informal curriculum); personal/biographical circumstances (familial/personal relationships/family background); financial/domestic situation); social network (hobbies/friends/family/part-time work) and meaning (the significance of HE to the individual). (See Appendix Fourteen for the Interview Schedule.)

The researcher was careful not to dominate the situation and allow issues to emerge other than those that had been brought to the setting. It was important to bear in mind that the interviews were meant to provide participants with an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences, consider the meaning they attached to those experiences and how they felt. In this sense, the interviews differed from highly structured or standardised models, but at the same time could not be described as 'unstructured'. Since the idea that any interview can be truly completely unstructured is problematic. In interview situations, it is the researcher who ultimately selects the topic for discussion and in doing so they are to some extent directing, or incorporating structure into, the interview.

As Burgess (1982: 107) comments:

‘The unstructured interview may, therefore, appear to be without a structure, but nevertheless, the researcher has to establish a framework within the interview; the unstructured interview is flexible, but it is also controlled’.

The participant chose the venue and time of the interview. Woods (1991: 70) argues that when interviews are arranged, where possible interviewees should be given choice of time and location: ‘This is not only a matter of convenience and availability, but again may give them a sense of control and confidence’. According to Woods (1991), the less formal and more relaxed the situation is, the better the interview. During the interviews care was taken to ensure they felt comfortable in the interview context, to create a ‘positive experience’ (Kvale, 1996: 36) for participants. Attempts were made to ensure that the participants felt that they were ‘competent’ (Rubin & Rubin, 1995: 125) and had something useful and valuable to contribute. Empathy was shown to participants with what they said through both linguistic and paralinguistic responses, such as verbal agreement, nodding and smiling.

Care was taken to use the participants’ own expressions and vocabulary when checking understanding of what had been said. As part of this approach, what the participants said was summarised, especially if they appeared to be losing confidence in their responses. This served two different functions, it reassured them that they were providing useful information and it ensured that the interpretation of their account was accurate. Antikainen, Houston, Kaupilla & Huotelin (1996), argue that the way people articulate and interpret past experiences through narrative accounts is not necessarily fixed, but part of an on-going process of reflection. During interviews, the meaning that the participants attributed to specific events or periods in their lives was influenced by their nearness to, or distance from, those events.

4.9 Summary

This chapter has discussed the research design, ethical considerations, gaining access to the case study site and the selection of the sample. Also discussed were the methodological considerations of the inquiry regarding use of grounded theory and phenomenographic tools to produce an integrated approach to the inquiry and develop a greater understanding of the FGS experience during a period of personal and political transition.

5. Using Grounded Theory (Stage One)

This chapter discusses how grounded theory guided the data collection, analysis and development of theory. Glaser (1978) advocates waiting to conduct the literature review until initial findings have been made in order to not influence the researcher with preconceived ideas. This inquiry followed the advice of Charmaz (2006) and carried out an initial review of the literature before the data collection took place. However, the main review of the literature was not undertaken until after completing the grounded theory, stage one, data analysis.

According to Chenitz & Swanson (1986: 3) the objective of generating theory is to further understanding of 'basic human patterns common in social life'. This objective of theory generation implies a focus not just on description but also rather on analysis and conceptualisation. There is an implication about how the researcher analyses data and conceptualises theory, as such, the interpretation of the data is an iterative process linked to the researcher's own worldviews. In acknowledging the intimate relationship between the researcher and the analysis of the data, the principle is to let the theory emerge from the data as part of the research process, rather than being preconceived or forced into a pre-existing hypothesis.

During all the stages of data analysis, the aim was to become familiar with all the data collected and look for patterns across and in the cases. The data was grounded in a circle of idea generation, planning, collection, analysis, interpretation and evaluation that fed to and formed part of each aspect of the data analysis. Such an approach shares features with grounded theory; the researcher is not proposing the objectivist/naïve realist version of this (as cited in Silverman, 2000: 62), where a researcher can approach a context with a blank sheet and discover the facts.

This inquiry did not strictly adhere to the principles of grounded theory; it used elements of grounded theory that are appropriate for data analysis. The use of grounded theory principles (Strauss & Corbin, 1999) enabled the researcher to establish the 'what' that was being said in the data. The data analysis process focused on drawing out what seemed most salient from the participants' view. The process for coding and developing themes was used with an emphasis on generating descriptive themes and subthemes, rather than the structured conceptual categories. The data collected from the interviews was first transcribed verbatim, and a hard copy was produced for the gathered data to be carefully read. Each transcript was carefully examined to enable the researcher to obtain a comprehensive view of the interviews.

Initial coding commenced after each interview was transcribed, and concerned the ‘fragments of data-words, lines, segments and incidents’ (Charmaz, 2006:42). Further reading took place to start and develop categories deriving from the data. According to Gillham (2000: 59) ‘categories’ are simply headings, a first stage in tidily presenting the range of data the interviews produced. In themselves, those headings were the important aspect and the substance and meaning came with the use of direct quotations, categorised under the headings to display the range and character of the response.

Charmaz (2006: 103) defines coding as ‘categorising segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarises and accounts for each piece of data’. A code can either be a label related to the data or the exact word in the data, known as an *in vivo* code. Coding is a systematic process of analysing the data, line by line in search of phenomena of interest and then labelling the data with a code. Grounded theory coding requires the researcher to stop and ask analytical questions of the data that has been gathered (Charmaz, 2006). Codes, concepts and categories are generated by analysis of the data, and a process of constant comparative analysis is used. This compares the codes, categories and concepts iteratively and constantly to each other until a core category is discovered and theoretical saturation is reached, leading to theory generation. A concept is defined as ‘a labelled phenomenon’, ‘...an abstract representation of an event, object or action/intervention that a researcher identifies as being significant in the data’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 103). Open coding is the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 101).

There are two types of codes that can be generated according to Glaser (1978), substantive and theoretical codes. Substantive codes conceptualise the empirical substance of the area of research, while theoretical codes conceptualise how the substantive codes may relate to each other. The researcher followed the general research process, starting with the interviewing of the cases, transcribing, coding and writing memos, where necessary. Codes were compared with each other and concepts (higher-level codes) started to emerge. The codes were constantly compared for connections, relationships, properties and dimensions. Theoretical coding and coding families were used, and the substantive theory, grounded in the data and after a long analysis process, emerged.

The use of open coding to initialise data analysis ensured that theory did not become a straitjacket; only once codes had been generated and themes identified was the theory once more overtly utilised. At this point there was considerable potential to challenge and amend the theoretical framework (the theories of Bourdieu, and later Archer, then finally Weick) to

develop a conceptual framework. This approach allowed for the application of existing theories and knowledge, while avoiding placing data in a theoretical straightjacket. It can be used to generate questions to develop new theory, or theory that is specific to particular social settings, through a systematic process of interrogation of data. This ensured that the coverage of data was rigorous and representative and that contrary cases were taken into account.

A grounded theory tenet is that researchers should be familiar with their discipline, but should not enter their study with a fully conceived idea of what their participants' 'problems' actually are, how they approach them and how they may resolve them. This will emerge early on during raw data analysis (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998, 2001, 2005). The initial concern of this inquiry was to research the experiences of FGSs at The Centre. The main concern was what this suggested about the ideologies of The Centre, based on the unique characteristics of FGSs and the implications of this for WP practice. In respect to FGSs in HE in the light of the legacy HE policy of New Labour and the changing policy framework of the coalition government.

Clearly, the grounded theory analysis methodology is highly empirical and practical as well as being inductive and intuitive. From a purist stance, on the surface at least, the initial focus was the individual experiences of FGSs, delving into their motivation to apply to 'The Centre'.

5.1 The Process of Data Analysis

The primary research was conducted in the FGSs' FS at The Centre to capture their experiences and interpretations. From these interviews, emerging themes were identified in the transcripts. From these themes, appropriate theoretical frameworks provided the reference point from which interpretation of these experiences identified points of commonality that could provide useful insights into this cohort of HE students. The interviews generated a large amount of data, which created practical problems of data management. In total there were fifty hours of interviews, which were all researcher transcribed. Although a lengthy process, this proved to be valuable in becoming familiar with the data. Data was stored securely electronically and, when in paper form, in a secure filing cabinet. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were sent to participants to check and amend as necessary and once confirmed they were filed safely (Yin, 2003).

The overall stance taken in relation to the analysis bears similarities to that taken by Charmaz (2003) in the sense that the intention was to offer a thorough analysis of the meanings FGSs attributed to their experiences which could be justified in relation to the underlying data. Charmaz's (2003) constructivist perspective on qualitative data treads a line between post

positivist and post-modern perspectives and suggests the possibility of rigorous empirical analysis of perspectives and meanings without the assumption that this identifies objective universal truths unaffected by the perspectives of the researcher. While the present analysis of transcript data differed from Charmaz's (2003) work in some of its procedures, it was conducted in a similar spirit.

The emphasis on interview data was underpinned by an assumption that, to use Henning et al.'s (2004: 50) words, 'the individual's perspective is an important part of the fabric of society and of our joint knowledge of social processes and the human condition'. Intersectional factors that emerge through a grounded theory approach were accommodated as part of the evidence and analysis. The data collected from the demographic sheet (Appendix Eight) were used in conjunction with the transcripts. The themes were then examined for commonalities across particular undergraduate programmes, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, domicile, support needs, and age (as a Stage One student aged 18, 19, or 20). The demographic aspects provided by the respondents were examined to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of the sample and to further interrogate the transcripts. (See Appendix Nine for Key Demographic Data.)

Initially the interviews were analysed in relation to four main themes: motivation (and reasons for inquiry); choice (social network/distance from family home); experience of the curriculum; and the meaning of HE (to individual identities). These themes were generated from the initial coding of the transcripts and were further developed. Where aspects in the transcripts were considered to be interesting or controversial (for example if the participants had difficulty articulating a point), the original recorded data was revisited to examine and consider whether analysis of speech patterns (pauses, hesitancy etc.) might shed any additional light on the data.

A manual method was preferred for close engagement with and saturation of the data and for close line-by-line attention to detail with occasion to stand back and look at the themes in relation to the full picture. The aim was constant reference to the original source material and the participant 'voices'. Each transcript was returned to the participant with an invitation for any deletions/amendments/additions to be made. Any identifying information was removed from the transcripts and the findings from the analysed data were discussed with the FGSs for corroboration and external validity. Through the generation of empirical material communicative validity was achieved by establishing what Apel (1972) refers to as a community of interpretation. Apel considers the production of valid knowledge claims, presupposing an understanding between researcher and research participants about what they are doing.

The inquiry followed the advice of Johnson & Christensen (2000); the data analysis was completed when conceptual redundancy had been reached (when no further concepts or codes could be gathered from this data set). There was a potential problem in that coding manually can generate too many codes, so consideration was also given to coding with use of objectivistic codes or heuristic codes. Heuristic codes provide a more complete picture and are more evolutionary. The process of iterative coding, analysis, recording and revisiting the original raw data was considered a necessary endeavour to prevent assumptions from shaping the data analysis process. This also enables discovery of possible biases, prevents imposing the researcher's understanding and constructions on the data, and provides an ethically based 'truthful' representation of the data. To triangulate and reach a sense of 'truth' and not an imposed bias, reflective memos were maintained prior to and during the process of the project. This continuous reflection and self-questioning approach aimed to bring personal perceptions, presuppositions and biases to the surface.

Each of the codes related to the initial research question and the interview data was coded firstly using these MCs and the sub-codes emerged. (See Appendix Ten for the Initial Coding Frame.). Four themes, seven codes and fifty five dimensions were developed from the Stage One data analysis.

The master codes (MCs) in Table Six below were developed after a process of testing and refining, these were further developed using phenomenographic tools to develop a theoretical explanation.

Table Six The Grounded Theory Codes

| | | |
|------------|--------|---|
| MC1 | (BIO) | Biographical information |
| MC2 | (EXP) | Prior educational/occupational experience |
| MC3 | (FCUR) | Experience of the formal curriculum at The Centre |
| MC4 | (ICUR) | Experience of the informal curriculum at The Centre |
| MC5 | (MOT) | Motivation for entering HE at The Centre |
| MC6 | (CHO) | HE choices (Why did they choose The Centre?) |
| MC7 | (MEA) | Meaning of HE |

The integration of categories and properties was achieved by comparing incidents in the transcripts with particular properties of a category. It consists of comparing incidents in the same category with a particular property of that category. During this process, the dimensions of a property are identified and categories and their diverse properties are integrated through the relations identified in incidents.

This process also enables a lift in theory development as researchers make related theoretical sense through constant comparison while integrating categories and properties (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The codes developed from using grounded theory tools are used with existing theory (Bourdieu, Archer, and Weick) to develop the ‘transcultural’ model. From these, four main dimensions: agency, motivation, critical life events and social interactions were produced (see Appendix Ten). The themes developed from the Stage One grounded theory analysis of the transcripts are summarised below in Table Seven. The master codes and transcripts were reconsidered in depth using phenomenographic tools (Stage Two of the data analysis), to aid in the development of a theoretical explanation regarding transition (see Chapter Eight Categories from Phenomenographic Data Generation: Making Sense of Transition).

Table Seven The Themes Developed from the Stage One Data Analysis of the Transcripts

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Research Approach | Qualitative Approach Stage One – Data Generation Grounded Theory |
| Dimensions | Agency, Motivation, Critical Life Events, Social Interactions |

5.2 The Conceptual Framework

‘... no social theory can be advanced without making some assumptions about what kind of reality it is dealing with and how to explain it. All social theory is ontologically shaped and methodologically moulded even if these processes remain covert and scarcely acknowledged by the practitioner.’ (Archer, 1995: 57-8).

The ‘transcultural’ model (Figure Three: 118) draws on the data analysis of the FGSs’ transcripts and a subsequent review of the literature. The transition into HE is often overwhelming as students experience an awareness of their bicultural identity (Hendrix, 2000). London (1989: 144) framed the dilemma that many first generation students face as a need ‘to reconcile the conflicting demands of family membership with educational mobility’. Drawing on psychoanalytic and family systems theories as well as Erikson’s theory of adult development (1959), London explains that it is common for late adolescents to separate from their families of origin to establish adult identities, yet it is particularly difficult for first generation students. He uses the term ‘breakaway guilt’ to explain the shame first generation students experience when they risk a real or perceived betrayal by the family (1989: 153). Orbe (2004) found that some first generation students choose to maintain two very distinct identities: home and university,

because by choosing their university student identity, they are indirectly perceived as rejecting the family.

There is also a discomfort associated with membership in both places described by Rendon (1992: 56) as 'living simultaneously in two vastly different worlds while being fully accepted in neither'. Housel (2012: 3) described it as 'straddling two class cultures.' The movement into a bourgeois space (Hendrix, 2000) causes some FGSs 'to feel as if they are operating in multiple worlds, or standing at the edge of two cultures, that of their family and friends and that of their college' (Putnam & Thompson, 2006: 124). Such dialectical tensions (Orbe, 2008) create further dilemmas for FGSs as they attempt to negotiate their multidimensional identities. This was explained by Rod as:

'In a way I'm kind of caught of ummm in between two groups, my family and my background and this world of (long pause) being here at uni. I don't feel that (I) fully belong to either group anymore. I kind of have one foot standing in each world.'

The FGSs in this inquiry straddled a home culture that has little prior knowledge of the requirements and academic culture of HE. During their FS they were in a period of cultural transition; they not only crossed the class border but started to also interpret a new culture. The model aims to illuminate what space FGSs occupied in their FS at The Centre in relation to their dualism of home and university lives.

The participants in this inquiry initially experienced bifurcation in their experiences of being part of life at The Centre and their lives outside. The FGSs in this inquiry were stimulated by the necessity of making sense of their experience of being at The Centre, to acquire new affordances and resolve conflicting ones. They struggled to create, appropriate and transform during their FS as they attempted to negotiate a secure sense of self as a university student. They encountered new people, discussed new ideas and saw events occur in their new world. In doing so, they found themselves in an environment which was contradictory or complimentary to their world prior to their transition to HE at The Centre. Assuming they did not engage in avoidance strategies to evade the moment, they were compelled to make sense of their new environment.

The conceptual model (Figure Three) overleaf aims to describe the interplay between aspects of FGS' lives during their FS at The Centre as they start to bridge two worlds (HE and their culture). It attempts to address a gap in Bourdieu's theory of action by a reasonable reinterpretation of habitus and create room for human choices as well as social influences on

behaviour. This exposes a function for reflexive deliberations proposed by Archer and combination of the theories of Archer, Bourdieu and Weick.

Figure Three The ‘Transcultural’ Model

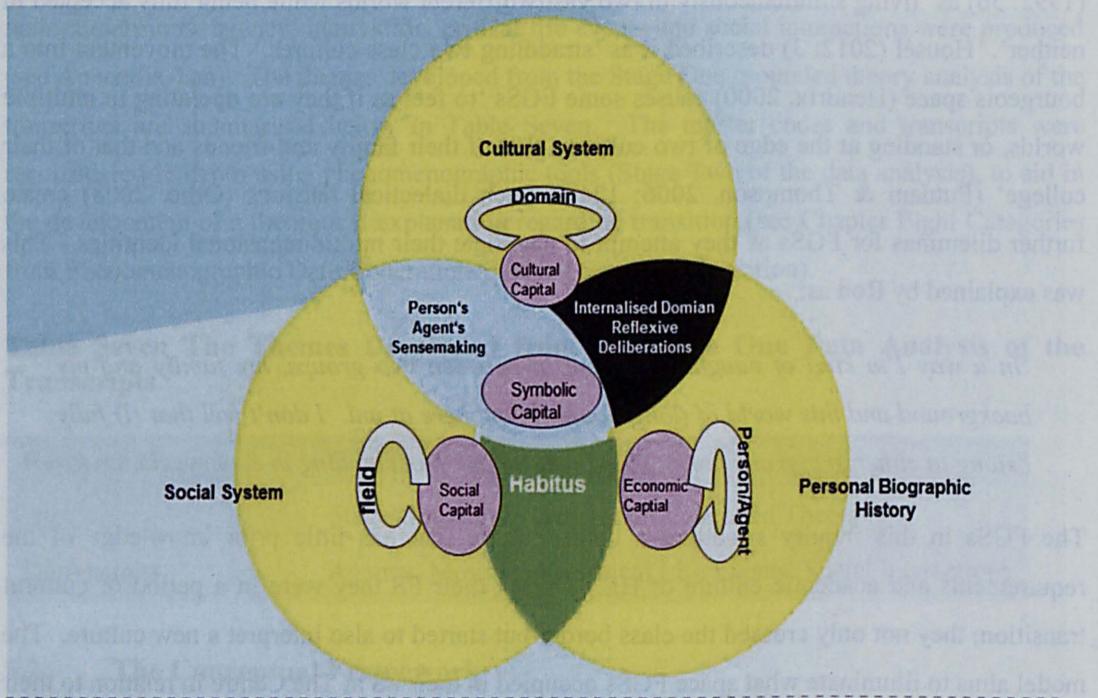


Table Eight The Intersections and Overlap of the Entities

| | |
|-----|---|
| 1) | The social system |
| 2) | The cultural system |
| 3) | The individual’s personal biological, sociocultural history |
| 4) | The individual (person/agent) (from Archer) |
| 5) | The field (from Bourdieu) |
| 6) | The domain (‘The Centre’, from Bourdieu) |
| 7) | Economic capital (possessed by a student, from Bourdieu) |
| 8) | Social capital (possessed by a student, from Bourdieu) |
| 9) | Cultural capital (possessed by a student, from Bourdieu) |
| 10) | The individual’s habitus (from Bourdieu) |
| 11) | The individual’s internalised domain (based on Archer) |
| 12) | The person’s/agent’s sensemaking (based on Weick and Archer) |
| 13) | Symbolic capital (possessed by an individual) (from Bourdieu) |

This thesis argues that deliberation/reflection is central to everyday experience. There is a rationalistic moment to this deliberation given that it is driven by things that FGSs experience as

contradicting or complementing their existing beliefs. However, it is not in any meaningful sense a rationalistic process. What can be reconstructed in rationalistic terms represents the possible contours of normative commitment, and what led FGSs to make choices and reflect on what becoming, being and achieving as a student meant to them.

As the FGSs progressed through their FS higher education experiences, they perceived that some peers knew the 'rules of the game' while others were often 'clueless' or 'in the dark' about what was expected or how to navigate The Centre. Margaret explained that:

'The others (fellow students) knew things that I didn't. I always felt like I was slowly behind everyone else'.

Kim shared, '

Their parents are educated and have degrees so they kind of you know, understand what is going on and how to work it and how to apply that to what was expected of them. For me, I kind of have to feel my way around and learn as I go'.

Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as 'the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate' (1989: 17; see also Bourdieu, 1986). Symbolic capital (13) emerged/was present for some of the FGSs in this inquiry. These students stated in their interviews what they felt could be achieved and obtained from studying at The Centre. This gave them a clear perspective of what completing a degree could mean for their future. Sensemaking and the ability to act 'transculturally' emerges in FGSs after the other eleven elements/components/entities have emerged. The first eleven aspects are necessary and sufficient for 'transculture' to develop with the students. (It is important to note that, if the first eleven exist, FGSs will be able to negotiate the two cultures.) However, in the interaction between the individual, field and domain, if the first eleven are present, then the ability to act transculturally may emerge in an individual.

In summary (hypothetically) 'transcultural' FGSs represented by the model have acquired habitus, internalised the domain, interacted with the field, and contributed to the domain. FGSs acquired and utilised all four forms of capital, including the fourth and 'final' form namely symbolic capital in terms of recognition. This thesis argues that Bourdieu's theory of action can be adapted by a reasonable reinterpretation of the habitus that creates space for human choices as well as social influences on our behaviour, through sensemaking. This opens up a role for the sort of reflexive deliberations advocated by Archer and to a reconciliation of the theoretical concepts of both Archer and Bourdieu.

5.3 The Development of the Transcultural Model

The dimensions arising from the use of grounded theory tools to analyse the data—agency, motivation, critical life events, and social interactions (belonging and fitting in) were used to develop the ‘transcultural’ model (Figure Three: 118). The FGSs in this inquiry encountered and experienced a range of transitions as they experienced achievements at The Centre during their FS and developed an identity of a higher education student. There was strong evidence to suggest that the way that the FGSs felt about themselves and The Centre itself made a significant contribution to their experience of being at university. This was not just in terms of their levels of satisfaction or enjoyment of the HE experience, but also crucially on their ability to engage constructively and meaningfully with learning.

The issues of feeling accepted as an individual and feeling a sense of belonging were vital in terms of the quality of students’ experience and their ability to engage and learn. The data gathered offered considerable insight into what ‘belonging’ and ‘feeling accepted’ looked like. They appeared to be pivotal issues; key factors that made the essential difference as to how they experienced HE and how they engaged in learning. The presumption is that as FGSs become more immersed into the life of the university, they will make the connections between how they learn, how they can apply their learning, and who they are becoming. For some, bridging the two different communities, the academic and the home, is met with resistance, while others seem to be more open to a new way of being in these communities. FGSs during the FS explore, benchmark and master information, skills, competencies, and affordances i.e. the capacity for effective action in context, to weigh up, select, and if necessary create new affordances for new contexts. These affordances are the basis for learning and for developing their university life.

The process of becoming a university student for the FGSs in this inquiry links to learning new affordances, managing repertoires of affordances and their relationships to different contexts. This thesis highlights that affordances are inherently ontological; learning a new affordance inevitably involves a shift in identity, and even learning to ‘be’ a HE student involves considerable shifts. Transitions are about changes in the environment and in social and educational practices that involve transformation, dislocation, or growth. That substantially changes the way meanings and practices are constructed, and the way they are experienced by FGSs, in their physical, social, and educational environment. FGSs may experience difficulties when trying to link frameworks and discourses used in their personal communities and those used in their social communities. This can be a result of a perception of their role that is

different to the way learning is conceptualised and practiced in their new environment, especially so when they are exposed to a particular way of thinking and terminology.

In this respect, the 'transcultural' model can allow us to identify the resources and frameworks that FGSs used to construct their identities and conceptions of learning in their previous interactions and the changes they are required to make during their interactions with their new environment (The Centre). Within a Bourdieusian framework, this would suggest that the habitus is in a process of on-going change throughout our lives, and that individuals can change the trajectory that early life experience and socialisation set them on. This would seem to contradict Reay's (2001) assertion that for the most part the changes in habitus are reproductive rather than transformative. FGSs in this inquiry reflected their earlier educational experiences, and actively sought out opportunities to engage in learning, and transform their student identities. Through this it appears that they bought into the economic discourse of education, which frames life-long learning as essential for both individual and wider societal economic prosperity (DfES 2003a).

The process of being an undergraduate involves attempts to become familiar, to negotiate, and to make connections between events, perceptions about knowledge and self-image. The impact of transition varied amongst the participants as transition could be disruptive. At other times quiet and insidious (when taking roles and practices for granted), not all FGSs react to the transitions in the same way. Some perceived them negatively while others as a challenging opportunity. The transitions incorporated the following characteristics: they were continuous, part of a process of cognitive, emotional and social changes, and often involved a sense of reconfiguration in terms of knowledge and self-regard and involved external changes and internal processes.

External changes concern FGSs' experiences and responses as they move between different contexts in their lives. This examines what FGSs perceive desirable in terms of goals and decisions and how these were situated in an HE context. Transitions can disrupt, challenge, and/or strengthen learning and formed part of FGSs' learning trajectory. The pattern for these transitions can imply an aspect of straightforward reaction to contexts or events, such as moving from sixth form/college to HE. It could also imply a break from normative expectations, such as going to university instead of the world of work.

Internal processes considered a student as an individual, and the ways in which they make sense of the interactions between their personal and social realities. These transitions involved shifts, in confidence or in perceptual frameworks, that occur in the individual as they try to understand

or make connections between the different parts of their learning journey, and adjust to the practices of their environment (studying at The Centre). The process through which ideas, practices, expectations, or surroundings become accepted or rejected and the implications for a student's identity and participation forms part of internal processes. The nature of these transitions brought to the fore questions with regard to the role of groups (such as family, friends, or teachers), dimensions of authority and power, and managing between different and often challenging roles and self-perceptions of what is achievement.

FGSs were involved in shifts in confidence and/or perception when in the company of others. This on-going involvement draws upon the dialectic between individual and social practices since it is through their interaction that opportunities for student development are realised. This dialectic is enforced and reinforced through participation in different social interactions that influence the way 'university' can be perceived by FGSs. Such perceptions are not straightforward, but reflect different emphasis placed on personal interest in the subject, the acquisition of higher order skills, the importance of social networks and engaging with The Centre. This understanding is not a means to an end, but rather depends on each FGS's interests and interactions. Presenting FGSs' transitions in relation to interactions, the role of the environment and the nature of the activities is important.

This concept of transition was further developed to produce the conceptual model, which was informed by the general theoretical ideas formulated in the sociocultural tradition. The model was developed using grounded theory analysis of the transcripts and the theories of Archer, Bourdieu and Weick. The model was initially developed from considering the words of one respondent Jenny that: *'University; it's like work, but your parents are proud of you'*. This was stated and/or inferred by FGSs during their interview. The concept of transition emerged from a grounded theory approach to the literature review and data analysis; the importance of the model relates to epistemological as well as methodological contributions to the research area.

This thesis sought to bring together already existing ideas, and by synthesising these, offer a model to illuminate the data. In terms of the complex interrelationships between cultural, social, psychological and organisational influences, in the way in which FGSs understood themselves in terms of their experiences. The identities that FGSs construct about themselves are influenced by a range of issues and the way in which they 'make sense' of experiences. This may include their 'habitus', the institutional habitus and the sensemaking activity they engage in. Helms Mills (2003: 55) asserts that 'identity construction is at the root of sensemaking as it influences how other aspects, or properties of the sensemaking process are understood'. Sensemaking is an updating, reciprocal, reoccurring, and on-going process that

individuals experience as they construct stories to make sense of equivocal experiences. There is no result of these stories and no clear cut retrospective version of the story told in present time. That is not what the process of sensemaking entails. Sensemaking allows us to move on from whatever triggered our uncertainty in the first place by creating an interpretation of a story that is partial, incomplete and constructed, but one that works for us.

Margaret Archer and Pierre Bourdieu both advanced theories of human agency. Archer places emphasis on conscious reflexive deliberation and the consequent choices of identity and projects that individuals make. Bourdieu's concept of habitus places equal emphasis on the role of social conditioning in governing behaviour, and downplays the contribution of conscious deliberation. Despite this, this thesis argues that these two approaches, with some modification using the work of Weick (the role of discourse in constructing the normative self), can be reconciled to create a theory of human action that is relevant to FGSs in their FS.

The triggers that set the sensemaking process in motion (e.g. unequivocal environmental contexts) do not exist outside of an individual's own cognitive creations. Weick (1995: 31) contends:

‘There is not some monolithic, singular, fixed environment that exists detached from and external to these people. Instead, people are very much a part of their own environments. They act, and in doing so create the materials that become the constraints and opportunities, they face. There is not some impersonal 'they' who puts these environments in front of passive people. Instead, the 'they' is people who are more active’.

This is a paradox for those who plan to use sensemaking as a framework in social constructionist ways (Allard-Poesi, 2005). It is a paradox because ‘it defines reality and meanings as socially constructed, yet it seeks to disengage from that experience and objectify it’ (Allard-Poesi, 2005: 171).

Bourdieu’s framework allows for an appreciation of how inequalities in education between non-traditional (FGSs) and the middle class are perpetuated by habitus, field and cultural capital. It does not allow for an understanding of how social change can occur through education, and changes that result in individual and institutional habitus. This links to the importance of how students make sense of themselves as an HE student through ‘sensemaking’ (Weick, 1995), and how as a result change and transformation can occur. The weaknesses in Bourdieu's theory of action can be resolved by a reasonable reinterpretation of habitus which creates space for human

choices, a personal sensemaking process (Weick - sensemaking) as well as social influences. This opens up a role for the sort of reflexive deliberations advocated by Archer and a blending of the key contributions of both Archer and Bourdieu. Weick (1995: 17) identified one of the seven characteristics of sensemaking as being grounded in identity and its production. In relation to the way we perceive ourselves as students, our past familial experiences related to learning and our family culture of learning are major influences. This includes the way we are socialised, and structural factors that may limit the opportunities open to us. It provides a useful model in which to understand how non-traditional students make sense of their learning journeys, and allows links between sensemaking 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 in a social space. In 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. The environment and culture in which we mature our class, gender, ethnicity, age, and the education we experience as children will influence the way in which we make sense of ourselves as adult students. Sensemaking is retrospective, social, on-going, and focused on and by extracted cues in our social environment (Weick, 1995).

Previous research (Furlong et al., 2006; Macaro & Wingate, 2004; Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000) maintains that transitions are complex, non-linear and contribute actively to the way students engage with their environment. Understanding the nature of engagement that these transitions evoke entails a complex process of becoming or 'a discovery for herself, but in so doing, discovers herself' (Barnett, 2007: 54-55). In this sense becoming is twofold: by engaging with learning, individuals are required to search for meaning themselves. In so doing, FGSs are also involved in a process of developing their own position in relation to learning.

The participants' constructions of their identity and the development of perceptual frameworks and conceptions about the process of learning, the evaluation of decisions, such as to go or not to go to university, depended to some extent on their personal goals, structural factors, experiences of compulsory education, and the influence of significant groups. It is useful to consider the individual aspects of the 'transcultural' model and illustrate how they appear from the perspective of (and with respect to) an FGS (person/agent). The FGSs (participants) during their FS (a transitional period) at 'The Centre' navigated, negotiated and began to adapt to two different cultures, their home and the dominant discourse of academia. Learning to bridge the gap between the two cultures was a key challenge for the students. The model aims to explain a 'transcultural' conceptual framework (see Figure Three: 118) which is a synthesis of Weick

sensemaking (2001, 1993, 1995, 2009; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007; Weick et al., 2005), Bourdieu (1986, 1988, 1990, 2001), and Archer (1982, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2007). Archer's work considers the conscious reflexive deliberation, Bourdieu's the theory of action and Weick's as a process by which FGSs give meaning to their experience of being in transition during the FS.

Several streams of literature are grounded in the theoretical perspective of this inquiry. A variety of writers had a theoretical influence on this inquiry: Pierre Bourdieu (1986, 1988 & 1990), Margaret Archer (1982, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2007), Karl Weick (2001, 1993, 1995, 2009; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007; Weick et al., 2005). Bourdieu's concepts of social, cultural and economic capital were used to form the basis of an analysis of the different purposes of education offered in the HE sector. After commencing the literature review, the researcher initially considered that inquiry was concerned with two theorists, initially Bourdieu, then Archer (when transcripts were initially coded during the stage one data analysis). As the grounded theory method was used this emerged to include Weick to aid in the further development of a theoretical explanation.

Employing Bourdieu's (2001: 81) analogy of habitus as a 'socialised body' provided the original research construct for this thesis. Adopting a Bourdieusian, approach towards field provision not only enables consideration to be given to the integrated structures of a particular world but also provides consideration of how habitus and field inform practice within a particular social world (Bourdieu, 2001: 8). The main theoretical challenge reflects Alvesson & Skoldberg's (2000: 4) contention 'it is not the methods but ontology and epistemology which are the determinants of good research'. The ontology, epistemology and methodology adopted for this thesis establishes a research framework and recognises educational establishments, by nature of establishment are socially and 'culturally constructed', or as Bourdieu (1985 & 1986) ascertains a cultural 'field'.

Drawing on Archer's (1982, 1995, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003 & 2007) perspectives on the agency/structure relationship, this framework explains how FGSs negotiate HE during the FS. Archer's concept of reflexivity provides a way of describing how those choices are made in relation to structural conditions and enables us to explain how students are 'persons' showing an inventive capacity to circumvent the constraints imposed by structures. From this position this inquiry reflects social constructivist theories, to consider how FGSs construct values and perceptions initially against the backdrop of Bourdieu's analogy of 'capital' in all its forms.

Seeking to investigate the experiences of year one (stage one) FGSs in their FS at The Centre, the ontological and epistemological framework adopted presents a fundamental methodological challenge. Crotty (1998: 10) suggests that data analysis that examines relationships subsequently influences the research and consequentially 'to talk of the construction of meaning is to talk of the construction of meaningful reality' for those partaking. Seeking individual perspectives and meaning is complex and extremely difficult to establish particularly with regard to individual habitus. The methodological approach does not seek to identify individuals by class, ethnicity, gender; the only focus is lived experience of the FGSs in their FS.

The lived experience is fundamental and reflects habitus that is individual and distinct as defined by Bourdieu (1984). Bourdieu, Archer and Weick were used to develop a conceptual framework to offer a model to gain a greater understanding of the experiences of FGSs. Danermark et al. (2002: 116) argue that social scientific skill is in essence a matter of analysing and developing the theoretical language and of employing it in empirical analysis. For realists, theories and concepts are regarded as more than sensitising constructs, they are regarded as abstract expressions of entities that exist in the real (intransitive) world (Archer, 1998). The concepts of structure, culture and agency are real; they exist in the intransitive domain. The difficulty is that theories and concepts are themselves transitive, so it is difficult to find agreement on how to define them.

Agency and structure refers to whether agents (individuals in the field, who can make choices) can be considered independently of the social structures (constraints/rules/guidelines) in which they operate. The cultural capital of academia has rules, which are often unspoken. Archer argues that this crucial human capacity (to reflect on ourselves in relation to our circumstances and vice versa) represents the missing link between macro and micro level social theorising. Archer argues that, because of the different uses to which the 'concept' has been put, the 'process' of reflexivity has been under-explored and under-theorised.

Archer (2007: 4) offers an account of reflexivity as 'the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their social contexts and vice versa'. This ability manifests itself in what Archer (2007) terms the internal conversation, encompassing activities such as day dreaming, fantasising, reliving past events, rehearsing for future encounters, planning for future eventualities. Clarifying where we stand, confirming our understandings of a situation, taking stock of our lives (i.e. the conversations we have with ourselves, silently and internally, rather than with external others). Although much of an individual's internal conversation may deal with trivialities, it is also the process through which

individuals determine their future courses of action. Reflexivity provides a way of describing how FGSs make choices in relation to structural conditions. It provides an explanation of how students are 'persons' showing an inventive capacity to circumvent the constraints imposed by structures.

In the conceptual framework these concepts (agency and structure) are, metaphorically, 'two sides of the same coin'. An individual is born into and adapts to a social and cultural system (in reality), many overlapping social and cultural systems. Their social system also pre-exists and is further shaped (evolved) by individuals (by forces that are created, by the existence of these systems themselves). They are the product of their parents' (or guardians') biological, social and cultural influences (and/or predispositions), as well as that of their environment (peers, lecturers, extended family).

When the FGSs started university at The Centre, they brought with them a biological, sociological and cultural history. This was both a set of predispositions (from genetics, peers, parents, and environment) and an individual history. They had developed a habitus (from birth), as a way of negotiating and navigating their way in (and behaving in) social situations. Students also bring with them to university a level of economic capital. During their FS at university FGSs absorb (internalise) the domain, and interact with the field, further developing their habitus as they make sense of their new environment 'the university'. Archer's (2003) notion of the internal conversation offers a powerful conceptual framework through which to understand the unfolding biographies of the inquiry's participants, as well as how different sorts of factors (structural, cultural, personal) contribute to the form and content of their trajectory to The Centre.

5.4 The Concept of Agency

Individual agency can be defined as 'the power of actors to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure. The term is intended to convey the volitional, purposive nature of human activity' (Jary & Jary, 2000: 9). The study of agency is concerned with whether and how human individuals can be causally effective with the theory of human action. This is the core problem of structure and agency: the question of whether, and how, social entities like organisations and institutions can be causally effective in their own right, as opposed to merely epiphenomena of the behaviour of the human individuals who are their parts. Without an adequate answer to this question, it is impossible to justify treating social collectivises as 'actors' in social explanations. The presumption that there are collective social

actors is central to causal explanations throughout the social sciences. Memes are one type of social reality; another comprises social structures, defined as the emergent properties of 'systems of human relationships among social positions' (Porpora, 1998: 339). This definition contrasts with that from Giddens' (1979, 1984) structuration theory which views social structures as rules and resources that govern human behaviour. In Porpora's (1998: 344) view, the causal effects of structure on individuals are manifested in certain structured interests, resources, powers, constraints and predicaments that are built into each position by the web of relationships.

Such emergent properties comprise the material conditions human activity occurs, although, as with memes, they do not necessarily determine such activity, given that humans are creative, and have the capacity to act counter to such constraints. As well as providing the context for human activity, structures are modified by the intended and unintended consequences of such activity. This is not the instantiation of structures that is posited in structuration theory. In Archer's terms (1995) the emergent properties of structures escape their creators to act back on them. Like memes, they have an objective reality, persisting in time and space; roles and relationships established by long dead actors can exert an influence on subsequent generations.

The concept of agency is problematic, few academics would deny that human agency can be causally effective, the questions of just what agency means and how it works remain contentious. There is a world of difference between Archer's (1995) stress on human reflexivity as the conscious prioritisation of concerns and translation of those concerns into life projects, and Bourdieu's emphasis of the role of the habitus as a body of socially acquired and physically embodied dispositions that seem to drive our behaviour with little conscious reflective input.

Psychologists such as Kohlberg and Piaget ascribe high value to agency in their theories, describing it in terms of rational autonomy (Biesta & Tedder, 2006). In neo-Marxist and other critical theory, education is viewed as being an important driver in developing agency. Agency is often described in such literature as being about empowerment, emancipation, individual growth (ibid). According to Biesta & Tedder (2006: 11), agency is the capacity of actors to 'critically shape their responses to problematic situations'. Calhoun (Biesta & Tedder, 2006: 5) describes agency as 'the capacity for autonomous action' and 'the ability to operate independently of the determining constraints of social structure'. Archer (2000) similarly views agency as relative autonomy and causal efficacy. Such views of agency construe it as the capability to act in the face of the constraints offered by society. Biesta & Tedder (2006) draw on Giddens, suggesting that in the complex conditions of high modernity, agency is both more necessary than previously, and more difficult. Agency is something that can potentially develop

over time; indeed the temporal aspect of agency is prominent in much of the literature (c.f. Archer 2000; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Biesta & Tedder, 2006).

Archer (2000) states that personal and social identity develop as individuals interact with their environment (both culture and structure), with the natural environment and with other individuals and groups. Such development is an historical but on-going process, and has its roots in practice. In Archer's (2000: 13) view 'our sense of self is prior and primitive to our sociality', but the emerging sense of self is heavily influenced by society and by other experiences. Emirbayer & Mische (1998: 963) develop this further, seeing agency as:

'a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and towards the present (as a capacity to contextualise past habits and future projects with the contingencies of the moment)'.

This thesis views agency in such terms, and agrees with Archer's (2000) view that human agents are reflexive and creative and can act counter to societal constraints; agents are influenced, but not determined, by structure and culture. Through inner dialogue (ibid), and 'manoeuvre amongst repertoires' (Biesta & Tedder, 2006: 11), agents may act to change their relationships to structures (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), and indeed to society and the world in general.

The above discussion of agency illustrates how agency is interlinked with structure, and especially with culture. Balkin (1998: 52) states 'Individuals are creative'. They modify skills, combine information, draw inferences, and stretch conventions. Individuals do this by making use of the cultural software they already possess. This does not make their activity any less creative; indeed, their cultural software enables their creativity by providing thought with a necessary framework for problem solving and innovation. The notion of cultural software, the knowledge, skills and values that individuals possess, is a useful one for understanding how agency can be enhanced or constrained by culture, and has clear implications for policy makers seeking to change practice in universities through the promulgation of new ideas and practices.

In summary, social structures are intertwined with memes but separated analytically to permit inquiry into social interaction (Archer, 1988, 1995, 2000; Balkin, 1998). This is not a duality, nor is it a binary opposition implying the sorts of separation of structure and agency and mind and matter. Rather, it is an analytical separation, which helps to unpick and understand the ways people interact with their social and physical environments, and to analyse the relative

weight given to each of the causal factors inherent in any change situation. Structure and culture provide the environment in which human agency is made possible and/or constrained, but paradoxically there can be consequences of such agency.

5.5 Morphogenesis/Morphostasis

Archer's (2009) social theory is called Morphogenesis/Morphostasis (MM), the terms referring to social transformation and reproduction, and is predicated upon critical realist foundations. MM speculates that there exist varying degrees of agency, by human agents who are active and reflexive. Such an agent is 'someone who has the properties and powers to monitor their own life, to mediate structural and cultural properties of society and contribute to societal reproduction or transformation' (Archer, 2000: 19). Personal and social identities are largely formed through interaction with reality, although psychological architecture (Balkin, 1998) clearly plays a role. Identity subsequently informs action, as individuals interact with reality, and interactions are subject to reflexive evaluations of cost/benefit and success/failure (e.g. physical danger, failure at work, social rejection). Such outcomes and our assessments of them affect us emotionally, so subsequent decisions about action are affective as well as cognitive (ibid).

Although cultural and structural systems predate sociocultural interaction, actors being situated within an ideational and structural context, this is not determinism as conditioning may pull in different directions. Humans possess a reflective capacity (discursive consciousness), systemic influences are only part of the story; causal relations operating between groups and individuals at the sociocultural level are also important. A person is both the 'child and parent of society' (Archer, 2000: 11) and voluntarism is possible, but restricted by 'cultural conditioning and the current politics of the possible' (Archer, 1988: xxiv). Morphogenesis/Morphostasis views the cultural and structural systems as being parallel but autonomous, interrelated without one determining the other, and intersect via sociocultural interaction.

According to Archer (1988: 12) 'individuals live inductively from past contexts to future ones because they are engaged in unchanging activities'. In this case, sociocultural practices (and underlying social structures) perpetuate old ways of doing things even when ideas change. Such practices are the result of the material interests of actors and strengthened by manipulation by those with an interest in maintaining old practices. Even in such cases, absolute stasis is unlikely; small differences of meaning amongst human agents are likely to lead to slow, evolutionary change although this may not be apparent to the actors (Balkin, 1998). Lack of

change may simply be due to the lack of cultural alternatives (caused for example by a lack of social differentiation), or an absence of the vocabulary and concepts for change within the cultural system.

Four key principles underpin Archer's (1995) model, as it seeks to provide a framework for understanding the processes that lead to morphogenesis and morphostasis in the cultural and structural systems of society.

1. There exist logical relations between the components of the cultural and structural systems (e.g. contradiction and coherence).
2. There are causal influences exerted by the cultural and structural systems on the socio cultural level.
3. There are causal relationships between groups and individuals at the sociocultural level.
4. The cultural and structural systems are elaborated because of sociocultural interaction, modifying current logical relationships and adding new ones.

According to Archer's (1995) social theory, two sets of logical relations exist within the cultural and structural systems, and between different memes and structures. These are complementarities and contradictions. These conditions occur when there are points of agreement or points of tension between or within different memes or interests. Such agreements and tensions are then played out via sociocultural interaction, and cultural and structural systems are elaborated as a result.

5.6 The Concepts of Social and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986: 47) proposed that cultural capital exists in three forms: in an embodied state, an objectified state and an institutional state. These three states can constitute a lived experience for an individual and affect, influence and define inequalities in the social realm. Cultural capital was conceptualised by McDonough (1997) as a symbolic resource, which has no intrinsic value itself but can be used to obtain, or be transformed into, highly valuable or scarce resources. It is also symbolised as a type of knowledge that is valued within the middle classes but not taught formally in schools.

Cultural capital includes habits, lifestyle, social and educational credits for example and is one of the key concepts in Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. The key concepts of field, capital and habitus, Bourdieu's 'conceptual three legged stool' (Everett, 2002: 65), are the

central elements of 'an original conceptual arsenal' (Wacquant, 1998) by which Bourdieu effects a synthesis between subjective actions of individual agency and the effects of objective social structures to analyse and explain social practice. There are numerous other significant concepts related to these including doxa (taken for granted principles and values, or what is 'common sense' in the field); symbolic violence (when power is exercised over dominated groups through doxa); illusion (interest, or stake in the field); subjective misrecognition of the true nature of social and power relations; and taboo, which prevents discussion of the contradictions which are objectively evident.

Bourdieu's original concept of social capital related to the political manipulation of social connections to maintain power (Claridge, 2004: n.p.). In an educational setting social capital could be translated as 'empowering' rather than 'having power over'. A student's social and cultural capital is based on their capacity to form friendships, on their academic standing with fellow students and lecturers, and on their reputation in other areas. Functioning in new surroundings involves learning, and understanding, acceptable patterns of behaviour and establishing credibility or 'social capital' as a member of one or more groups.

Social and cultural capital are both integral to understanding identity within the context of WP. Cultural and social capital both conflict and negotiate with each other in the processes affecting educational choices. Bourdieu (1977, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1998) developed theories around cultural reproduction to explain how structure and agency are closely linked to education, which is in complete contrast to Giddens (1991). Bourdieu related the notion of capital as a format to understand the link between people and education (Anderson, 2001: 6) and part of a wider analysis on the diversity of social order.

5.7 The Concept of Habitus

Bourdieu (1977, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1998) focuses on the impact social class and/or origin have on the trajectory of an individual's life course. He is concerned with the factors, which determine whether that individual remains within a social space occupied by others from similar backgrounds or moves into a new social space occupied by those from more advantaged backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1984). Although our early life experiences, such as our tastes, patterns of consumption and the people surrounding us can be considered to tie us firmly into a particular social group, Bourdieu acknowledges that movement is possible.

'To say that the members of a class initially possessing a certain economic and cultural capital are destined, with a given probability, to an educational and social

trajectory leading to a given position means in fact that a fraction of the class (which cannot be determined a priori within the limits of this explanatory system) will deviate from the trajectory most common for the class as a whole and follow the (higher or lower) trajectory which was most probable for members of another class' (Bourdieu, 1984: 111).

A range of factors impact on the participants that relate to a Bourdieusian theoretical framework (Crozier et al., 2011; Reay, 1998). Habitus moderates the way that individuals internalise experiences of social structures, and the possible actions and adaptations that they make in the light of their experiences. In response to habitus students 'inherit' or 'possess' a fluctuating degree of cultural capital that, according to Bourdieu can constitute:

'practical or theoretical knowledge of the fluctuations of the market in academic qualifications... [that]... enables... the best return on inherited cultural capital in the scholastic market' (Bourdieu, 1998: 142).

One criteria that 'successful' higher education choosers possess is being aware of the subjects that are most marketable in career terms. Some elite higher education institutions provide a marketable value, regardless of subject, with the HEI chosen having primacy over any subject chosen for some middle-class applicants (Reay, 1998). This can be contrasted with responses from ethnic minority, working-class and comprehensive school students who lack such cultural capital (Reay, 1998), although middle-class students who attend comprehensive schools see the relevance of and make successful applications to 'good' HEIs (Crozier et al., 2011). In contrast working-class students often choose HEIs that both they and others see as second rate (Reay, 2003b; Reay et al., 2010) and these tend to be concentrated in the lower half of the university league tables (Macrae & Maguire, 2002). The knowledge that facilitates well or poorly informed choices, and the access to this knowledge, appears to be significant. One clear factor that emerges that has a marked impact on choice and the way that applicants prepare for HE is a parental or family history of participation in higher education (Crozier & Reay, 2011; Crozier et al., 2011; James et al., 2010; Thomas & Quinn, 2007). Working-class parents have limited experience of HE and so find it more difficult to support their children when making HE choices (Archer et al., (2002). Whereas, students who come from more traditional middle-class backgrounds and have a family history of HE attendance have less anxiety than their working-class peers when it comes to making choices. They draw on familial experience and provide a wealth of 'cultural, academic and social capital' (Reay, 2003b). Parental participation in HE can impact in terms of both inter-class and intra-class differences. (See 3.4 Parental Influences: Families and Universities.)

The entrance into HE of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and, more specifically, of FGSs represents this deviation from the probable trajectory. Bourdieu's theory on reproduction and transformation of class structures in society provides an appropriate framework for considering the experiences of FGSs in HE. In Bourdieu's framework the various forms of capital, cultural, social, symbolic and economic, are resources which individuals can draw upon to secure advantage in particular fields. Crucially, for the various forms of capital to have value they have to exist in a field in which they are recognised and can be employed. Only when cultural and social capital is recognised as legitimate can it be converted into symbolic capital which brings with it symbolic power.

Individuals' early life experiences create dispositions, which influence how they act and the decisions they make in specific circumstances. These dispositions are known as habitus and impact on how one acts in any given situation. Bourdieu (1977: 72) describes habitus as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions'. Habitus enables 'an intelligible and necessary relation to be established between practices and a situation' (Bourdieu, 1984: 101). Just as the absorption of early life experiences is unconscious, so too is the impact it has on an individual's actions and habitus is embodied, 'it is not composed solely of mental attitudes and perceptions' (Reay, 2004: 432). Despite the operation of habitus being an unconscious process influencing the decisions and actions of individuals in particular situations, it still provides an element of regularity and predictability to social life (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 18). Bourdieu argues that when an individual encounters a new and unfamiliar field habitus is transformed (Bourdieu, 1990). Habitus is permeable and constantly being restructured by the social world. It is:

'The universalising mediation which causes an individual agent's practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less 'sensible' and 'reasonable' (Bourdieu, 1977: 79).

As individuals within the same social groups or classes experience similarities in experience or upbringing, this can also result in the existence of a class or group habitus (Bourdieu, 1977: 80). Bourdieu claims that class habitus underpins difference and cultural capital can reinforce this difference. According to Bourdieu individuals shape their own habitus, so it is possible to break from a normal habitus (comfort zone), unlike capital which is formed through societal influences. Habitus it is argued is shaped by family and school experiences; it is a mixture of structure and agency. Bourdieu argues that habitus does influence an individual to make certain decisions (Paton, 2008: 12). It could be that whilst WP practices continue to place an individualistic, deficit model on students from a lower socioeconomic background, the risk to the individual is great. Even when this cohort of students is able to negotiate the complicated

pathway to HE, they are still seen by HEIs as 'different' to those from a higher socioeconomic background.

Habitus is largely understood to relate to an individual's position in social space (Bourdieu, 1990b). It is both past and present, an embodied history that is shaped by and shapes practice. It is the mechanism through which decisions and choices are made, not as 'mechanical action' (Bourdieu, 1977: 73), but more comparable to intuitive reaction. Habitus works in conjunction with capital and field and facilitates understanding of re/production. Habitus is strongly located within understandings of social class although class boundaries and categorisations are not as clear or illuminative as they could be. This is particularly pertinent for understanding habitus and a way habitus can adapt to context.

The concept of habitus is not just another word for 'personality', but something more dynamic, fluid, and much less deterministic. It is really a way of talking about the embodiment of previous social fields, whereby individuals acquire and carry ways of thinking and being and doing from one place to another. It is about how past social structures get into present action and how current actions confirm or reshape current structures. As Bourdieu (1989, 43), states '...when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself 'as a fish in water', it does not feel the weight of water and takes the world about itself for granted'. The habitus gives us our 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson, 1998) or a sense of reality, of limits. Within this, we do make a myriad of decisions, which Bourdieu termed strategy.

Bourdieu allowed for adaptation of the habitus in response to experience and the context of habitus as being 'variable from place to place and time to time' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 9). The main body of his work focuses on the way habitus 'tends to favour experiences likely to reinforce it' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 61). Habitus adapts to context and this is relevant to this inquiry. Lawler (2004: 112) finds that 'more or less identical habitus can generate widely different outcomes'. That is, despite the focus on habitus as being mainly applicable to groups, the limited homogeneity within social classes leads to increased flexibility in interpretation of the term. For example, whilst the majority of young people from a lower socioeconomic background do not progress into elite HE institutions, a small minority do. Although the concept is often applied to social class groups in understanding collective practices, it can also be used to understand individual practice (Bourdieu, 1990b).

Bourdieu describes habitus as an acquired set of shared behaviours and patterns constructed from an internalisation of the experiences and social structures of individuals (agents) within a group (Calhoun, LiPuma, & Postone, 1993). For students, 'habitus' could relate to the accepted

norms and patterns of behaviour within an institution (for the participants in this inquiry 'The Centre'). Understanding a university's norms and practices is a process of construction, created from information received from other people and personal experience.

Bourdieu (1990: 108) states that:

'One of the privileges of the dominant, who move in their worlds as fish in water, resides in the fact that they need not engage in rational computation in order to reach the goals that best suit their interests. All they have to do is follow their dispositions which, being adjusted to their positions, 'naturally' generate practices to the situation'.

In relation to FGSs, entering HE, the early life experiences of students coming from backgrounds where progression into HE is not automatically considered a possibility, means that going to university will become less of a natural step in their transition to adulthood than for someone from a background where HE is the norm. Lack of encouragement to achieve and aspire educationally will negatively affect a young person's habitus, reducing their expectation to go to university. Where a young person does apply to university, the combination of their habitus and being in the unfamiliar field of HE may result in their applying for courses or institutions where they feel comfortable, but which do not reflect the full extent of their academic ability. In comparison, the habitus of students from more advantaged backgrounds who throughout life have been supported and encouraged educationally, means they are more likely to possess higher levels of expectation and greater self-belief in their own abilities, making them more likely to apply for the most selective or competitive institutions.

As habitus continually evolves throughout life as new experiences are processed, exposure to WP provision at university or supportive influences can still positively affect students' dispositions. This is significant as it means it is never too late for WP or student support to have a positive impact on the lives of students. Widening participation provides a continuing opportunity to positively influence the habitus of students from less advantaged backgrounds, including the FGSs participating in this inquiry.

Tett (2002) argues that the subordinated classes are constrained by the habitus of HE institutions, and will search and struggle for a sense of legitimacy and authority. The transformation required to fit into HE may often require the fighting of self as well as the inherent barriers of society. This point was considered when analysing the data from transcripts. The researcher has reflected whether FGSs had been affected in anyway by the balance of realising potential and/or maintaining a sense of automatic self.

5.8 Archer and Bourdieu Combined

Bourdieu (1977, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1998), despite his insistence on the inventive and creative capacity of the habitus, is less than decisively committed to allowing a role for conscious deliberation in the determination of action. By contrast, Archer's (2003: 9, 14) account of human action places conscious reflexive deliberation at its heart. For Archer, reflexivity is a power which human beings possess and is the ability to monitor themselves in relation to circumstances. This is exercised through a process of conscious reflexive deliberations during which individuals conduct internal conversations with ourselves about themselves (Archer, 2003: 25), 'our situation, our behaviour, our values, our aspirations'. The inner conversation 'is a ceaseless discussion about the satisfaction of our ultimate concerns and a monitoring of the self and its commitments' (Archer, 2000: 195).

Archer (1993) argues that reflexivity is a mature ability, and a precursor to the development of a personal identity and a social identity. These link to who an individual depends on delineating what they care about (thus defining one's personal identity) and relating it to the social context to develop projects that are based on ultimate concerns and which are used to guide the conduct of our lives (defining our social identity) (Archer, 2000a: 9-10, 219). For Archer (2003: 9) reflexivity is specifically a causal power. In an individual's reflexive deliberations, they come to conclusions that affect their behaviour in the social world.

There is a strongly humanistic element to Archer's stress on the conscious nature of reflexive deliberations and the opportunity that they present to make decisions about how an individual's lives are conducted. This is not at the expense of social influences on human behaviour; as Archer (2000a: 10) states:

'we do not make our personal identities under the circumstances of our own choosing. Our placement in society rebounds upon us, affecting the persons we become, but also and more forcefully influencing the social identities which we can achieve'.

Archer (1995, 1996a) argues that social structures and cultural systems have causal powers in their own right. Archer rejects the implication that an individual's social position fully determines subjectivity or behaviour. She points out that these develop in very diverse ways amongst people with the same social background (Archer, 2003: 348). For Archer, what is critical in these relationships is that individuals, social structures, and cultural entities each possess their own distinct existences and influences on social outcomes. None of the types of entity can be eliminated from the explanation of social events, nor conflated with each other in

such accounts. In accordance with this ontology, Archer rejects views of human action that deny causal power to individuals and their reflexivity.

Archer (2003: 10-14) criticises those who argue that human action can be explained without recognition of the causal powers of human beings as such, whether because they substitute the powers of biological parts for the powers of the whole human being (neural educationists) or because they substitute social forces for them (human action as socially-determined discourse). Archer criticises the view that human agency and social structure can be conflated, which she perceives occurred in the work of Bourdieu (Archer, 2003: 11-12).

Archer and Bourdieu are opposed at two distinct levels: in terms of both their theoretical and their ontological views of human agency. At the theoretical level, the focus is the extent to which human beings influence their own destiny. While Archer rejects 'contemporary social theory that seeks to diminish human properties and powers' (Archer, 2000a, back cover). Bourdieu sees human action as driven by a socially derived habitus that provides spontaneity without consciousness or will' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 56). At the ontological level, the question turns on whether social structure can be seen as distinct from individuals or whether the two are mutually constitutive. Archer discusses the ontological differences using the example of how Bourdieu could view one of her participants ('Graham') conceivably making some choices consciously, but 'largely unaware that his horizons have been socially reduced' because of social conditioning (Archer, 2003: 11). For Archer (2003: 12), the issue with this perspective is that:

'there never comes a point at which it is possible to disentangle Graham's personal caution (a subjective property of a person) from the characteristics of his context (objective properties of society). All that is certain is that he does not have the last word about himself, his intentions or actions. Therefore, it becomes impossible that Graham can deliberate upon his circumstances as subject to object, because these are now inseparable for 'Graham'.'

It could be that this is a case of the more general ontological error of conflationism, which 'rests upon conceptualising 'structures' and 'agents' as ontologically inseparable because each enters into the other's constitution' (Archer, 2003: 1). Archer views the divergence between her theoretical framework and Bourdieu as primarily ontological. Bourdieu in his work is vague about the ontological relationship between structure and agency and rejects both methodological individualism (in the form of Sartre's subjectivism) and methodological collectivism (in the structuralism of Levi-Strauss & Althusser). He seeks to find a middle way that can

accommodate some features of both (Bourdieu, 1990a: 9-13). Conflationism can be found in Bourdieu's (1990b: 53) description of habitus as 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations'. Dispositions are features of individuals, and Bourdieu seems to equate structure with internal human properties similar to Giddens who equates structure with rules (Giddens, 1984: 17-25). This fits Archer's characterisation of conflationism (Archer, 2003: 1), with agency and structures each entering into the constitution of the other. This suggests that, agents and their knowledge are constitutive of structures:

'To speak of habitus to include in the object the knowledge which the agents, who are part of the object, have of the object, and the contribution this knowledge makes to the reality of the object. However, it is not only a matter of putting back into the real world that one is endeavouring to know, knowledge of the real world that contributes to its reality (and to the force, it exerts). It means conferring on this knowledge a genuinely constitutive power, the very power it is denied when, in the name of an objectivist conception of objectivity, one makes common knowledge or theoretical knowledge a mere reflection of the real world' (Bourdieu, 1984: 467).

Bourdieu argued that structures are constitutive of agents:

'Overriding the spurious opposition between the forces inscribed in an earlier state of the system, outside the body, and internal forces arising instantaneously as motivations springing from free will, the internal dispositions the internalisation of externality enable the external forces to exert themselves, but in accordance with the specific logic of the organisms in which they are incorporated' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 54-5).

If both of these claims are maintained as valid, then it is difficult to see how agents can be distinguished from structure. This thesis suggests Bourdieu's position can be made compatible with some relatively subtle changes that leave his theoretical agenda intact. It is not necessary to alter the claim that agents are constitutive of structures. Indeed, the emergence relationship is concerned precisely with the question of how parts interact to generate wholes with emergent properties. 'The object' can be viewed as being made up of agents inherently including in the structure the knowledge that agents have of the structure, by virtue of including the agents as its parts and their knowledge as properties of the parts. This knowledge has a central role in the

interplay of structure and agency, which perpetuates that structure, and sees this knowledge as constitutive of structure.

At the heart of Archer's and Bourdieu's ontological disagreement is the phrase 'the internalisation of externality'. When individuals 'internalise' something, their beliefs about the world are affected by experience in such a way that they accept a belief about that event as a fact. Individuals may internalise a sense of inferiority because of being persistently treated as though they are inferior by people around them. Bourdieu's quote (1990b: 54-55) means that beliefs about the world, or dispositions towards acting in it, are affected by experiences of social structures, and social structures' effect on behaviour.

These beliefs and dispositions are not to be equated with social structure, nor to substitute for the notion of a distinct social structure, but to be seen as features of the human beings who are parts of the structure. This does overcome a 'spurious opposition between the forces inscribed in an earlier state of the system, outside the body, and internal forces arising instantaneously as motivations springing from free will' (Bourdieu, 1980: 53-5) since it helps to make clear the mechanism through which external forces causally affect the internal ones. Here, the 'external forces' do not disappear into the body but their effectiveness derives in part from a process that depends upon their effects on the body.

The literal sense of internalisation leads to a very different interpretation of Bourdieu's argument, and it is this view that is encouraged by the description of habitus as 'structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures'. This is when individuals internalise something it becomes literally part of them and habitus is not merely a set of dispositions that are causally influenced by experiences of social structure. Instead, habitus literally is structure, internalised into an individual's body a view that closely reflects Giddens' (1984) conception of structure. From this perspective, Bourdieu is not simply rejecting a spurious opposition between external and internal forces, but also denying the real distinction between external and internal forces. Beliefs and dispositions are no longer properties of individuals who are distinct from social structures; rather they represent an ontological penetration of the individual by the social structure. From this stance, structures really are parts of people. If this is what Bourdieu intended, then his position is conflationist as it fails to distinguish between a social structure and the consequences it has for an individual's mental state.

Distinguishing which of the readings Bourdieu really intended is not easy and is open to a variety of ontological interpretations. At the ontological level, there is scope for reconciling Archer and Bourdieu. Ontology is not entirely independent of theory; and will only work if

Bourdieu's theoretical position is compatible with such a reading. A conflict between Archer and Bourdieu is their differing perspectives on the theoretical relationship of human causal powers to human action. A way of resolving the theoretical conflict the argument is to see some actions as reflexively determined and others as determined by the habitus, so both Archer's and Bourdieu's theories are right, but about different actions.

In a sense, both authors allow space for a resolution in their argument. Bourdieu (1990b: 50) writes 'if one fails to recognise any form of action other than rational action or mechanical reaction, it is impossible to understand the logic of all the actions that are reasonable without being the product of a reasoned design', which seems to suggest that he accepts that some actions are indeed the product of reasoned design. Archer (2000a:10) suggests that personal identity, which seems to be a co-requisite of reflexive deliberation 'comes only at maturity but it is not attained by all'. At any one time, some people have not become reflexive, and others will never do so, leaving them, it would seem, in the grip of their habitus.

On this reading, Bourdieu's insistence on the role of the habitus and Archer's insistence on the role of reflexivity can be seen as logically compatible, with their different emphases reflecting either a desire to stress the importance of their own theoretical perspective or an implicit argument about what proportion of actions fits into each category. The core argument is that frequently actions are co-determined by both habitus and reflexive deliberations. This is despite the apparently conflicting implications of these two perspectives for a sense of ability to choose actions. They represent two complementary aspects of the same process. The primary tension within Bourdieu's account is that between his stress on the subconscious operation of the habitus and his insistence that the habitus operates through active, creative, invention and improvisation.

A route to resolving this tension was provided by Weick's (1995) concept of 'sensemaking'. This account of action is consistent with many aspects of Bourdieu's habitus, and it provides an explicit role for conscious input to dispositions that Bourdieu largely neglects. There is an important role for conscious learning in the construction of habitus. To be told 'that's not for the likes of us' (Bourdieu, 1984: 471), for example, may deeply affect habitus but it does so through a conscious process. Conscious decision making, too, plays a key role because it alters sets of dispositions. The conscious reflexivity of FGSs in this inquiry draws heavily on the work of Bourdieu, Archer and Weick. This argument links back to the previous discourse in Chapters Two and Three regarding pre-disposed choices, decoding, power constraints, culture response, psychological dispositions, socialised body, and fixed identity.

Decision making is heavily influenced by an existing set of dispositions (personality traits). As Thompson (1992: 16-17) has put it, 'to view action as the outcome of conscious calculation is to neglect the fact that, by virtue of the habitus, individuals are already predisposed to act in certain ways, pursue certain goals, avow certain tastes, and so on'. Decision making is never independent of the habitus, of an existing set of dispositions and provides a mechanism for the amendment of dispositions, most obviously in response to new situations, which are not congruent with previous experience. When a new role is adopted, individuals may cautiously consider how to act in that role and be guided not only by dispositions arising from previous social positions, but also by consciously absorbed new information. It is not possible to account fully for dispositions without taking into account the role of both conscious learning and conscious decision making in their determination.

It is important to recognise the role of decision making in contributing to dispositions; and recognise the essential role played by unconscious dispositions in the implementation of decision making and as influential inputs to the making of those decisions. What is developed is what Bourdieu has called 'a permanent dialectic between an organising consciousness and automatic behaviours' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 80). This account of human action is still in tension with Bourdieu's on at least one more count: his claim that the habitus is durable, 'ingrained in the body in such a way that they endure through the life history of the individual' (Thompson, 1992: 13), and dispositions can develop substantially over time. Even the most deeply embodied of dispositions can be altered. The tension here is between the idea that the habitus consists of all dispositions, and the idea that the habitus endures unchanged throughout an individual's life. Only one of these ideas can be definitional to the habitus, since individuals are constantly altering dispositions. The habitus can either be defined as the set of all dispositions, in which case it is not entirely durable; or it can be defined as the set of durable dispositions, and it is clearly only going to be a subset of dispositions. It would seem more consistent with Bourdieu's intention to regard the habitus as all dispositions.

This thesis suggests that it is viable to maintain Bourdieu's claim that the habitus is durable, as an empirical claim about certain aspects of the habitus in certain situations, while accepting that certain dispositions are changeable, and others developed as short-term responses to particular situations. It is possible that the social conditions that frame dispositions are such that an important subset of dispositions are determined relatively durably by early experiences arising from an individual's social position. This exposes the possibility that the habitus of certain groups of people in certain sociohistorical situations are more stable and more durable than those of others. Habitus may have been more stable in the feudal period than the developed

world today given the vastly different rates of social change (and of changes in the social positions of individuals over their lifetimes) between these two types of society (Bourdieu, 1990a: 73-4).

Archer (2000a: 166) criticises Bourdieu for portraying bodily skills as 'beyond the grasp of consciousness'. The tensions within Bourdieu's account of habitus, with some subtle amendments seem to be resolved by integrating that account with sensemaking. Action can be the product of dispositions, while also providing a place for creative conscious decision making in the determination of these dispositions; this resolves the apparent contradiction between elements of voluntarism and determinism in Bourdieu's work. Resolving the tensions in Bourdieu's thought opens a way to reconciling his theory of the habitus with Archer's account of reflexivity. It is precisely by showing how reflexive deliberation can enter into the same process of sensemaking. The same argument allows us to position both Bourdieu's work and Archer's within a fuller account of human action. Individuals are constantly presented with opportunities for reflexive review of beliefs and intentions, which effect on actions via altering dispositions. Conscious reflexive deliberation plays a role in influencing the dispositions that in turn largely determine actions.

In practice, this means that when an individual acts, some aspects of actions are determined with little or no conscious input, while others are strongly influenced by recent reflection. The extent to which reflection affects actions is left open by this theory. It seems likely that this extent is highly variable, across a number of dimensions. First, the same individual is reflexive with regard to some aspects of their behaviour, but strongly driven by their social conditioning with regard to others. Second, individuals from different backgrounds may display a different balance of reflexive and unreflexive action. Third, different societies in distinct historical periods may show marked differences in the degree of reflexivity demonstrated by their members. If these speculations are valid, the contribution of reflexivity to the causation of human action varies by individual, by social class, and by historical context. It is necessary to theorise the ways reflexivity develops and operates, as well as theorising the less reflexive aspects of the development and operation of the habitus; to develop a theory of reflexivity to complement Bourdieu's theory of the habitus, and Archer (2000a: 2003) offers a substantial contribution to just such a theory

Archer's analysis of the acquisition of personal and social identity is a compelling story about the development of reflexivity, but it is a story that neglects the role of the habitus. Archer states that social structure does affect human action, but she does not see its effects being channelled through dispositions. Archer (2000a: 10) argues 'we do not make our personal

identities under the circumstances of own choosing. An individual's place in society reverberates on us, affecting the persons we become, but also and more forcefully influencing the social identities which we can achieve.' Both choices of primary concerns, and of roles and projects through which they can be pursued, are constrained by social context. Archer (2003: 14,134-5) tends to stress the externality of social forces, as when she says that the individual is right to believe:

'that he lives in a social world that has different properties and powers from his own - ones which constrain (and enable) his actions. These are temporally prior to his conceiving of a course of action, relatively autonomous from how he takes them to be, but can causally influence the achievement of his plans by frustrating them or advancing them'.

Structures are viewed as having an influence on the outcome of plans rather than on subjectivity itself. The reason appears to be Archer's (2003: 38-9) desire to retain the human individual as an independent actor in their own right:

'Our reflexive deliberations are held to be the processes through which we agents selectively mediate structural and cultural properties and also creatively contribute to their transformation. Therefore, to rob agency of its first person powers, by accrediting them to third parties, is to cut back on the causal powers, which make each agent an active contributor to social reproduction or transformation. Agency needs to be granted autonomous properties to play this role. To eliminate their first person perspective on themselves deprives them of this autonomy by discrediting their powers and explaining them away as the results of childhood influences, society's discourse or brain states'.

This thesis, like Archer, proposes that it is not possible to eliminate the first person perspective, or the causal powers of human individuals, from the explanation of human action. It is argued that it is possible to retain these without denying the impact of the social world on human subjectivity, and without denying the role of biological parts in underpinning behaviour. It is contended that it is possible to explain the powers of human individuals without explaining them away. Human behaviour cannot be explained purely in terms of the causal powers of biological parts. These parts cannot produce human causal powers unless they are combined in the particular set of structural relations that constitutes them into a human being. It is as whole human beings they have the capacity to decide, to act, and to affect the social world.

To argue that social background and experiences influence dispositions is not to cede all causal power to the social level at the expense of the individual. Dispositions may sometimes be heavily and unconsciously affected by social factors, but no one is ever completely at the mercy of habitus. Habitus at any one time is not the unmediated product of social structures, but the result of a lifetime of critical reflection upon experiences, including experiences of those structures. To accept that social conditioning affects beliefs is quite different from believing that social structures determine behaviour. They influence behaviour, and this influence operates in part through causal impact on beliefs, but they do not determine those beliefs. The individual remains the prime mover of human action, even if it is accepted that social conditioning plays a crucial part in forming dispositions.

Once this is accepted, then Archer's account of the development of personal identity and social identity can be seen as an argument about the extent to which individuals are able to modify habitus. As personal identity is developed, it becomes possible to become more able to evaluate concerns to develop reflexivity and to modify dispositions as a consequence. Indeed, developing projects is precisely this example of the process of modifying dispositions for future action. Reflexivity becomes a critical attitude towards the dispositions acquired from the past, as well as towards the contemporary social situation (in the case of this inquiry transition to HE) that they face.

With these re-interpretations, then, Archer's account of reflexivity is integrated with a similarly reinterpreted version of Bourdieu's account of the habitus using Weick's sensemaking. The resulting synthesis (Figure Three) provides an account of human action in relation to FGSs during a period of transition in their FS.

5.9 Bourdieu and Weick Combined

Bourdieu defines capital in its various forms as properties of the social space being investigated (in the case of this inquiry, the world of HE). Bourdieu's theoretical framework (1984) allows for an appreciation of how inequalities in education between non-traditional working-class students and the middle class are perpetuated by habitus, field and cultural capital. It is suggested that the framework does not allow for an understanding of how social change can occur through education, and changes that result in individual habitus. This theme links to the importance of how FGSs make sense of themselves as HE students through 'sensemaking' (Weick, 1995), and how as a result change and transformation can occur.

The concept of 'sensemaking' (Weick, 1995) was applied to this inquiry as part of the conceptual framework to help provide a theoretical explanation. Sensemaking literally 'means the making of sense' (Weick, 1995:4). Sensemaking is a widely used generic term within a number of different disciplines (Klein, Moon & Hoffman, 2006; Fisher & Dervin, 2008) and originally developed from organisational theory it can equally be applied to FGSs, who are making sense of their identities within the emergent domains of changing government policy and HE. Weick proposes '(s)ensemaking begins with a sensemaker. 'How can I know what I think until I see what I say?' (1995: 18). He goes on to say that this is a trap and that the sensemaker is singular but that no individual ever acts like single sensemaker. 'Instead, any one sensemaker is, in Mead's (1934) words, 'a parliament of selves.' (Weick, 1995:18). Sensemaking is an on-going process, individuals make retrospective sense of events, as well as prospective sense in that it is made retrospectively but 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: 6). It provides a model to understand the on-going interaction between the individual 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 inquiry, it provided a useful model to understand how the FGSs made sense of being at 'The Centre' and how they had chosen to study there. Identity construction is seen as a vital element, 'a core preoccupation' in the sensemaking process. This is seen in largely psychological terms; a need to 'confirm one's self' is an important trigger to sensemaking.. Actions occur for many reasons and intuitively, rather than for rational reasons; indeed action is a spur to sensemaking. Emotion influences sensemaking; 'sensemaking is infused with feeling'.

One of Weick's (1979: 130) central ideas is enactment, which recognises 'the active role that we presume organisational members play in creating the environments which then impose on them'. Enactments is a 'simple but complex notion' (Mill, 2003a: 69), which means far more than 'just taking action', but has recursive features reminiscent of Bourdieu's relation between habitus and field. 'Noticing' or directing attention is a form of enactment, and the way noticing takes place will influence the interpretation of what is noticed, and how subsequent actions unfold. As actions are taken, the nature of the reality that is faced, and subsequent action is taken, changes in patterned ways. In its extreme form, enactment generates the 'self-fulfilling prophecy'.

A second concept which plays a central role within Weick's (1979) sensemaking theory draws on the retrospective attribution of meaning to action. Weick (1979: 92) states that, 'actions

occur for any of several reasons, and only when actions are completed is it possible for a person to review them and know what decision was made or what intention was present'. This idea was developed in later work into Weick's often repeated aphorism, 'How can I know what I mean until I hear what I say?' Weick emphasises an oppositional view to that of action-based rational choices against a perceived external reality, 'understanding does not so much guide action, as the lay view would have it, so much as action guides understanding' (Gioia, 2006: 1717). The combination of these two 'non-obvious' (Gioia, 2006) ideas of enactment and retrospective attribution of meaning to action are fundamental components of Weick's version of sensemaking.

Weick (1995: 15) argues that 'to talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an on-going accomplishment that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations they find themselves'. Weick presents his approach to sensemaking not as theoretical framework or a body of knowledge but as 'a set of ideas with explanatory possibilities' and 'a recipe for analysis' (Weick, 1995: xi). Weick's approach can be used as heuristic for understanding sensemaking in respect to FGSs in their FS. Weick (1995: 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: 17) identified seven characteristics of sensemaking:

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

Each of these characteristics has implications for understanding the experiences of FGSs at The Centre. Sensemaking provides a method of considering how FGSs position themselves in relation to particular pre-existing discourses (e.g. those relating to social justice, social exclusion, and HE), and the practices they enact such as the decision to study at 'The Centre' and why they chose a particular course. How a person makes sense of their situation is grounded in the identity they develop of themselves in relation to others (Weick, 1995: 20). This model complements and develops the Bourdieusian model and the impact of social processes on one's identity and sensemaking processes.

Bourdieu's theoretical framework makes clear that there is a relationship between sensemaking and the maximisation of social capital; the structure of habitus, which drives individual action,

is seen as embodying the power structures of the field and the taken for granted (axiomatic) assumptions about how the social world is, and what constitutes social capital. Weick's sensemaking does not make this link so strongly. It could be that combining Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus with Weick's organisational psychology focus and his concepts of cues and frames (though broadly similar in some respects to habitus) provides a greater understanding of FGSs in their FS at The Centre.

The iterative process of reflection/reflexive thinking that is embedded in the on-going process of sensemaking and making sense has an impact on practice and how thinking about events may change. Sensemaking is embedded in reflexivity, and individuals can be reflective or as Weick describes it, 'reflection in action' (Weick, 1995, 2001, 2009; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007). This framework is relevant to this inquiry taken in its entirety (including action and discourse) rather than just the interpretative aspect, which seems often employed in the literature.

5.10 Summary

This chapter has discussed the interrogation of the transcript data, coding of raw data, and the development of codes and themes. Also discussed was the use of grounded theory and phenomenographic tools to produce an integrated approach to the inquiry and develop a greater understanding of FGSs experience during a period of personal and political transition. The development of the transcultural model through the adaptation of existing conceptual frameworks (Archer and Bourdieu combined, and Bourdieu and Weick combined) has been analysed and its application to FGSs at The Centre clarified.

6. Themes from the Stage One Analysis

This chapter discusses the themes developed from the use of grounded theory tools to analyse the transcripts (Stage One data analysis): agency, social, motivation, critical life events, and level of achievement.

6.1 Agency

The primary aim of this inquiry was to gain a greater understanding of the first semester experiences of FGSs (see Appendix Seven for a selection of Pen Portraits of the Participants). The common element of this theme is a positive reason for attending university described by the participants. In effect, the decision to attend university showed personal agency. The respondents were from a variety of family backgrounds and positioned in the same socioeconomic group. Classification systems that seek to homogenise people into identifiable groups are limited in offering insights into individual experiences. Blanket policies that are designed to improve conditions for a lower socioeconomic (working class) 'group' may not do so.

This is particularly the case for WP initiatives. Although intended to raise aspirations of working-class young people, research has found that the middle classes benefit the most from such programmes (Henry, 2002). It is pertinent to consider the family background in more detail of students who were considered for WP interventions. Such influences do not occur in isolation; they are situated and constructed in social networks. It is through the family and its networks that an individual's habitus develops a history that becomes embodied and acted out through class-based practices (Bourdieu, 1977). The cultural and social capitals existent within a family group inform and structure the habitus, which 'acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences' (Bourdieu, 1977: 87).

Alicia recognised the encouragement that her parents had given her to study at university level:

'They (her parents) always said to me oh you are clever and maybe you should go to university, they never pressured me into doing anything but (pause) that is the thing as well, if your mum and dad never went to university, well, my mum and dad could never have guided me, they could never have helped me to decide what I wanted to do'.

For thirty eight of FGSs their family-based habitus was positively aligned to education, which was illustrated through the levels of encouragement they had received. FGSs'

parents wanted their children to succeed and the support from their respective families enabled them to prosper within education. These FGS did not talk about their parents' occupations in derogatory ways, there is a sense in which they knew they were moving on and beyond the class-based horizons that informed their childhoods. They identified with the notion of poverty, even if they had not experienced it themselves and this knowledge drove their decision to progress on to HE. FGSs displayed agency in the sense of seeing what was possible for them to achieve and perceiving that it was attainable for them to realise their potential by effective management of the resources they had at their disposal, including their capabilities.

FGSs who stayed at home or lived near their family home thought that their parents were relieved that they were staying close by to pursue their studies but did not believe that their family tried to exert undue influence to choose a local university site. Marilla spoke of her Mum's relief that she was not travelling far from home, even though she had been offered places at two London universities. Leoni, had been offered places at other universities (in the North West), thought that her parents were happy that she had chosen a local university rather than moving far from home. FGSs considered the close proximity of The Centre to their home a very important reason for choosing it as their HE institution. The decision to attend a campus close to home was in many cases directly influenced by the financial outlook of the student and his/her family. The fact that the majority did not live in halls could have affected their social integration at The Centre.

Educational success was an important part of many of the FGSs' family habitus; this was not the case with all their friendship circles where there was often the view of HE as a '*waste of time*' that leads to large debts and no guarantee of graduate employment. In light of the academic and personal investment FGSs were taking in studying at The Centre, it is perhaps of no surprise that the feedback from their first assignments (formative or summative) was critical to them. FGSs were looking for evidence to confirm or not challenge their decision to attend university as being the '*right one*' by validating themselves as '*capable students*' and were using their feedback as a '*sign*' to do this. Positive feedback confirmed FGSs' decision to study at university as being the right personal choice. It had a significant impact on their involvement in university life as they started to believe that they were capable of working at university level and become successful students.

'I was very happy with to get from my first piece of work feedback because most of it was positive anyway (laughter and pause). Because it had been my first essay since I had been in university and I was quite nervous about it and thinking 'oh dear' do I

really know what I am supposed to be doing. A lot of questions at the back of your mind, but the way it came back it was like positive and it made me more confident and told me the areas which I was weak, and the areas which I was strong in. So it was very informative'. (Keely)

Three types of parental attitude, as an aspect of student agency regarding applying to study at university, appeared to be evident in the transcripts:

- **Parents explicitly involved:** evidenced through positive measures, for example attending open days, listening to anxieties, advising on subject or through means that are more oppressive where students felt they had no choice but to apply to university.
- **Parents implicitly supportive:** evidenced through listening but not actively involved in the process of application or attending HE fairs and open days.
- **Parents reluctantly supportive:** evidenced through contradictory statements reflecting parental anxieties, but recognising the importance the student placed on going to university.

These descriptions also seemed to fit with what FGSs said about their parents. Whilst the above categories are relatively simplistic and do not reflect the complexities behind why parents should fall into one category or another, they are useful in looking at parental attitudes towards the prospect of their child progressing to university. The responses of the FGSs' parents could not only reflect attitudes towards university, but could be symptomatic of inner feelings concerning the 'loss' of their child as 'each enters a new stage in a more separate life course' (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1989: 87) and perhaps also a move away in class and/or disposition terms. Whilst a split from the residential home is considered 'normal and appropriate' (Goldscheider & Goldscheider, 1989: 87), leaving home to go to university is not a 'normal' transition for many of these families. In this inquiry, the majority of the students live at or near their family home.

Literature highlights that there is an inevitability surrounding middle-class progression to university (c.f. Edwards et al., 2003). This is in part due to family experiences of education. Information or the type of 'hot' knowledge Ball & Vincent (1998) refer to when exploring school choice, which is applicable to university choice, is limited in families where there is no previous experience of HE. Despite the fact that very few of the parents had attended university themselves, this did not deter them from supporting the decisions of their children, nor did it

prevent them from actively encouraging them to go. In that sense, some of the participants appeared to come from families where attitudes towards education 'proved less unfavourable than that experienced by the great majority of their peers' (Bourdieu, Passeron et al., 1994: 42).

FGSs' attitudes towards HE and studying at The Centre were expressed in terms of betterment; the parents wanted their children to achieve more than they had to increase opportunities and secure jobs that had secure futures. The family habitus was not one of antipathy towards education, but one which embraced it as a tool for entering the workforce in a more privileged position. This was clearly articulated by Carla, who during her interview acknowledged that going to university would enhance her employment chances, but she was also reluctant to openly negate her mother's work. Explaining the reasons why her mum was in a low-paid job Carla could reflect back to the context in which her mum was forced to make decisions in her life.

6.1.1 Agency – 'Should I Stay at Home or Go Away?'

Thirty of the fifty participants had considered other HE establishments on their UCAS application. They had eventually chosen to study at The Centre and none felt, with hindsight, that they should have attended a different university. Very positive reasons for their choice were given such as their love of the town, a desire to stay in their home town, the possibilities of greater financial security and less debt by going to a university close to home, and (in one case) the prestige of doing a full degree at a university against studying at an FE college.

The picture of FGSs' experience and interaction with The Centre is complex; access, progression, outcomes and futures are not straightforward, smooth and seamless. Gender trends were not immediately apparent. Although some participants spoke of differential opportunities available to men and women in the past, they did not express that their own experiences had occurred because of gender inequalities.

Many of the respondents mirrored Archer et al.'s (2003) findings that students self-select their university based on pre-determined ideas based on social class. Clara commented that she felt that she '*couldn't apply to a local Russell Group university*'; there were some comments in the transcripts which suggested that this played a part in the decision making of others too. Fran talked of how she felt that if she had chosen to go to a Russell Group university, there would be pressure on her to '*perform*'. Hazel had dropped out of the local Russell Group university the previous October and stated that she was not able to '*stick it out*' after the October half term and

went back to work her term-time part-time job in a full-time role, until she returned to HE at The Centre.

Michael, who had applied and accepted a place the previous academic year at a prestigious university as he had focused mainly on the academic rather than the social profile of the university. In his interview, he described the lack of a social group there that he could identify with as negatively affecting his adjustment to being at university. Although he dropped out after four months, he said he felt at the time determined to still go to university. He reapplied to universities and got offers from all of them. He chose The Centre as he felt the close proximity to his family and friends made it a '*safer*' option.

The above examples from transcripts could suggest that the ideas which Archer et al. (2003) put forward had a part to play in their decisions. Brooks (2012) and Lawton & Moore (2011) note that many non-traditional students stay at home for reasons such as an attempt to decrease their debt, being near to part-time work or providing care for others in their household. Geographical distance between parental home and university could pose a potential barrier to HE entry, and be a deciding factor when choosing between institutions. Some of the participants were constrained in their HE choices because they could not afford to leave home, or for personal or cultural reasons to remain close to their family. The Centre's geographical distance from the FGS's home had little or no impact on the decision to participate in HE, but had a strong influence on institutional choice. It is suggested that studying at The Centre constituted a '*home-like*' experience and offered a sense of familiarity, security and was a '*comfort zone*' for some of the FGSs enabling a '*comfort ontological security*' to be maintained in the transition to HE (Patiniotis & Holdsworth, 2005).

The process of leaving home is an important part of the process of the '*transition to adult life*' (Buck & Scott, 1993: 863). Whilst FGSs were entering a phase of transition from the family home, they did not perceive their entry to university as a final move away. Despite the close links that they still enjoyed with their families, the move to university reflected a life change and as such required a period of adjustment. After initial periods of uncertainty and anxiety, the majority of participants stated that they were enjoying their FS at The Centre.

The decision to stay local, near to or at their family home and to study at '*The Centre*' was, for a number of reasons: wanting to stay at home, financial obligations or family responsibilities. FGSs who lived at home felt they did not enjoy the same freedom or experiences as those living in halls, which affected some of the social aspects of student life. Many of the social events at '*The Centre*' are focused around the halls and unintentionally exclude those who live at home.

The majority of FGSs who lived within ten miles of The Centre stated that their social life was still mainly with people who they knew before coming to The Centre. Davina's comment illustrates this:

'I just hang out with (list of twelve names), I have known them since primary school'.

The 'cultural characteristics' (Reay, David et al., 2005: 37) of a post-1992 institution have been identified as being different than those of a traditional institution (Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). FGSs were attracted to the university given its close proximity to home, confirming literature that suggests that 'working-class students' lead localised lives (Healy, 2006). The idea that university can influence a student identity needed to be considered in light of the propensity of the students to remain in the family home. Peter stated:

'I live at home still, I have a the comfort blanket of home and my creature comforts, first day of uni was like that first day starting school. (Pause and laugh) my mum was like, you know how was uni, have you made any friends, (long pause). What have you done and everything like that. For me that was really nice and made me feel you know good because then I could tell her how I was feeling and think hey I can do this'.

6.1.2 Agency – Support Networks

Crozier et al. (2008) found that non-traditional students were under great pressure to manage their social and cultural identities in university and in their home communities. Crozier discovered that these students had to deal with greater tension between the demands of home and family and coping in the university environment.

A range of people of significance to the FGSs who participated in this inquiry were identified, including partners, families, friends from outside university and those in shared accommodation. How these people helped to provide support is discussed, noting particularly how family support from those with knowledge of HE practices endures, while for some with different experiences there was a degree of alienation from those closest to them.

Students develop confidence as HE students through friendship and peer support (Foster et al., 2011; Andrews & Clark, 2011). Morey & Robbins (2011) cite friends and peers as 'an important informal source of support' and as an aid to transition. The FGSs in this inquiry described how the friendships they built with their fellow students (some first generation, some not) were crucial to their wellbeing and helped them feel a sense of belonging, as well as being a source of friendship and fun. FGSs reflected on the importance of peers in their support

networks; the students had largely built their network for themselves, with little facilitation from lecturers or The Centre or the wider university. The practical support their families were able to offer included maintaining the household to allow them to concentrate on their studies.

FGSs highlighted this kind of practical support as part of their reason for choosing to live at home while they studied, fearing they would not be able to cope with the demands of university at the same time as they coped with new domestic responsibilities such as washing, cleaning and cooking for themselves. Living at home meant that they could continue with the same work patterns, family responsibilities, leisure activities and social networks that they enjoyed while at school or college. As such, they are rejecting 'normative ideals' about studenthood, the implicit understanding there is only one 'authentic' way of being a student, and forging new and distinctive pathways through university.

FGSs referred to family members and partners as sources of support. Only four students' hometowns were more than 50 miles away. One participant, Megan, whose family lived further away, had an aunt living locally, and Josh had a brother working close by. During their interview, many of the participants discussed how friends and members of a wider social group had recommended The Centre and this had encouraged them to apply.

Mia's family, although not local, were important when she was finding the transition to being at The Centre difficult:

'The first couple of weeks, I sort of, (long pause) I eventually sort of rang my parents in tears and was just like I can't do this, this is too hard, I don't like it, and I just sort of spoke to them about it. I think it was a good thing that I really enjoyed the academic side of it otherwise I probably wouldn't be here. And I think that would have been a great shame because I'm loving it now.'

In addition to Mia's family, her boyfriend provided support:

'I have a boyfriend who is actually very, very good; he is keen for me to do well!'

Megan felt more able to make friends when her boyfriend joined her from home:

'After half term I moved in with my boyfriend and 'cos I was then happier I sort of made more of an effort to make friends on my course.'

The perception of four participants was that a number of members of their family were prevented from accessing HE. The sense of a powerful mixture of emotions transcending

through generations was evident, with FGSs feeling enormous pressure to succeed, having achieved the privilege denied to their forebears. FGSs perceived this to be the motivation behind their parents' and wider families' desire to see them enter HE, with their mothers in particular living out their ambitions through their children.

6.1.3 Agency – Small is Beautiful

FGSs also commented that the small class size, in comparison to that of a large university campus, was the major attraction to The Centre. Leanne stated that:

'I guess people are just inclined to people who are similar to them really, similar background, similar experiences, same sorts of personalities, (pause) sense of humour and things.'

Similarity, familiarity and attraction have been found to be interdependent (Moreland & Zajonc, 1982); somebody or somewhere that is perceived as more similar or more familiar or more attractive can influence the other two factors. Smoother transitions are likely to occur when people and environments are perceived as more similar and familiar. The same can be true of different institutions where 'the two worlds both look, and in many respects actually are, the same. These worlds have many of the same points of cultural reference' (Evans, 2008). Although Evans is referring to the similarity between public school and Oxbridge, there is no reason to suppose it is any different for particular colleges or school and a range of universities. Megan commented that:

'The way it's laid out and the buildings and stuff are quite similar to my sixth form... so I liked that, the way it sort of looked quite similar, and it's quite spacious'.

When discussing their physical environment, many of the participants could not easily describe why they liked The Centre or why they preferred it to other places, although it seemed to relate to a perception of institutional identity and the degree fitting with personal or family identity that can be viewed as offering similarity and familiarity. Tom and Simeon tried to explain:

'(pause) was more kind of serious as in the buildings were a bit kind of older, and the people as well. (Pause) just felt as if it had more life, that's the only way I can describe it really. I mean (pause) I know is a really good university but I just wasn't sure if it was me so much because umm I'm not sure, it just didn't have, I mean walking round here, it had a good vibe about it.'

Tom went on to say:

'It's like a feeling that there's no words for. It's just kind of walking around it just didn't kind of um, I don't know, it just didn't have something that I was perhaps looking for. Maybe that's the best way to put it and finally I came and looked round with my dad both times and...I think (I) kind of felt something off him, at (The Centre) he felt as though it was just kind, you know, he was full of compliments more for here than he was for (other local university). I mean I'm not sure if that maybe influenced me in some way.'

'It's almost a blessing in a way that I've come here, it's just, I just feel so much more at home (pause) I'm not being funny to people at (other local university) it's, I'm sure they're all very intelligent people and everything, but it just looks a bit, well it was built in the sixties wasn't it and um I don't know it just looks a bit dated (long pause) I don't know, I just don't think I'd really have enjoyed to be there.' (Simeon).

Underlying these comments is an emotional response to the perceived identity of an institution overlaid with attempts at rationalisation. It is noteworthy that Tom and Simeon as FGSs may not possess the social capital of students with a higher socioeconomic status and to be 'virtuosos of university choice' (Reay et al., 2005: 71). The point is not about the virtues of a particular university or whether people make the 'right' choice. It is about constructed cultural values and their effect on impression formation, and the way in which individuals manage their responses to those impressions of people and places (specifically as indicators of who inhabits them). The core social motives of understanding and trust are implicated, and tended to refer to others' agreement on either positive or negative aspects, which implies shared understanding. Donna stated:

'I know that students generally feel exactly the same thing' (being able to approach lecturers).

A sense of belonging is bound up with assumptions of shared understanding with other students, family or staff, which can affect trust. Gemma commented that she had lost trust in staff following negative feedback after completing an induction piece of coursework:

'I feel like there's nowhere I can go, so I need to sort that out really, I need to get my faith up, I need to get my confidence back again'.

There was some indication that places can provide an anchor point in themselves, suggested as relating to familiarity and security. Several participants went to the computer open access room if they were on their own for partly social reasons such as ‘e-mailing, on Facebook, just passing time.’ (Liz). She further stated:

‘I think we usually sit in the (café) just ‘cos it’s where we first sat, (laughs) we’ve always stayed there’.

Leanne commented on the difficulty of diffused sources of information. This suggests that electronic sources of information are not always a substitute for a person.

‘I think universities are quite strange, they’re quite unusual, there’s not someone you can just go and ask. You can’t just ask someone, you have to find out who you would ask and where that information. (Pause). It’s not like you can just go to a desk and say, oh, because they’re there for a specific reason’.

With few social spaces available, the lack of a ‘proper’ student union was regularly referred to. Liz commented:

‘I think this is the best (campus) just because... a lot of people live actually live near campus and have your lessons here and you can socialise in town but I think the best thing the university could do would be to build a student union place, with a bar. All we have is a pool table and a café.’ (Liz).

6.1.4 Agency – Commuter Campus

The shortage of places to go either in groups or alone was quite apparent. One consequence is that, as many of the students do not spend much time on campus, this is likely to impact on the academic community of The Centre. It seemed that there might be concern about the tendency to desert the campus once lectures or seminars were over. Nadia stated that:

‘I tend to get on quite well doing work at home so I tend to go home. I know we’re supposed to stay on campus but if I work better at home. I was told by (a lecturer) to stay on campus. (long pause) I heard she told one of my friends to be here every day of the week. I don’t know how true that is but that’s what I heard’.

FGSs varied greatly in confidence, in their approach to learning, their understanding of the role of lecturers, and how much help they received. This can be seen in the excerpts below:

'(The staff) were just fantastic and made it a pleasure to come in and want to be involved in more things and really want to be here'. (Becky)

'There's one guy who like if you miss a seminar entirely he's like oh you could do some next week or something, if you've got any doubts if you don't understand anything give me a call or something... (pause) yeah they're extremely helpful. I really think if you fail anything here, it's only because you really wanted to! You didn't make any effort because they make it as easy as possible for you'. (Anita)

'I have (approached staff), yeah, just quickly but never um, never in great detail because normally, so far I've been able to grasp things. And I mean quite a few of my friends are quite helpful at that as well, being able to chat, because if you both don't understand things sometimes it's easier to work it out between you'. (Lexi)

'(The staff) put confidence in you to do well, they almost believe in you, that you can do it, and that's what's positive about it.' (Simon).

'There is that sort of implied responsibility... they say well we don't actually care if you pay attention... and it kind of works, it's, it's self-controlling. The people that want to pay attention come, the people that don't, don't'. (Andrea).

'You get the feeling that (tutors) actually know you, and are interested in you'. (Ellie).

'My tutor has been absolutely amazing and so supportive through the induction process and I don't think I would have, well I know I wouldn't have managed so far this semester without his input'. (Wendy)

6.1.5 Agency – Lecturers as a Resource

FGSs appreciated their relationship with tutors as different from the relationship they had with teachers at school. They felt that they were understood and that the support they had received from lecturers helped to develop their identities as university students. While some enjoyed freedom from structure, others felt confident to ask questions or did not need much help, and found staff supportive, others did not. For FGSs there was considerable uncertainty about student and staff roles, issues of insecurity and a social 'fog' based on fragments of information or assumptions about people and institutions which shaped more negative experiences. Merleau-Ponty (1975) uses the term 'brouillée' (foggy) when talking about phenomenology of

the social world. This perspective is illustrated by excerpts from Nadia's, Carla's, Diane's and Evelyn's interviews:

'In a lecture, it's just really brief because we've got such little time and I'll just be like what are they talking about and so I'll have to go home and do further reading and at A level it was so useful to have that teacher just to ask questions all the time whereas at uni I don't think that's as, I know the lecturers say come and find me whenever, it's just not the same I don't think ummm I'd rather ask my friends which is really bad... it's just a bit scary to go up to someone I don't know, whereas if it was my teacher at A level I wouldn't have a problem. I'm still quite a shy person anyway so that's probably got something to do with it... I don't think, none of them know my name. I just feel like a bit of a, just a number, just a person that comes in and I think I miss that about school, I miss having someone to talk to, to help me, that's why friends are so, I don't know what I'd do without my friends'. (Nadia).

'I don't know, sometimes maybe there could be less focus on learning groups and (pause) friendship groups and stuff, maybe actually a bit more intense tutoring and actually like getting to know the person how they're really getting on as opposed to like a token oh umm how you are doing kind of thing. From talking to some other people on my course, they've had similar experiences and they're a bit like oh, er what's the point in asking them things'. (Carla).

'She (the lecturer) sat in her room and she said I don't care whether you turn up for lectures, seminars, she said I've got my degree so I'm not bothered whether you turn up or not so that to me is the kind of attitude across the board so you kind of feel isolated and that, you don't really know, er where you're going with your work. (Diane)

'The support I've had has been astronomical, now I'm a student ambassador. I want to tell everyone about how this can change your life.' (Evelyn).

6.1.6 Agency – What Degree?

From analysis of the transcripts, it seems that simply being in an educational institution can create a sense of 'them and us', hierarchies and boundaries, and of unwritten rules about what is 'allowed'. The diversity amongst a relatively small sample (fifty participants) of FGSs suggests that there will be a very wide range of motives and attitudes to study, and varying degrees of

knowledge about institutional practice. Perhaps some staff are more accessible than others or have differences in what they consider appropriate help. The data suggests a wide range of student confidence and some inequality in meeting FGSs' academic needs.

There was an uncertainty about what to do with their lives and their choice of subject, with no real idea what was included in their degree content, and this did cause some difficulty. Minnie and Kara stated that:

'The first sociology lecture went straight over my head, I'd no idea of so many of the words they were using I'd not heard of and actually the, there was just the developmental psychology and the learning psychology I had briefly touched on that in child care and I found because I felt I could do it, because I'd heard of it before, I did much better on those two weeks, I was more involved'. (Minnie)

'I personally hadn't done psychology or sociology really before so I was a bit baffled by what they were talking about – (laughs) like some of the words and stuff they were using, I was like I don't really understand what she's saying to me'. (Kara)

Minnie's and Kara's experience indicates that familiarity of academic material is important and had an impact, as she said, on their involvement, taken to mean academic engagement. The participants had completed a variety of level 3 subjects prior to starting at university. There is a division between the students who have a foundation in an area and those who do not. This was particularly the case for degrees that depend on general academic skills more than particular knowledge. It is not clear how such differences can be addressed without overt discussion of existing knowledge. Here is an example where Green's (2006) emphasis on understanding a student's locus so that effective scaffolding can take place comes to the fore.

Neavah found most staff at The Centre willing to help her. However, this did create an uncertainty and anxiety, though this was not enough to cause Neavah to leave The Centre:

'...when I was handing in the first essay and I got the first one back and I put so much effort into it and then I got like really poor, them little tick things like poor, poor, poor, poor, I was like maybe my brain isn't like a social scientist, because I haven't done it before, I don't have a very, I've always done like science and stuff, biology and stuff, I was thinking (long pause) maybe I've got more like a factual brain rather than creating an argument kind of brain so I did think then oh I don't know if I've chosen the right course, and I do sometimes still think that, like sometimes when I don't understand things so I'm a little bit anxious about that but I do the best I can.'

Kara's explanation for not doing well in her essays during the FS can be categorised as internal, uncontrollable and stable, with reference to Weiner's (1985: 2000) attribution theory, predicted to lead to feelings of fear and the possibility of dropping out. The judgement as to why she did not do well rests on doubts about her ability in the subject whereas, in this case, creating an argument is surely a skill that develops over time. Judgements about self and others have social origins and social consequences. In that light, it is interesting to note a comment made in passing by one student that not being able to understand a particular lecturer was an indication of the lecturer's intellectual superiority.

The sense that FGSs had that they should be 'doing it on their own' was inadvertently fed by staff and other students and created or contributed to a false image of what is meant by independent learning. FGSs at times saw themselves as inadequate students when they asked for help. This agrees with Leathwood's (2006: 615) presumption about equating a need for support with being a 'bad' student.

Once at The Centre, new information and experiences provided different perspectives for the participants. In transitional terms, there was a marked shift for many away from a somewhat instrumental approach to getting a degree. For some FGSs academia proved to be an enjoyable experience, for others there was greater awareness of its limitations as some kind of automatic passport to employment. Liz, Mia and Nadia commented:

'I think it's completely changed my view. Um, having a degree is a fantastic start in life but by no means will it guarantee you any form of work, no matter what degree. (I have found out) from my you know other students, from my seminar tutors and lecturers, um, (pause) from people who I have like a part-time job with as well, it's all to do, I'm beginning to realise the value of having work experience when I'm in the second year as I had not realised I would do a block when I chose the course. I don't know what I am going to be about my job then.' (Liz)

'So many people I know describe being a student as it's a complete doss but no it's a lot of hard work and (long pause) it's actually a lot of the uni work I really, really enjoy.' (Mia)

'When I first wanted to get a degree I thought the only reason (was) for the degree, it still is that but it's now more part of an experience, a life experience.' (Nadia)

Some FGSs referred to moving on with their lives as a motive for applying to university and studying at The Centre. Moving away from home has already been referred to as part of that

process for those who had not continued to live at home, but expressed as a kind of measured transition. Mina, Julie and Lee commented that,

'I didn't want to live at home anymore but I didn't want to be up north doing a course (pause) umm I don't know what it is about, but I've always seen being independent as a good quality because it's, if you're too dependent on say your parents, you're waiting for them to, for you to do the, like do the rest of your life basically, and if you're dependent...you haven't got anything to hold which is actually yours, you can't turn round and say I earnt (sic) this, look at me, I'm amazing.' (Mina)

'It is not too far away from home, it's may be two hours away. (Pause). It was a big liberation to be completely absorbed into a whole new place, um, you know just, to start again, it's a fresh start because I think you kind of get tired of who you are when you're, when everyone knows you and every little thing about you so it's a good opportunity to start again afresh and have lots of new people'. (Julie)

'...there's the social side, like leaving home and having independence and being able to run your own life and budget and things. (Laughs) It's like a stepping, a sort of midway thing between living completely independently and then living with your parents'. (Lee).

The initial financial incentives for staying at home had less meaning once FGSs were studying at The Centre. Trudy stated that:

'For some reason I didn't want to move far away from home (pause) the main reason really I suppose was to kind of save money because I lived quite close, um, you know I'm seeing horror stories of people coming out of university and having big debts and everything. I thought if I try and minimalise it as much as I can it would help but I do regret that I have to say, definitely regret not moving out'.

Discourses about independence are bound up with the value of individuality, intrinsic to the ideal student experience. Transition is seen as necessary and involving a degree of discomfort. This is illustrated by Tasha and Nicola:

'I think I would have matured kind of thing, living away from home (pause) as I am living at home all my kind of my washing's done for me, that is nice, I'm not saying it's not, it is nice. But I think it's a sheltered university experience (pause) I'd

rather 've kind of been eating baked beans for a week if I didn't have any money kind of thing, that's a university experience for me'. (Tasha)

If I'd have moved out then I'd call it more of a university experience because it's about like living away from home, fending for yourself, 'cos it's a lot more different from living at home, going to school, where everything's done for you, so that's the experience, that's what I want next year. (Nicola)

FGSs' reflections on their FS indicate that the 'university experience' has become reified as an important rite of passage and a social motive in its own right. Whether moving away to study should be valued more than living and studying locally, so maintaining existing ties, is questionable and is a highly subjective and individualised decision.

. Anna, who started late, in the FS at her previous university (due to illness in the family) and withdrew before Christmas, described The Centre as her ideal university:

'I'm probably alone in this but I loved school and I loved college so I'd like it to be a step on from there but not made to be this huge thing where you've got to go (long pause) somewhere far away from where you live, do you know what I mean? And you've got to meet loads of different friends and I love meeting new people but I like, like when I went to college I went with some friends but I met a whole load of new ones and university is so seen as something you've got to do on your own and got to do far away and I've got a very close boyfriend at home as well so I'd like it to just to be that a little step on from and I have quite an independent home life as well so I suppose I wasn't going for that but I'd just like it to be a step on really, like school, college, university. (Anna).

6.1.7 Agency – Achievement

FGSs' transition to HE study showed signs of irregularity in terms of the ability to apply personal experiences and skills to theoretical knowledge in assessment. The process of assessment is more demanding in HE and many of the participants were concerned that there was a 'lack of chance to incorporate tutor feedback in final draft' prior to submission. Learning at university is an individual process, as students become autonomous students. The existence of learning support services enabled the preservation of students' autonomy. The FGSs decided to seek help or not regarding their concerns around coping with the demands of assessment.

There was concern regarding formative and future summative grades for essay, modules etc., as part of a range of factors driving their commitment to study at The Centre. For some (twenty two participants) their grades had a personal significance, the desire to do well and achieve high marks served as a reason to keep going. FGSs that did not prioritise high grades were focused just on getting through, completing their courses and obtaining professional qualifications, as they wanted to gain a foothold into employment. Many stressed in their interviews a similar perspective to Dan that *'A degree is like an entry ticket for a better job.'*

Goals are important to motivation although multiple goals, e.g. academic and social, can lead to conflicting priorities, which were influenced by diverse identities and life contexts. For many their entry to studying at The Centre was complicated because of academic setbacks. Narratives were offered that were anchored in poor secondary schooling; as the following extracts show, school was experienced as a site of failure, struggle, discouragement, and unhappiness:

'I really struggled and I failed quite a few of my subjects'. (Claire)

'My grades from school weren't the greatest in the world'. (Scott,)

'I hated secondary school, it was absolutely horrible. I found it really hard to make friends. In school, I was just on my own and I was being bullied. I absolutely hated it. I left when I was 16. I got okay GCSEs but I found it really hard to concentrate and learn. My parents were quite surprised at how well I actually did (pause) so I went to college and did a BTEC. Ummm, when I looked at the amount of points I'd got I hadn't got enough to do anything at university (pause) I got in to do the Foundation Degree but I thought being as this was the degree I might as well do this one. (long pause) So once I'd got in and I went to the admin staff and went and said is there any way I can change the degree I'm doing to a different one and they said yeah that's fine. So I don't think I've got enough points to do that degree, but I have got in now'.

(Josie)

The way in which FGSs discussed their journeys into HE indicated how this might have damaged their self-esteem and confidence about their capability as students, with a lack of confidence based on a sense of a failure to achieve academically. Not only did the negative effects of past schooling experiences structure many of the responses, it suggested the pull of these experiences during their FS signalled the capacity of these emotions to migrate into and within HE.

Achievements and outcomes were evaluated by his/her perspectives of the FS. These were identified along a continuum in FGSs' perceptions, which varied from underachievement at one extreme to achievement at the other. When FS experience outcome fulfilled personal aims/goals of studying at The Centre, a student would regard it as achievement. However, if the outcome failed to fulfil his or her personal aims/goals the student would classify it into the category of underachievement. It could be that catching up with fellow students in their group was perceived as achievement, or completion of their FS or receiving a good grade. As the following excerpts illustrate, FGSs who did not feel a sense of achievement felt they had not been challenged enough to fulfil their aim for studying for a degree.

'Catching up. Like I have said, at the beginning I've forgotten to get a lot of stuff. The achievement is I have caught up with everybody. And the fact that I have been doing my project and things. I've been doing them at a good level and with enough space. I gave myself enough time. Because I was especially recently I've been forced myself to be more motivated. At college, I wasn't at all. So you know everything I am doing at the moment every single day I did something new that helps me is an achievement'. (Robyn)

'Yeah, then it is not really an achievement. Because it is just something that passes time. I would gain probably a degree out of it. But I don't really achieve like the knowledge that I wanted to achieve. So even if you got good grade, you wouldn't think that is really an achievement?' (Diana)

'No, because it was easy. Because if it was hard to get the high grade, then I learnt a lot to get to that grade, then that's an achievement'. (Sara)

The core social motive of self-enhancement (Fiske, 2002) and the theory of need for achievement (McClelland, 1961) both suggest that humans are motivated to 'be' something. The social possibilities of what one can or should become are constructed by social institutions including the family and schools, however personal and undetermined by other people they might appear. For Fiske (2002: 241), self-enhancement refers to the hope 'that others will see you as socially worthy'. The cultural capital that is attached to a degree gives it high value as a potential self-enhancer, even though Tom expressed some doubt as to its continuing value:

'It's only now that I'm here that I actually realised how kind of important you know, you know the chance to kind of achieve a degree which is you know a real, (pause) I know it doesn't hold much substance now 'cos lots of people have them but for me

personally it just kind of just sort of affirms to myself that I can, if I put the effort in I can achieve something'.

The possibility of feeling worthy and gaining confidence was very important and at times highly emotional.

'I don't feel like I've really achieved anything... I'm just jealous of the friends that I know that went to uni and have moved away and travelled and done more. I'd like to be a bit more, bigger life, more exciting and that's part of doing this because I think it would make, help me to do other things, a bigger life... I think having the education thing would give me confidence'. (Ellie).

'It means a lot, um, I suppose it's a, for me, it's very much represented a second chance, as I dropped out of uni umm (long pause) it's given me a great sense of achievement, um, you know I've met so many new and interesting people, um (pause) you know I've had my own sort of ideas and opinions challenged which I think is never a bad thing, um, it's just sort of given me different ways to think about things, um, it's given me a lot more confidence as well (pause) in the community I was brought up in (sigh and pause) you don't try and rise above your station sort of thing, and I was very much given the impression that only certain people could like be teachers for example, you know people who were sort of well- respected and educated in the town, um, so not just any old, and certainly not me'. (Elaine)

'For me, getting through university would be the biggest achievement so far umm The drive comes from the past, giving up on myself and somehow getting good grades, the need to make something of myself, to make my family proud, to make myself proud (pause) the drive comes from the need to succeed really (pause) I'm quite used to people saying oh she'd never do this, she's crap at this, so now I feel the need to prove them wrong'. (Beth)

Martin referred more directly to social status:

'I felt that um with a degree education (the work I want to do) would carry that certain status which I wouldn't have without qualifications'. (Martin)

Luke compared himself with his partner's family who were educated to a higher level. A degree could be seen as a passport to a more valued social world.

'A lot of my partner's family have been to university. I always felt that a bit more keenly when I was with my partner's family, sort of talking to them um that I'd you know I'd missed out and wanted to kind of develop myself (pause) they were able to kind of articulate things better, put forward arguments better and um, just more better informed about social issues and things like that so I kind of hoped that it's going to give me that as well'. (Luke)

Simeon expressed a similar view:

'I've never really been recognised at anything in my life before, apart from sport, but it just doesn't really, that doesn't matter to me, it's just sports are sports, whereas academia, I always see academics as those people that you want to aspire to be'.

Andrea, desired something more from life:

'I came to the conclusion that it wasn't actually what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. It was alright but it wasn't really stimulating. You know, I could do it with my eyes shut, and it paid well but I decided that wasn't enough anymore'. (Andrea)

There was an awareness of the social pressure to get a degree and the structure that allowed for it. For many of the participants, as the excerpts below show, university represented the next step in the educational system en route to a job.

'It's like an integral part of your career, isn't it? Yeah, so going to university would obviously be like the next step'. (Kara).

'I mean when I was in college it didn't mean (much), going to university just seemed a natural progression from college so it didn't mean that much (pause) a rat run'. (Tom).

'It appears like you can't really do anything significant with your life if you didn't have this bit of paper that says, you know, yeah you did three years of sitting in a library. (University) is an enjoyable experience, I don't want it to seem like it's drudgery but there's a lot of pressure at kind of sixth form level, right you're definitely going to go aren't you, it's quite important that you go'. (Josh).

'I don't know, to be totally honest I've no idea what I want to do with life, I've always enjoyed learning so I feel it's the next step. I've no idea what I'm going to do with it. I just want to learn more because I find it interesting'. (Zena).

'I don't really know what I want to do so, the tuition fees were going up, so I thought I'd come to university, get a degree and then see what happens'. (Nadia).

6.1.8 Agency – Teach Us

The extracts below indicate that this was necessary for many FGSs and referred to a desire for more contact time, particularly seminar rather than lecture time, for integration, academic progress and motivation.

'I think work wise I don't feel as motivated as I think I should be because, 'cos it's in so few hours I don't feel like uni is my main part of life so I can't really get into it sort of thing 'cos, I dunno, there's not enough 'in' time to be doing it and I'm not very good at getting motivated myself!' (Lexi)

'I think there might be needed more, personally, obviously you're probably meant to do it off your own back (sic), with extra help and stuff but (long pause). I think maybe a bit more time practising essays, personal development was meant to be that but I didn't find that very helpful at all'. (Kim)

'I don't think there's enough contact time. It is not enough for the amount of work that you have to do um and I think that they've piled on too much into each of the modules because you don't have time to grasp anything before you're moving onto the next subject (sigh and long pause) if you're going to do that then the hours is definitely not long enough, the lecture time and seminar time is not long enough, but by the same token, if it was more hours, I wouldn't be able to get in for a lot of it, either, because of my position, I still work part time. Double-edged sword there. (pause) You're kind of taught at, so that's how it's done. You're taught by someone standing in front of you but it's not as interactive as it needs to be with the people who, 'cos it's alright tossing an idea with a fellow student but they don't know the answer either, so you need the extra from the tutors because they're the ones with the knowledge'. (Donna).

The extract from Donna's transcript supports Leese's (2010) idea of the 'New Student' who balances part-time work with studying at university. This is a student who has chosen to live at home, work locally and travel into a local university mainly to attend lectures and tutorials; spending little time in the university environment. A link was made in Donna's interview

between paying fees and contact time and FGSs clearly felt that they were not getting their money's worth. Donna went on to say:

'I think coming into the environment, it should have been made clearer to the students that, although they might give the impression they're not interested but that is to some degree what they're there for, go and use them, because a lot of students they just, from that initial when they've turned up they've been told no that's not what (the staff are) there for, you know, they're more interested in something else. (pause) I thought that paying for it they were at my disposal, but that's obviously not the case, because they make it very clear that they've got 101 other things to do and you are at the bottom of the list in their priorities'.

This was supported by Lin and Liz, who stated:

'Oh there ought to be more considering we're paying three grand a year, really... my friends at other universities have got sort of 12 hours a week, minimum and I think I've got ten this semester, something like that? I could easily spend Monday to Thursday in my house just doing, well just doing social stuff so going shopping and going out in the evening and then the next day um, just you know, I could just as easily kill time and not do anything to do with the university for those days.' (Liz)

'There's definitely not been enough. 'Cos although, 'cos I think no matter how many hours it's easy to miss them, it's really easy to miss them but if there were a few more, it just feels a bit like sort of say for this year, I'm paying three thousand and seventy I think this year in fees I think. (pause) And I'm not sure I think the government pays more on that, so then it's sort of like how many thousands and thousands that is, and I get ten hours a week and it goes down to eight sometimes'. (Lyn).

Overall, for many the transition from a highly structured and supportive sixth form experience to having what might be considered free time and few pieces of written work was difficult to manage. Indeed, the less regulatory environment has been theorised as a potentially demotivating factor likely to lead to disappointment and possible withdrawal (McQueen, 2008). There is an issue of readiness which could be tackled both during the FS in the institution and through discussions with schools and colleges. In addition, the payment of fees (which has now increased) had the effect of increasing FGSs' sense of themselves as service users, and they had more expectations from the staff as service providers.

In answering the question posed to them, FGSs absorbed, rejected, or reacted to the individual circumstances into which they were born and through which they lived that better describes how they finally made the transition to university. During the interviews, there was only one side of the story to present. However, there is another side that is at least partially visible and that is the influence of each individual on the people and situations around them, intentional or otherwise, that in turn encourages responses that dampen down particular characteristics, hopes, plans, and ways of being.

Parents loomed large, with more reference to mothers. For example, Hannah's mother was a '*massive force*' in her desire for HE. Evie and Valerie talked of mother/daughter relationships and the difficulties associated with transforming a mutual dependence into, for the young people, desired independence. Educationally, Hannah's mother was a role model and source of support. Socially motivated emotions of guilt, shame and pride were important 'drivers' in their families' lives.

Evie was raised with expectations of achievement although, by comparison with others around her including those with culturally diverse upbringings, she perceived there to be a lack of practical structuring to support those expectations, one example being no desk to work on at home. Valerie's parents appeared to lack understanding, or perhaps experience, of the subtle means by which educational outcomes can be manipulated so that she was pushed and coerced into school work rather than persuaded and encouraged, as well as receiving mixed messages about the value of education and the imperative of getting a job as soon as she left school. Overt discussion of theory was included. Experiences were related that revealed the theoretical bases of their meaning, frequently drawing on familial understandings of the social and academic world, but overlain with some social scientific knowledge. It was noticeable that the participants referred in passing to concepts such as social identity or group theory or the hidden curriculum.

6.2 Motivation

Motivation is a broad term that can refer to the direction and level of effort applied to a task. It reflects what is desired and how much it is desired. In an HE context, motivation can encompass the reasons students give for attending university (distal goals) and their level of desire or willingness to engage in activities directed towards shorter-term (proximal) goals aligned to these reasons. The nature of motivation can be explored from two perspectives: (a) FGSs'

reasons for attending The Centre, and (b) what determines (changes to) the level and direction of their motivation whilst at The Centre.

Only eight of the FGSs interviewed felt they had decided to study at The Centre because of parental pressure. Rob stated '*my mum and dad wanted me to come to university so I just fell in line*'. Eleven of the FGSs were not sure if doing a foundation degree/degree was what they really wanted to do. An example being Sue who stated that '*I just felt I wasn't quite ready for going out into the real world of work.*' However, they felt that they would be letting their family down if they did not continue, as their parents were keen for them to continue their education. Their lack of motivation meant that they did not attend lectures/tutorials on a regular basis, and were not committed to their studies.

Archer et al. (2003) suggests that socioeconomic status and family background have a major impact on students' ambitions and aspirations. They propose that entrants to university from the lower socioeconomic groups see it predominantly as a route to a better job. Part of the motivation to engage in further study appears to come from students trying to make sense of their career choices and options. FGSs depicted themselves as agents in their own careers, and this is a key factor identified in other research into sensemaking in career development (Canary & Canary, 2007).

Goals are important to motivation although multiple goals, e.g. academic and social, can lead to conflicting priorities, which are influenced, by students' diverse identities and life contexts. For many this is an instrumental (*to get a better or better-paid job*) approach to gaining a degree. A lack of success at school can often be an incentive for later study (Gorard & Rees, 2002). This is an example of the 'get in and stay in' mentality of the working-class students in Crozier et al.'s (2008) study. Despite the fact these students may not have been confident learners, it did not mean that they did not have a strong disposition to learn (Gorard & Rees, 2002). This determination saw them through this phase of their transition to university, which many described as a 'survival'.

FGSs indicated that motivation was of the broader context of their HE students' lives and developing identities. Transitions do not occur in series or in isolation. In relation to education, family, friends and teachers acted as key purveyors of sociocultural capital. Of these, family and friends appear to be primary influencers who are likely to mediate WP strategies that aim to raise attainment, aspiration and application. Kiera stated, what many others inferred: '*We know about social exclusion, poor housing, the benefits system, being seen as scroungers and chavs. We've lived it (in the Campus Town), being here (at The Centre) means we can leave it outside*'.

Transitions in the economy or policy are systemically bound up with individual transitions. Côté & Bynner (2008: 251) discuss delayed or 'prolonged' transitions as young people live at home for longer, postpone having children, stay in education for longer, put off or cannot find full-time work and so on. Delayed or accelerated transitions imply that there is a 'right' or preferred time for a transition to take place whereas either can have associated advantages or difficulties (Mitchell, 2005). The participants' accounts indicated that a number of transitions take place over time and at different paces, and the interviews indicated that transitions were not simple linear affairs. Nor are transitions easy to define in clear and meaningful ways. For example, becoming a more independent learner is heralded as an important transition to make. It could be that independent learners can or do make better use of social resources rather than working in a more separated or isolated way.

Rather than offering simple solutions to complex problems in the transition to and through HE with regard to social motives and socially motivating circumstances, some important questions arise. The holistic approach taken by the inquiry provided a glimpse of the interplay between individuals' lives and the socially structured world in which they find themselves. Government policy has been a driver of promoting higher education for its potential financial benefits for a transition to a better economic world and a better standard of living. However, the transition to being some kind of '*better person*' is also recognised. 'While we clearly value the benefits of HE to wealth creation, we probably do not celebrate enough the civilising contribution that HE can make in a more complex social environment' (HEFCE, 2008: 36). Presumably their hope is for the next generation, although it is philosophically questionable whether the aim of creating wealth and living in a 'peaceful and intellectually and culturally stimulating world' (ibid) are truly compatible.

6.3 Critical Life Events

Bourdieu's 'aspirational habitus' was described by the FGSs as they stated that there was a sense in their families that education was valuable and the culmination of this was to go to university. Habitus was not always a restricting mindset or style of life that clashed with the ethos of HE. The notion of being '*better than that*', whatever '*that*' means for the respective FGSs, featured in many interviews. This was particularly the case for those who felt that they wanted better opportunities than their parents had. Despite the fact their parents had not been to university, HE was viewed positively. Studying at The Centre was also seen as a way to '*make more money*' and this view featured highly in the transcripts. The perceptions being that studying a degree would be a help get '*a job*' and '*money*'.

An example being Elizabeth who stated:

'About a year ago I was like; oh I'm not going to university. (Long pause) Why pay that much for an education? Then I heard the fees were increasing umm I didn't want to be on the dole because there are less jobs around here every year, umm here especially in comparison to other towns. Most of the jobs that there are, poor pay are menial'.

For Julie the, death of a family member when she started sixth form led to her applying to The Centre. Denzin (2001) refers to such events as a major epiphany that can result in a rethinking of existential goals.

'I guess the thing that made me sort of come to the decision to get a degree was that with my dad, when he died, he ended up with just nothing'. (Anne).

FGSs discussed an imagined future, which they envisage to be a 'better' future. Imagined social capital provides a space for dreaming of the possibilities that could occur through connecting with the learning environment (Quinn, 2005). It provides a tool for FGSs to envisage moving away from what is expected of them, often because of bonding social capital, to a place that they want to be, raising aspirations and expectations. Without that space, new social capital will remain unimagined and ambitions and aspirations will be constrained. Other research exploring the aspirations of students in transition (in this case from FE/sixth form to HE) in the hospitality industry describes the 'imagined futures' of these students (Goodlad & Thompson, 2007). These 'imagined futures' include 'climbing up the career ladder' and gaining qualifications which would allow them to fulfil their career dreams (Goodlad & Thompson, 2007: 5).

Many of the participants in their accounts stated/inferred that they did not possess a true awareness prior to starting at The Centre of what life as an HE student was going to be like. They found studying for a degree at The Centre and the change from school/college difficult. Within the interviews they reported that they expected more to be done for them by staff at The Centre and found the 'freedom' difficult. Viv stated *'this is the first time I have been on my own with no-one telling me what to do, and checking up on me (laugh) it just went to my head!'* Fifteen of the participants referred to their participation in HE as being something that they had 'drifted' into. This is a particularly interesting finding (discussed in 6.1 Agency); most of the literature regarding participation is based upon a single simple assumption that individuals are actively making decisions.

The FGSs varied considerably in their experiences of the transition to and through university. A shift from a highly regulated to a less regulated system, variation in living arrangements, a lack of social spaces on campus, and diversity in terms of students' ages (18-20), and life experiences were all implicated in different transitional experiences. Developing confidence, enjoying their chosen course, benefiting from supportive staff, student relations, and making new friends, characterised positive adjustment. They described how building networks at The Centre included taking on the role of student representative and student ambassadors.

The emotional impact of these past educational experiences was indicated through the participants' use of contrastive rhetoric. There are several lines of sociological argument which suggest that the business of making contrasts is a widespread feature of interactional and conversational practice (Hargreaves & Woods, 1984: 221). Contrasts are either explicitly or implicitly involved in all descriptions, since all our conceptions of what things are also constructed according to the corollaries of what they are not and such rhetorical accounting devices justify what speakers say and believe. The use of such contrastive rhetoric was identified in many social settings, where FGSs created accounts based on distinctions between 'them and us', 'past and present' and 'here and there'. The quote below indicates how Helena used the contrastive rhetoric of '*past and present*' to understand her experiences of education:

'Oh I did terrible. I just like messed around you know (pause) 'past and present' I wasn't really interested, but as I got older you know you want to do well you are more motivated because you know the outcome in the end. (Pause) Yeah I was like in the bottom class when I was a little kid about five, umm then I worked myself up and then in my last year at school I was in the top set which was a good achievement for me. I thought I'd come to uni to be good at psychology and sociology'. (Helena)

Being accepted to a degree programme at The Centre was not enough to allay some of the participants' fears about their capability to study at university level. They were anxious and often commented on what they perceived to be their 'weaknesses'. Janice stated that:

'I need to be reassured that I'm doing the right thing or going in the right direction, umm you I mean I'm not brilliant at grammar like commas and semi-colons I'm rubbish at stuff like that, we didn't really learn that at school'. (Janice)

The data regarding FGSs' journeys into HE highlighted that they felt they were taking huge academic and personal 'risks' in deciding to study at The Centre. Crozier et al. (2008) and Bowl (2001) found that a combination of academic and personal issues appeared to shape the

learner identities of their 'non-traditional' participants, as they entered university lacking confidence in their academic capability, suggesting their emotions reflected many of this inquiry's participants.

Key emotions stated by the participants regarding their first few weeks at The Centre were:

- Worried, would they succeed, had they made the right choice of degree and place?
- Excited, eager to get started, apprehensive, what are the other students and the lecturers like?
- Overwhelmed, lost in a sea of faces, buildings and instructions.
- Nervous, lots of rooms were in front of me, which one should I go in.

FGSs stated that during the FS the most difficult/stressful things during the change from attending school/college to studying at The Centre were; intensity of workload, timetable (lack of) and year timetable (terms etc.), deadlines, the first assignment, what was required, report/essay writing, the big academic jump from sixth form to HE work, adjusting to the change in teaching and learning style, lecturers having less time, lack of information (relying on Moodle), lectures, working environment, and finances.

Hannah commented that:

'I just kept going, I just (pause), I just followed the crowd I suppose, you know, (pause) I didn't make the definite decision but I just sort went along with it'.

FGSs varied considerably in their experiences of the transition to and during their FS at The Centre. Developing confidence, enjoying their chosen course, benefiting from supportive staff-student relations, and making new friends characterised positive adjustment. Variation in living arrangements, a lack of social spaces on campus, diversity in terms of age, and life experiences were all implicated in different transitional experiences.

FGSs were faced with multiple transitions in and beyond The Centre during their FS, depending on their life circumstances. These included sexuality, partnerships, moving out of or away from home adjustment, living at home and being a student, to a significantly less regulated pattern of study. This evidence suggests that participation in HE is strongly embedded in and explained by interwoven social, historical and biographical circumstances and experience.

Transition to university and being involved in university life was not a one-time event for FGSs. It was an event that will continue throughout their time studying at The Centre. Consequently, a series of outcomes happened and will continue to occur after their FS. Academic outcomes are

related to assessment results, understanding of subject knowledge and academic skills. Social skills and friendship were seen as important and that these aided FGSs' sense of being part of The Centre. Confidence, motivation and independence are the key three outcomes identified by FGSs as part of their personal development to becoming, being and achieving university students. Knowledge about The Centre's systems, and their feelings regarding life at university, were all stated as outcomes that aided their sense of belonging during their FS.

Overall, the FGSs who participated in this inquiry, found the transition to university difficult in the FS. They had been surprised by the intensity of the workload; found their first assignment very stressful; had difficulty adapting to the change in teaching and learning style; found it difficult to organise their workload and to self-study; felt lost and physically got lost. FGSs, similar to new employees, attempted to make sense of their role. The feeling of lack of ownership or control of the student process by these undergraduates caused them to reflect on their position and try to make sense their role. Their main focus was to achieve a degree and gain employment, not to be a 'university student' in the traditional sense.

At the transition point between primary and secondary school, FGSs lacked the level of autonomy they had felt during the process of choosing a university. Their increased autonomy is perhaps also reflective of a shift in habitus: the students informed or discussed their ideas about HE with their parents following their own information seeking. Although many parents implicitly and explicitly supported their children through the process of choosing a university, there was a sense in which they sat on the side lines observing their children making the transition to university.

The decision to go to university for many of the participants was constructed in a complex myriad of emotional and psychological processes (Lucey, Melody et al., 2003). FGSs recounted instances where they felt confused, ambivalent, disappointed or anxious. Coupled with these intense emotions were also feelings of anticipation and excitement. However, whilst the parents of the students had not been to university themselves, they had knowledge of people who did and this may have contributed to the positive attitudes displayed towards education.

FGSs had mixed emotions, being both scared and excited regarding studying at The Centre. Some indicated that they had no one to turn to for advice, with some stating that *'I don't really know anyone who's been to university'*. Support from parents was often commented on positively and stated that they felt the balance of their parents' input was about right. They were supportive without being too involved, allowing the students to feel autonomous in the process of choosing a university.

FGSs' autonomy was indicative of increased levels of support in their previous sixth form institutions, where teachers took on the role of advisor/mentor. This contrasts with earlier moments in FGSs' educational histories where their parents were responsible for choosing an appropriate secondary school. In line with political rhetoric, choosing a good school for your child is an act of a 'good' parent (Ball, Bowe et al., 1996; Goldhaber, 1999).

Peter felt that his parents were supportive of him going to university, but he felt constrained by his home context. His mother, being disabled, required full-time care and support and this was mainly provided by Peter's father. Peter felt that he was needed at home to provide some respite for his father. With this in mind, Peter applied to 'The Centre'. He had the academic ability (part of the Gifted and Talent programme) to go to any university, including Cambridge. Peter self-selected away from Cambridge believing that '*it wouldn't be right for me*'. The emotional and psychological distance that Peter would potentially travel to go to Cambridge would be immense. Through his history of academic success, he had positioned himself in-line with more middle-class practices and yet was not completely comfortable with the idea of entering a local Russell group university. Peter had always wanted to attend university locally as he knew that he would 'fit' socially there. During his interview, Peter referred to other universities as being places where he would not feel comfortable, where '*they just didn't feel right*'. The shift in habitus for Peter was such that going to The Centre felt safe, but going beyond the boundaries of his geographical area was a step too far.

Peter has continued to live at home and share in the care of his mother as he had always done. In choosing The Centre, literature suggests that his (and many other participants) 'certified form' (Bourdieu 1986: 291) of cultural capital would have less market exchange value than if he had studied at a more reputable institution (Salter & Tapper, 1994). In a Bourdieusian sense, Peter, although he had travelled some distance in going to university at all, had created little distance between his social beginnings and social position. He had not transgressed, in a Bourdieusian sense, the 'social limits which reflect spatial distances' (Bourdieu, 1998: 10). The 'logic' of Peter's choice of institution is embedded in his home context and the social distance he has travelled to get to HE. Peter's aspirations are bounded by his mother's dependency. Peter takes his caring role seriously and demonstrates huge attachment to his family. By choosing The Centre, Peter is protecting his habitus from possible 'crises and critical challenges' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 61).

Transitions are not simple, linear affairs, nor are they easy to define in clear and meaningful ways. FGSs revealed the processes around 'becoming', 'being' and 'achieving' university students in the interviews. Becoming a more independent learner was seen as an important

transition as was making use of social resources rather than becoming isolated. Social motives influenced FGS' transitional experiences and a sense of belonging and feelings of trust were important factors in their experiences and adjustment. The former includes comparison with previous institutional experiences, and fits between personal and perceived institutional identity, and building friendships. Trust was greater for those who believed staff were interested in them as students, and lesser if there was doubt about the university's academic status or being valued by others as learners above financial gain for the institution.

6.4 Social Interactions

A key aspect in the data was the self-perception of FGSs, i.e. how they perceived themselves as university students, as their GCSE results and subsequent level 3 qualifications were often seen as a matter of 'luck' or 'a fluke' and 'not really university students'. This was stated with some concern and anxiety, and influenced their decision to study at The Centre. Bourdieu (1990) describes the unique difficulties involved in establishing position in social fields where 'belief' is an 'inherent part of belonging' (Bourdieu, 1990a: 67). The FS for all undergraduates is full of complex negotiations in which the students attempt to find their respective 'place' in their new environment.

'Meeting people and finding close friends that I can really confide in' (Patsy) was highlighted as a key aspect of settling in. However, this was not offered as a reason for attending The Centre explicitly by the FGSs either because it was not a primary motivation or because they felt it inappropriate to state this in the interview. It is possible that this was an unspoken motivation for other FGSs. This may also be a matter of concern for some FGSs as a personal risk is involved in forming new relationships away from established sources of support. The value of friendships is reflected in many of the students' interviews, where new friendships are often seen as providing peer support within the subjects studied rather than for social activities at The Centre. Kath commented that *'I've got my (previous) friends (long pause) anyway (laugh) I did want to open my horizons and meet new people and things, but it wasn't my aim coming here.'*

In this inquiry, FGSs expressed anxious moments in which they felt alone at times during the first few weeks. It is not the form of 'disconnection from family and cultural backgrounds' Wentworth and Peterson (2001: 10) identify when describing the FS university experiences of FGSs. Nor is it the type of 'dislocation' identified by Walkerdine et al. (2001) when describing social mobility. The participants' described a more subtle social and cultural dispersion. How

FGSs perceived themselves as learners (university students) was influential in how they became, felt they belonged, engaged with and made the transition to studying at The Centre.

This inquiry did not initially set out to explore the learner identities of the participants. However, the transcripts provided a narrative about their experiences in relation to how they perceived themselves as university students as they began to become, be and achieve at The Centre. Significantly these identities were not of 'strong' learners and this suggested that this may influence their experiences of becoming a university student. Many did not view themselves as successful learners. Their learner identities could be described as 'fragile' (Gallacher et al., 2002: 43) which meant they entered university lacking confidence in their academic capability. Matt stated that *'I'm a lot more confident in my intelligence now I am here (at The Centre) (long pause) in my abilities (I) think my personal confidence has grown.'* Weil (1986) and Gorard & Rees (2002) contend that a key aspect of a student's learner identity is formed by their prior experiences of education and their beliefs about their capability as a learner. Yorke & Knight (2004) argue the self-theories of students are a neglected aspect of HE, yet are influential in student development and achievement.

The participants also made reference to financial problems, with many of the students working part time to be able to survive, and found it difficult to manage the work/study/personal life balance in the first term. The FGSs found meeting friends and forming social groups difficult. This was often accentuated by the fact that they were living at home (in the next county), and having to travel considerable distance (by train), so were only attending timetabled teaching sessions. When asked if they had talked to anyone about their concerns most had not, as they either did not really know who to talk to or did not feel they could talk about it.

Once they were aware of support available at The Centre, barriers remained which prevented or deterred them from accessing it. Trisha described how it was possible to discreetly look at posters advertising support.

'You can just pretend you're looking (pause) at some other posters. Umm you don't have to look directly at a poster. You can pretend to look at the next one and then just do it (laughs) just go, you know.'

Many FGSs had not talked to their parents about the problems they were having. They often commented on the cost of the tuition and compared this to their learning and teaching experience. They stated that they could not 'see' where their tuition fees were going except to pay the wages of lecturers who often did not help them or give them the feedback that they

wanted. Many wanted feedback on drafts, not just on completed work, because as consumers they were 'owed' it.

6.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed how the FGSs' previous experience of the education system, financial constraints and family obligations determined their choice both of location for studying at university level and the type of degree to undertake. The FGSs in this inquiry underwent a sociological and psychological transition to HE. This enabled them to come to terms with genuine cultural differences between their home environment and that of academia. The FGSs' fixed identity may have undergone some change (decoding) with regard to the environment of The Centre.

Engaging FGSs at the outset of the FS is important for an institution such as The Centre to plan for and develop, as it helps to carry FGSs through inevitable setbacks during their FS. A lack of engagement with their courses in their FS of study could lead to lower confidence and lack of engagement with HE. Universities need to understand the cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) of FGSs and create an environment to suit this, which will facilitate their engagement, retention and success.

If time had permitted it would have been useful as part of this inquiry to examine the effects of engagement wellbeing, and peer support on academic confidence and HE student identity over the duration of the FGSs' programme of study at The Centre. This could be an area for further research as a longitudinal study of FGSs.

7. Using Phenomenographic Tools (Stage Two Data Generation)

This inquiry set out to discover the experiences of year one FGSs in their FS at a single case study site 'The Centre'. Grounded theory tools were used initially to analyse the transcripts (Stage One data analysis) and developed the 'transcultural' model to describe the experiences of the participants. However, this model did not fully explain how the FGSs experienced transition to HE at The Centre during their FS. The researcher was met with a decision, as the nature of the inquiry was time bound (the focus being first generation students in their first semester of study). This meant that the researcher was unable to re-interview the participants as they had at this point commenced their second year. Asking the participants to take part in a second interview would have influenced their responses, as they would have been reflecting on and recollecting their experiences of the previous year's first semester. Sarantakos (1998) states that 'During the story-telling step the respondent offers a complete reconstruction... of a certain topic...' (Sarantakos, 1998: 253), within which the respondent can unfold the link between the past and the present and reconstruct as they recall and remember it.

The interviewer considered interviewing a new sample of FGSs in their FS at The Centre. This was discounted as the original participants had the unique characteristic of being the last cohort of students with tuition fees of up to £3,375. It was decided to use phenomenographic tools to consider the transcripts as a whole, and focus initially on an aspect of data from the grounded theory analysis 'achievement'. When the accounts were viewed as a single transcript (a collective account) 'achievement' appeared as a 'phenomenon', as manifestation of agency in transition. Across the participants' accounts there was a variation of the FGSs' experiences, with 'achievement' being stated and/or implied in a variety of forms by all the participants in the group (sample). Phenomenographic tools were selected for this inquiry as this enabled the researcher to produce a collective product. Quotations from individual accounts were later selected when discussing variations that aligned to a category.

Phenomenography is most frequently described as a research specialisation that aims to map 'the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and various phenomena in, the world around them' (Marton, 1986: 31). It is underpinned by the notion that people collectively experience and understand phenomena in a number of qualitatively different but interrelated ways (Bruce, 1997; Marton, 1986). Phenomenography is concerned with describing things as they appear to and are experienced by people (Marton & Pang, 1999). The aim of phenomenography is to identify particular, usually limited in number, categories that describe how students, on reflection,

experience the world (Entwistle & McCune, 2004). Some researchers (Haggis, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006; Case & Gunstone, 2003) have expressed concerns regarding the narrowing of the complexity of the process into straightforward and hierarchical categories.

In a phenomenographic study, the researcher does not intend to present an objective understanding of a phenomenon within a particular context and to present both similar and different views on how this should be carried out, but rather record how individuals described their own experiences. This uses a second-order perspective (an epistemological position) where the world is described as the interviewee understands it.

All undergraduates start university with different perspectives of achievement in HE (and their transition); subsequently not all FGSs' personal aims and motivation are identical. However, no matter how diverse these personal aims were, FGSs in this inquiry described fulfilling their aims by involving themselves in HE. Being involved with HE was eased or complicated by a variety of influential factors. The FGSs who participated in this inquiry's initial perspectives of HE were not static, and could change with the impact of influential factors and the involvement process. A variety of FS experience outcomes (agency) resulted from this dynamic involving process of being at The Centre (structure).

Phenomenography seeks to understand variation in people's experiences of different phenomena or aspects of the world. Phenomenography's focus on learning and the experience of learning in different contexts has meant that learning-related phenomena comprise the most typical experiences investigated using this research approach (Edwards, 2007). Phenomenography's historical foundation in the discipline of education has endured and its on-going development as a research approach has primarily occurred in this sphere (Limberg, 2000; Marton & Booth, 1997; Svensson, 1997).

Phenomenography is considered to be a relational approach to research because the object (the phenomenon under investigation) and the research subjects (the people experiencing the phenomenon, 'FGSs') are not viewed or treated separately. Instead, phenomenographic research focuses on exploring the relations formed between the research subjects and objects or aspects of the world (Bowden, 2000a; Limberg, 2000). It is these inseparable subject-object relations that phenomenography represents as experiences, which when combined represent the phenomenon as a whole. Phenomenography is grounded by a non-dualist ontology, whereby the person and the world are viewed and studied in relation to each other. Marton (2000: 105) explains phenomenography's non-dualistic ontological perspective stating:

‘There are not two worlds: a real, objective world, on the one hand, and a subjective world of mental representations, on the other. There is only one world, an existing world, which is experienced and understood in different ways by human beings. It is simultaneously objective and subjective.’

Non-dualist ontology also has implications for the relationship between the researcher and the aspect of the world (The Centre) under investigation. This relationship is important as it allowed the researcher to carry out the data generation, as some understanding of the research topic is needed to interpret the statements made, and to keep the research focused.

However, any preconceptions or theories about the aspect of the world under consideration that the researcher has from their own experiences must be held at bay during the research (Sandberg, 1997).

7.1 Data Analysis using Phenomenographic Techniques

Phenomenography is similar to grounded theory in that the categories emerge from the analysis of the transcripts as a whole through an iterative process (Åkerlind et al., 2005) rather than forcing the data to fit into a pre-determined model. Phenomenography also seeks to reveal the finite set of categories of conceptions of a phenomenon, but it is different from grounded theory because the categories are logically connected in an outcome space, usually displaying a hierarchical nature.

Svensson (1997) explains that the research orientation of phenomenography as a research process and a research tool is primarily concerned with focusing on and describing conceptions, with each conception representing one way in which the particular phenomenon under investigation is experienced. The aim of data analysis in phenomenographic studies is to uncover variation in how the phenomenon under investigation is experienced (Bruce, 2000; Limberg, 2000). Phenomenographers are not only interested in the variation in ways of experiencing a particular phenomenon, but also in the ‘change in capabilities’ for experiencing particular phenomena in the world. These capabilities, as a rule, can be hierarchically ordered with some capabilities being more complex than others.

There is no single process or technique prescribed for the analysis of phenomenographic data and an array of approaches are reported in the literature. Although the absence of a distinct approach has been a point of frequent criticism (c.f. Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Francis, 1996; Richardson, 1999; Säljö, 1997; Uljens, 1996), other authors contend that given the nature of this

type of research, this is neither possible nor desirable (Bruce, 1997; Johansson, Marton & Svensson, 1985; Prosser, 2000; Säljö, 1988). An early approach to data analysis in phenomenographic studies is provided by Marton, Carlsson & Halasz (1992) who detailed a four stage approach to data analysis. These stages involved: identifying relevant data as 'pools of meaning'; sorting data into 'pools of meaning' based on similarity and exclusive of reference to individual participants; contrasting groups of similar data and writing a category of description for each; and finally verifying a portion of the data by engaging an independent judge to establish inter-judge reliability.

Bruce (1997: 104) describes the analysis process as being 'an interplay between the researcher's understanding, the nature of the phenomenon being studied and the style of the available data'. In phenomenography, the process of analysis and the outcomes the process produces are constituted through the relationship between the researcher and the data. An outcome space is constituted that illustrates the structure of the qualitative variation in the way a phenomenon is experienced (c.f. Åkerlind, 2005; Bowden & Green, 2006). Walsh (2000) offers comment on the process, proposing that analysis requires the researcher to more than merely record the different ways participants talk about the phenomenon, but be able to delve behind what is said and how the particular phenomenon is understood. This may be achieved by working across the data as opposed to focusing on what individuals say separately or in isolation from each other.

A phenomenographic study usually involves the use of interviews to gather data. In the interview the participant makes comments which are analysed and reported as conceptions (findings). Säljö (1997) expresses a concern that phenomenographic studies may not adequately justify the link between comment and conception. In a phenomenographic study, the researcher is looking for the conceptual meanings underpinning oral expressions. Säljö (1997) refers to this regarding the link between utterances in an interview and conceptions, and the need to adequately justify the link.

Research by Johansson, Svensson, Anderberg & Alvegard (2006) has focussed on the interplay between oral expression, meaning and conception. In this interplay, conceptual meaning comes from the conception and the oral expression. The intentional expressive approach can be used during interviews to help participants reflect (Anderberg, 2000). This involves asking interviewees a question and then following this up with another question that encourages them to reflect on the conceptual meaning of expressions that have been used. The researcher must then translate utterances into conceptions. Marton & Pong (2005: 335) describe a conception as having:

‘two intertwined aspects: the referential aspect, which denotes the global meaning of the object conceptualized; and the structural aspect, which allows the specific combination of features that have been discerned and focused on.’

This translation occurred at the analysis phase of the inquiry. Phenomenographers have developed frameworks to help further the study of conceptions and a study in 2011 by Harris found that although these frameworks are not strongly grounded in theory, they provide a method for phenomenographers to ‘think about important distinctions within conceptions’. Interviews are the focus of the phenomenographic analysis when they have been used as the primary means of data collection.

The transcripts represent a ‘snapshot’ of some of the experiences of a group of people (in this inquiry FGSs in the FS) with a particular aspect of the world (The Centre) in response to a particular set of questions at a particular time (Åkerlind et al., 2005). When data collection has relied only on interviews, no other evidence exists beyond the transcripts to inform the analysis process (Bowden, 2005). The analysis process was both one of ‘discovery’ (Hasselgren & Beach, 1997) as well as one of ‘construction’ (Bruce, 2002). The results were not known in advance and tested in the inquiry, but emerge and are constructed in an iterative way from the transcripts.

The process of phenomenographic analysis in this inquiry commences with examining a set of meaning statements taken from the responses in the transcripts of the interviews. The focus of the meaning statements is on the different ways the phenomenon is seen by the participants. Meaningful responses were taken from the individual transcripts and pooled, shifting attention from the individual to the meanings expressed by the group as a whole (Marton, 1988).

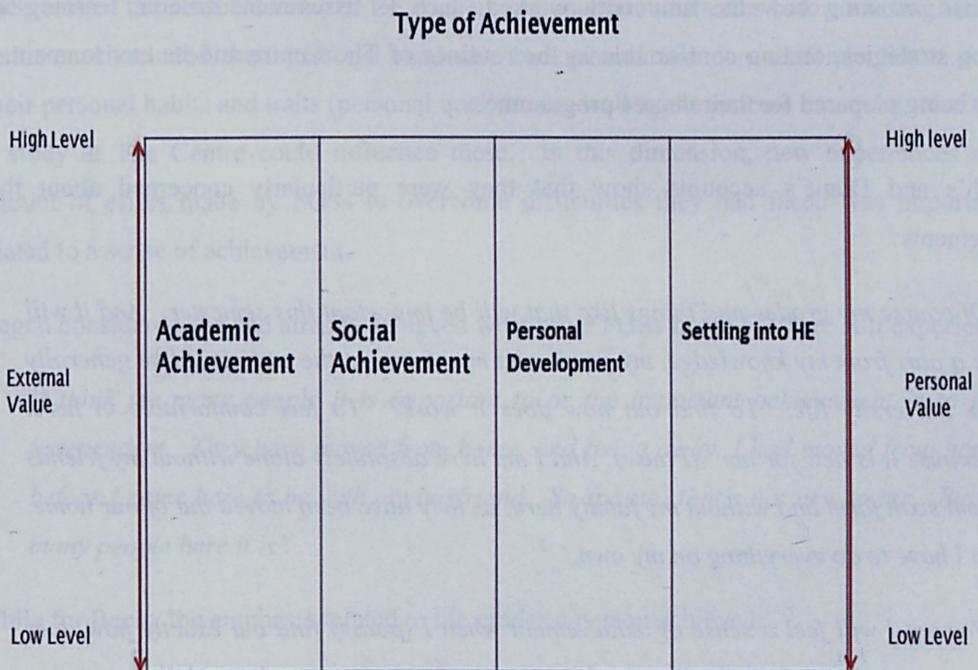
Meaning statements were grouped to form the first tentative categories of description according to the features and characteristics (dimensions of variation) which they hold in common. The dimensions structure the description of each category. They delineated the categories one from another according to the number of dimensions or values of dimensions which are evident in each category. The dimensions facilitated an ordering of the categories into an outcome space where each category was placed in relationship to the other categories. An iterative process refined the categories and dimensions with repeated interrogation of the data. The outcome space from the Stage Two phenomenographic data generation of the participants’ accounts as a collective product is summarised in Table Nine overleaf.

Table Nine The Outcome Space Constructed from the Participants' Accounts

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Research Approach | Qualitative Approach |
| | Stage Two-Data Generation Phenomenographic Tools |
| Outcome Space | Variations generated from the use of phenomenographic tools. Achieving Aims in HE, Perception on Achievement (high or low), Transition to HE, Involving Oneself in HE, Influential Factors. |

As shown in Figure Four below, the overarching category (outcome space) consists of four variations, namely FGSSs' perception of achievement (high or low) and their transition to HE, involving oneself in HE, influential factors and FS experience outcomes. These variations are discussed later to provide a detailed picture and enable the reader to gain a comprehensive understanding of FGSSs' transition to HE.

Figure Four Variations of Achievement within the Accounts



The FGSSs' accounts varied in what was considered an achievement. Each variety (type) of achievement had different levels of perception. The granular components (variations that

formed the inclusive hierarchy) of agency in the FGSs in the FS are academic achievement, social achievement, personal development and settling into HE. The evaluation criteria for type and level move between external value and personal value dimensions which relate to individual students' personal circumstances within the collective product such as their educational and life experiences. In this inquiry, the FGSs' achievements varied in type and form of achievement level within the collective account.

7.1.1 Varieties of Achievement

The participants discussed their perception of achievement and provided a variety of specific examples of FS achievement which had aided their transition. These were constructed into four broad types: academic achievement, social achievement, personal development, and settling into HE. Academic achievement related to subject knowledge, being given feedback and doing one's best. This meant learning subject knowledge, getting feedback from lecturers, or doing one's best in academic study. Social achievement related to making new friends, socialising with fellow students and having a good time, as well as developing social skills. Personal development meant being independent, feeling happy about oneself, knowing who you are and being challenged to make improvements in your learning. Success in settling into HE concerned knowing how the university worked, such as assessment criteria, learning and teaching strategies, feeling comfortable in the routines of The Centre and its environment, as well as being prepared for their degree programmes.

Hannah's and Diane's accounts show that they were particularly concerned about their achievements:

*'Of course my grades and things like that will be important this semester. And it will be a part from my knowledge, my grade and my course at the end. It is like generally the university life. To find out how does it work? To feel comfortable in here. Because it is new for me. (Pause) And I am here absolutely alone without my friends from sixth form and without my family here, as they have been moved out of our home. So I have to do everything on my own.'*³

'For me I will feel a sense of achievement when I (pause) find out exactly how does the university work and what do they expect of my essays and my skills, until that happens I will not feel that I am really here'. (Diane)

³ Hannah lives in the campus town with her Grandmother, as her family house was repossessed in the July prior to the start of the academic year.

Erica felt that she had achieved by becoming a student at The Centre. She considered that being a university student was *'all about making new friends and meeting new people'*.

7.1.2 Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation criteria for the type and level of FS achievement fell into two variations within the group, external value and personal value. Some FGSs tended to draw on external or objective criteria, such as lecturer feedback or potential grades, to evaluate their level of achievement and becoming HE students. These FGSs believed that FS achievement was purely personal and assessed it by personal esteem. A few accounts are offered here by way of example. Josie said:

'Say my exams, if I get 40%, then I have achieved something, but that's a low level achievement. Say if I get 70%, that's like high level achievement. Umm I would say. I really want at the end of this semester to have a high level.'

While Tilly expressed:

'It depends on how you are pleased with yourself, you are or you have done something.'

FGSs related the personal value of HE to their personal circumstances before starting HE at The Centre and included their personal academic background and non-academic life experience. Their personal habits and traits (personal qualities) as well as the process he or she went through to study at The Centre could influence these. In this dimension, new experiences and the amount of effort made by FGSs to overcome difficulties they had faced was important and related to a sense of achievement.

Megan considered she had already achieved what other FGSs in the FS were still experiencing:

'I think for many people it is important to or the important achievement is to get independent. They have moved from home, and living away. I had moved from home before I came here to be with my boyfriend. So (pause) that's not new to me. But to many people here it is.'

While for Becky the emphasis related to the grades a person achieved:

'I think it's whether you think you have achieved should relate to the person themselves because I might say a B is an achievement. Somebody else might say they think an A is, you know, the only way that they achieve and anything, nothing or

anything below that isn't; whereas you get some people that are more than happy with just getting Ds. (pause). It definitely depends on how you think of it. Given different people's circumstances, which are definitely going to have an effect on what they see as achievements while they are settling into this life.'

Janice commented on the difficulty of the FS so far:

'If it was only easy, the FS, I probably wouldn't have that as an achievement for me is just being here now. (Pause). I would like to say some of the examples like being more independent and actually you know just be pleased at the pass if you know what I mean. But yeah, I would definitely like to have something else as my achievements I have just had have such a difficult first two months'.

Libby wanted to be able to pass the first year at The Centre:

'Well, for my overall degree, I am aiming to first class honours degree. (Laughs) I am aiming for the top grade in the degree, as I have got this far so why not go for the best. But with respect of the first year and this semester, I am not too worried about getting the top grade as long as I can get onto the second year and start focusing on the work there; it is all about become a university student this year. That's my goal to pass this semester, this year and get onto the second year. From the second year onward, then I will be highly focused and motivated to get a higher grade. (Pause) I don't think there is much motivation to get a really high grade in the first year'.

The quotes above show FGSs' perspective on achievement and transition, embodied by their personal aims in HE. These provided the fundamental motivation for their actions and interactions during their FS and subsequently guided the overall achievement and transition process. This perspective also offers a framework to evaluate the university experience of FGSs in their FS.

8. Categories from Phenomenographic Data Generation: Making Sense of Transition

Grounded theory and phenomenographic tools were used in this inquiry to generate data, describe and consider the participants' transition to HE and experiences of HE at The Centre as individual accounts (Stage One) and as a collective product (Stage Two). This chapter discusses the variations in experience within the accounts developed from the Stage Two data generation: Perception of achievement (high or low), Transition to HE, Involving oneself in HE, Influential factors (FS experience outcomes). The aim being to allow the reader to consider the logical and hierarchical relations between categories.

The data generated from the use of phenomenographic tools is first presented by outlining the overarching category of description (outcome space); the four conceptions/categories (variations in the outcome space) are then described in detail with relevant quotations from individual accounts that align to the components. The overarching category 'fulfilling one's aims in HE' captured the essence of FGSs in the group's experience of achieving and transition during their FS. The making and shaping of student transitions is a socially situated process, influenced by a range of social and cultural factors. Hodkinson et al. (2004) observed that a learning culture is not simply the context within which learning takes place; it concerns 'the social practices through which people learn' (Hodkinson et al., 2004: 4). Hodkinson et al. emphasise that what students learn in a particular institution is how to belong to that institution, and how to be students in that setting.

Higher education transitions involve social practices, through which transitions take place. Students learn how to 'do' transitions from within particular settings, and the way that transitions are framed and understood in particular institutional settings is important. What count as 'normal', expected, and 'good' transitions may vary, and relate to the social and cultural contexts of their production. Considering the participants' accounts as a collective product (one transcript) allowed the researcher to identify aspects relevant to this phenomenon ('transition') and construct an outcome space that illustrates the structure of the qualitative variation in how it is experienced.

The FGSs in this inquiry needed to explore, benchmark, master information, skills, competencies, and affordances i.e. the capacity for effective action in context, and the capacity to weigh up, select, and if necessary create new affordances for new contexts. These affordances were the basis for learning through being/becoming a university student at The Centre. The participants who felt they were achieving/had achieved at The Centre became

involved in university life during the FS and engaged in sensemaking. Embedded in the activity of sensemaking are the interactions and patterns of the human agent involved in the processes. The interaction itself is part of the understanding of what is happening or what has happened, sensemaking (retrospective) and making sense (in the here and now). In other words, the understanding is not just in the narrative of the event, but also in the information collected. It is how the participants made sense of their current experiences in the processes they are involved in. Sensemaking regarding becoming a university student at The Centre took place in their FS when the participants became involved in university life. This occurred during their day-to-day interactions with staff and fellow students at The Centre. A theory of transition (being and becoming a university student, belonging and fitting in) was developed through the use of phenomenographic tools. The theory reflects the ways in which the FGSs in this inquiry perceived their transition, in the first few weeks and months at The Centre. The participants were challenged to adapt to the stress of being at university, with little assistance from parents who had not the experience to help guide them through the journey. This meant that during the FS their social networks were of great importance.

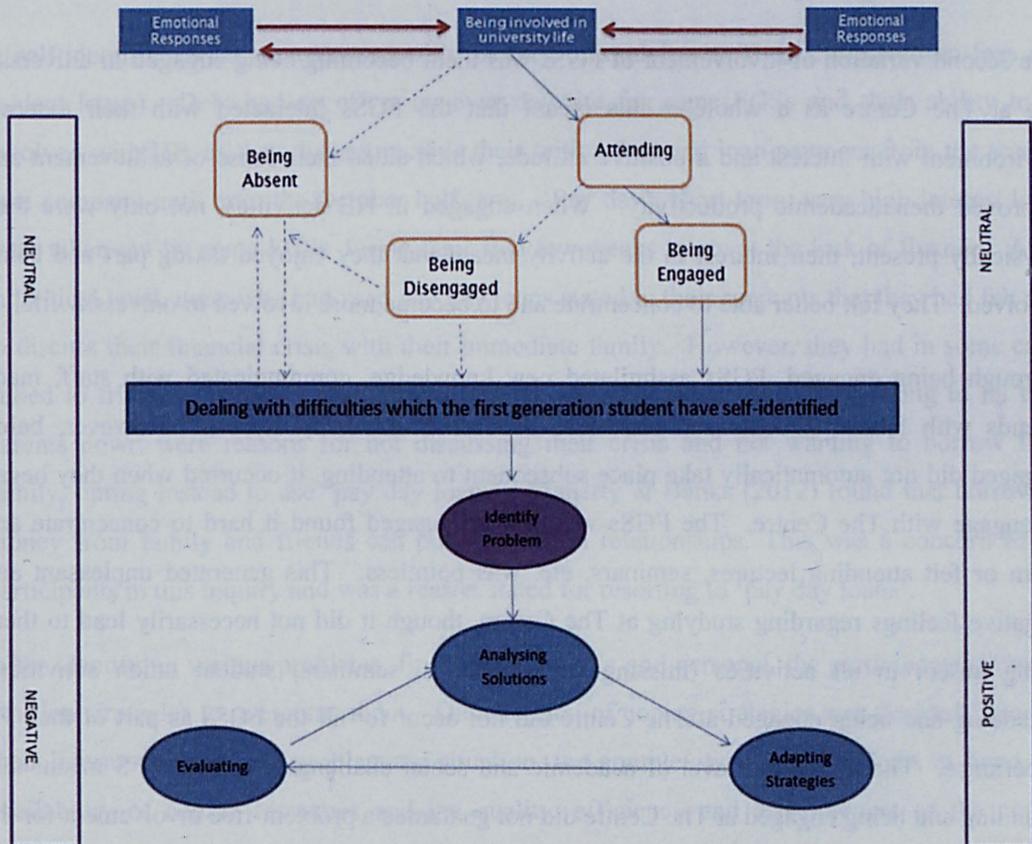
FGSs discussed, in their accounts, their attempts to make sense of their roles and place at The Centre. This required them to involve themselves with HE, in a similar manner to an employee involving themselves with their colleagues and the organisation. FGSs needed to physically and/or psychologically take part in HE-related activities (social interactions) which prepared and enabled them to fulfil their aims/goal in their FS. A necessary coping strategy was to be involved and develop a sense of belonging in HE both socially and academically. The point of transition (see Figure Six) when they joined The Centre was a time when they were most vulnerable with, for example, coping with personal, social and academic changes in their lives (critical life events). This 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).

Detailed data generation of the participants' accounts as a whole described how the FGSs were faced with new study and life-changing routines in HE. They described the need to take part in life (belonging) at The Centre, to know the routine of studying, become accustomed to life at university, to achieve their personal academic/social goals (motivation) and become a university student. Rather than a one off event, being involved in the life of The Centre, and so gaining a sense of belonging, meant going through a dynamic process throughout the FS. For the FGSs in this inquiry this was an important aspect of their becoming and being a university student which enabled them to engage with their learning. This consisted of three variations of involvement,

1) Attending, 2) Being engaged, and 3) Dealing with any self-identified difficulties that transpired or were still occurring. Each of these variations were accompanied by emotional responses which affected the FGSs. In the first two variations, involvement consists of two opposite dimensions, being absent and attending (similar to employees attending or not attending their work place), and being disengaged and being engaged (similar to employees engaging or disengaging at work). In the third stage, involvement consisted of identifying problems, analysing problematic situations, adopting strategies, and evaluating them.

Emotional responses resulted from this involvement process and varied on a continuum of dimension ranging from positive, neutral to negative, as shown in Figure Five below, Adapting to HE, The Process of Transition model. This was developed to further explain how the FGSs in this inquiry began to be and become university students at The Centre during their FS. It reflects the ways in which these students perceived becoming a university student at their post-1992 university campus. This model suggests that within the diverse campus context of The Centre, their FS experiences related to a self-motivated, self-regulated and self-evaluated reflexive process, which were facilitated by institutional and external factors.

Figure Five Adapting to HE, The Process of Transition



Attending university at 'The Centre' is the first and the most superficial level (variation) of involvement, as it required the least psychological input. Although attending did not necessarily mean that the students were emotionally attracted by or psychologically committed to the activities they were undertaking, it did provide a chance for them to gain a better understanding of The Centre and HE as a whole. When attending The Centre, the participants met the basic requirements of attendance and accustomed themselves to their new start in university life (transition). Attending aided their settling into HE and formed a basis for the next variation of involvement, being engaged. This was necessary to help them to cope with studying at university level, begin to develop academic work and becoming, being and achieving as a HE student.

All undergraduates (not just FGSs) are expected to take part in university daily life and routines. However, not all students in this inquiry attended every academic session during the FS, engaged with the recommended reading or self-studied. Being absent was a phenomenon which existed in their first few weeks and for some throughout the first semester. Being absent from The Centre resulted for some negative feelings such as being lost or underachieving. They also felt that they had missed opportunities to receive essential information, which could have aided them in becoming/being more involved with The Centre.

The second variation of involvement of FGSs was them becoming/being engaged in university life at The Centre as a whole. This meant that the FGSs interacted with their external environment with interest and a positive attitude, which aided their sense of achievement and improved their academic productivity. When engaged in HE activities, not only were they physically present, their interest in the activity meant that they enjoyed taking part and being involved. They felt better able to concentrate and to become more involved in university life.

Through being engaged, FGSs assimilated new knowledge, communicated with staff, made friends with fellow students and started to become a university student. However, being engaged did not automatically take place subsequent to attending, it occurred when they began to engage with The Centre. The FGSs who felt disengaged found it hard to concentrate and learn or felt attending lectures, seminars, etc. was pointless. This generated unpleasant and negative feelings regarding studying at The Centre, though it did not necessarily lead to them being absent in all activities (missing some lectures, seminars, student union activities). Attending and being engaged at The Centre did not occur for all the FGSs as part of their FS experience. The increasing level of academic and social challenge during the FS meant that attending and being engaged at The Centre did not guarantee a problem-free involvement for the participants. To make a successful transition during the FS and become, be and achieve as an

HE student, the FGSs also needed to deal with any self-identified difficulties. The ability to respond to and overcome self-identified difficulties was an important and integrated part of the involvement and transition process for the FGSs in this inquiry.

Dealing with 'self-identified difficulties' refers to the process by which the FGSs dealt with obstacles that may have prevented them from fulfilling their full transition and participation at The Centre. This occurred when the transition was not a smooth journey and they realised that the events/problems affected them. Coping with self-identified difficulties was the most complex or advanced level (variation) of involvement, as it required the most effort from students, compared to attending or being engaged. The ability to manage self-identified difficulties normally generated the highest level of emotional response in the FGSs (feeling frustrated or feeling proud). At this variation of involvement with HE, FGSs went through a sensemaking process which consisted of identifying problems, analysing problematic situations, adopting strategies, and evaluating possible outcomes. A variety of specific problems or difficulties were identified due to the challenging nature of the FS and a diversity of personal circumstances. For example, they expected to be taught differently from the methods they actually experienced (similar to a new employee expecting a job to be something different to what they experience in reality).

A self-identified issue was concern with the cost of studying at The Centre (tuition fees and student loans). Debt had an effect on everyday life for some FGSs and their ability to be involved with HE, as they did not receive their tuition fees and loan payment from the student loan company until after the October half term. 'Pay day', short-term, very high interest loans were taken out by some FGSs during their first few weeks to cover the lack of finance. At an individual level, none who had used pay day loans stated in their accounts that they had felt able to discuss their financial crisis with their immediate family. However, they had in some cases talked to friends (university and non-university). Feeling shame and not wanting to let their parents down were reasons for not discussing their crisis and not wanting to borrow from family, opting instead to use 'pay day loans'. Flaherty & Banks (2012) found that borrowing money from family and friends can put a strain on relationships. This was a concern of the participants in this inquiry and was a reason stated for resorting to 'pay day loans'.

After identifying various problems, financial, academic and personal, the participants started to develop strategies to overcome them. The adoption of coping strategies was decided based on their interpretation of the problematic situation, the complexity of the problems at hand, the availability of coping resources and the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the coping strategy options. The variety of strategies employed fell into two broad categories, being self-

reliant and seeking external assistance. The category of being self-reliant includes strategies such as adjusting oneself, and self-reflection. The majority of the time FGSs were not able to solve problems themselves. On these occasions seeking external assistance such as asking and collaborating with fellow students became a necessity.

Both Bethany and Zena discussed how during the FS they had become more self-reliant:

'But now I have learned that I need to like change myself and adjust myself. And be more open and try not to be shy'. (Zena)

'Just either go out or watch TV. (long pause) Yeah, have a break. After the break, I feel a bit more willing to work again'. (Bethany)

After using strategies to deal with a self-identified problem, these were evaluated not only as to whether the problem had been solved to their satisfaction but also for the effectiveness of the approach they adopted. When problems were solved successfully, they were more likely to feel pleased, satisfied and proud. However, if problems were not solved successfully, students were either left with a sense of underachievement or went through the problem-solving activity again with another strategy. The difficulties identified were individualised and a variety of coping strategies were adopted based on individual circumstances. Whether they successfully coped with difficult situations was also subject to a series of influential factors; resources available, external pressures, their personal task value expectancy, habits and traits (their personal qualities).

All the variations of involvement had emotional responses, which occurred both as a consequence of, and/or as a potential start of, students' interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions on their way to fulfilling their personal goals concerning study at university level. Emotional responses tended to be discussed in the accounts through description of feelings regarding their experiences. Positive emotional responses include feeling satisfied or proud, while negative emotional responses include feeling bored or frustrated. The terms easy and difficult were used by FGSs when discussing feelings and emotions regarding events that had occurred/were occurring in the FS.

The terms easy and difficult were related to both positive feelings and negative. Most of the time, easy indicated a feeling of satisfaction. It could be used to describe experiences leading to negative feelings when they felt they have not been challenged enough to achieve as much as they felt they should. Similarly, difficult was normally used to describe experiences generating negative feelings. It also related to being challenged in a stimulating way, this they perceived

positively in terms of making the transition. As well as stating positive and negative emotional responses, some FGSs were neutral in their description/discussion about their feelings and emotions when discussing incidents. These FGSs described in their accounts feelings related to experiences in the FS as different rather than classifying them as good or bad. These responses could be described as cognitive responses; they illustrated emotions expressed as positive or negative feelings. The neutral responses are taken as a middle point between positive and negative emotional responses and are viewed by the researcher as neutral feelings.

Neutral feelings refer to responses such as feeling ok or confused. These responses were not as strong as positive or negative feelings and were normally generated when discussing situations that the FGSs viewed as a natural part of the FS experience, such as feeling confused when noticing differences in teaching between sixth form school/college and The Centre. These generated sometimes neither positive feeling nor negative feeling, as it was assumed by FGSs that university would be different and they just needed to adapt to being in a new environment. Some of the neutral responses provided correspond to affective investment.

The term affective investment refers to the intensity of an individual's emotional input and ranges from low level of affective investment to high level of affective investment. Low level of affective investment associates with a neutral response to situations; while high level of affective investment relates to either positive or negative emotional responses. Accordingly, the emotional response can be viewed as moving along two affective investment continuums. One ranges from neutral to positive, the other ranges from neutral to negative. As indicated by the following quotes from individual accounts that align to this, and compare the variations within the category. A lower level affective investment (involvement in HE) was just attending The Centre (Kara); solving self-identified difficulties had a higher level of affective investment (involvement) and generated stronger positive (David) or negative feelings (Liz).

'At the start, it was really, really, awkward. It was like really weird to come to university. Because it's a different environment. It's not like... I don't know...It's just really different. Like you are on your own. You have to like getting there and make friends because you don't know anybody'. (Kara)

'I was really afraid about the lectures, about and I think I am ok now with these. I still have a lot of things to do. But I can do on my own. And I had my first assessment two weeks ago (just before half term), (laughs) it was such a high I was so happy and my mom was so proud of me because I got good feedback. And I was proud as well. I was not just happy, I felt hey now I am a proper student'. (David)

'I found the first few weeks very stressful (sigh). Because all they have given us to work from is a booklet (workbook). Nothing is really explained we just have to get on with it. (pause). We work through the booklet, sometimes (pause) I'm with someone else but often I have to try and work it out on my own. The only way you can really know how to learn the stuff in the booklet is to keep going through the booklet. You have to keep going through the booklet. (long pause) Because there is not much help that they actually give, when I have asked I am just told it is in the booklet'. (Liz).

8.1 Perspective of Achievement - Personal Academic Background

The effect of prior academic background was not limited to FGSs' knowledge level of a chosen subject. It also extended to the teaching and learning styles that the students were accustomed to before starting at The Centre. The variation in the FGSs' previous knowledge about a subject resulted in different levels of challenge they experienced. Some came to The Centre with a sound knowledge of the subject area of their degree, while others entered HE as students who had not studied much in the chosen subject before. Compared to the latter, the former group was more likely to feel that the first few weeks were easier to cope with. Helen stated that:

'I find it quite easy to keep up because all my lectures so far (pause) I have covered lots previously in my A levels'. (Helen)

Besides previous knowledge about the chosen subject, the difference in teaching and learning style between HE and previous academic experience also lead to challenges. Polly and Vince are offered here by way of example:

'I was like what do they want from me? Because I am used to be told the title and (pause). Because I was taught differently. I was just given the title. I have to find my own sources and write my own essay. (Long pause). And that's how I had to do it. But now we were given the sources and I have to do everything else on my own. I was very confused; I find that really confusing, it needs me to work to grasp the actual project. Which is really hard.' (Polly)

'In comparison to the levels of education in school and college, it's being a big leap. In terms of like especially responsibility, organisation. It has made me more self-reliable than I probably was before when I was at college'. (Vince)

8.2 Perspective of Achievement - Level of Achievement

Apart from type, FGSs' 'achievements' in HE at The Centre could also be differentiated in their perception by level, particularly in terms of the perception of their academic achievement.

Elizabeth and Carrie both discussed their sense of academic achievement:

'If I do a draft of an essay or report and get good feedback from a lecturer, I'll class that as the high grade I could get when I submit it. But if I cannot get anyone to give me feedback or if I just get a 'that's OK' I think that well that will get a low grade. Because, I don't know, because it's the unknown, isn't it?' (Elizabeth)

'I am sort of aiming for like...I am saying I am on average because I am aiming for like B and C grades this semester. So I am just saying if I hit that mark, I have done a medium, I've done a moderate success. Whereas if I go above it, I have achieved something more by the end of this semester, I mean it will be by accident.' (Carrie)

8.3 Transition to HE - Support

A variety of support mechanisms experienced/used at The Centre were identified and seen as critically important. These support mechanisms are broadly from two levels: structural level and interpersonal level. Structural level support means support generated from the institutional structure. It is embodied by course structure, institutional facilities, resources, academic support services, and activities, e.g. induction, freshers' week.

Will described his anxiety about accessing support from staff at The Centre:

'I haven't actually used (study skills support). I'm too scared um (long pause) to actually use them. I have bit a (pause) I have issues with people thinking that I'm not up to it, you know. (laugh). It's a bit silly, you know (pause) and of course they're gonna be nothing but fine. I know this, but yeah, yeah, I do worry about that, very much.'

An initial concern being how the course is structured, especially the timetable, had great influence on students' time distribution in their daily life. They needed time and energy to adjust themselves to university routines, such as living independently and socialising with new people as an aspect of settling in.

Many of the FGSs undertaking a Foundation degree stated that having a less intensive course timetable in the first few weeks of study at The Centre would have enabled them to cope better with starting studying at university. This was a critical issue especially by those FGSs who were finding it hard to adapt to being at The Centre and were negotiating other commitments. The intensive course structure of the Foundation degree prohibited students from socialising with students on other degrees. This had a negative impact on these FGSs' social lives as they only had friends on their degree programme. It also reinforced the sense of doing a degree as 'like going to work' with the reward being the qualification at the end. This was a view that Tom and others in the inquiry held:

'They are not really like into going out much because it is a really hard degree and you have to like get your head down and do a lot of work. It is like being at work; it is harder than being at work. (Pause) You have to like work every day, like you know put efforts in it. You can't really go out every day. So I can't achieve like some friends that much and going out much and meeting people that much' (Tom)

The facilities and resources provided by The Centre, such as the university website and teaching facilities, played important roles in their involvement in HE. When dealing with the self-identified difficulties, the availability of information resources enabled them to employ efficient strategies and get out of difficulties successfully. The Centre has a number of staff employed to support students. By contrast, the lecture hall was seen as a place which inhibited their engagement with teaching activities and their sense of belonging. This was seen as important by Janice and Lee who stated:

'Student support is very, very helpful. (Pause) They will guide you how to write your essay. Even how to cope with your stress. So I can say student support services is very, very (pause) important. Without them and their help, I don't think you can manage. It is really good, sometimes you can just turn up and see someone, sometimes you have to book and they also advertise workshops. I wouldn't have survived until the October half term here without them'. (Janice)

'It's like when they try to teach you technical stuff and theory things, I am bored in the lecture hall. It's very hard to get it into your head. It's different when you are in a small classroom, you know what I mean. I don't know what makes the difference, but I'll see things, what I am learning and I work things around my head. When I learn something, I found it easier to do that in small seminar and workshop rooms rather than a lecture hall'. (Lee)

FGSs benefited greatly from the academic support services and activities developed and provided by The Centre when trying to involve themselves in HE. The induction activities were a valuable opportunity to know more about their course programme, fellow students and The Centre. This contributed enormously to their settling into the new life of an HE environment, their transition to HE at The Centre and their development of becoming a university student. Viv commented that:

'It was induction week. Let (sic) say the second day, they have activities here. I attended the activities and there were like some games to do. Standing there and people were like just talking to me and I talked back. And then they asked me whether I am first year and so on. (Pause) Yeah, induction week is very very important (Laughs), I made some great friends on other courses, I see them here and in town. They have been a real help in making me feel that I belong here, they are just like me'.
(Viv)

The most influential interpersonal support came from fellow students and academic and support staff at The Centre.

This was of particular importance to Sophie:

'I ask the teachers when they were around. And I ask my classmates too. And that helps me a lot. Everybody was very helpful and smiling all the time no matter how stupid my question was'. (Sophie)

Mike placed a strong emphasis in his account on the importance of friendships, discussing his friends, both on the campus and at home. Mike felt that his university friends had been pivotal to his positive experience of The Centre:

'Without the good friends I have made here to support me, I believe that uni would be absolutely terrifyingly boring and would seem totally worthless. It would just be work, work, work.'

Mike stated that time spent on leisure activities and with friends did not distract from his academic work, and felt on top of what he described as a heavy workload during the first few weeks at The Centre. Mike was very confident about his academic abilities, did not describe any anxieties about coursework, and was confident that he would finish the first year with good grades, as he had a good support network. Mike's comments on exams illustrate this confidence:

'Should be fine, all we have to do is answer a few questions (pause) it really should not be a problem'.

The information Mike provided about his attendance in class was contradictory. He stated that he attended regularly during his first few weeks, but also made comments about missing a number of lectures and seminars and said:

'I forgot which I think is very justifiable (long pause) I wanted to go I just forgot'.

When interpersonal support was available and easy to access, students tended to feel reassured because it enabled asking. Asking was one of the most commonly used coping strategies and functions most effectively when dealing with self-identified difficulties.

'In the first week like, there was always some help around, always some student ambassadors, staff or some tutors. So there was always someone to ask. (Pause) That helps a lot because we could ask. If I have any question, I could ask at once instead of thinking about who should I ask for this stuff? We just ask. It was really good as I felt that I could get used to this'. (Mike)

Being aware of the availability of a range of interpersonal support made FGSs feel safe and positive about their university experiences as it enriched their repertoire of coping strategies.

'But now seems like you can go and search for help because they are always available to help you. Now I am coping and I am ok. I am no more stressed out like before at the beginning of the semester'. (Minnie).

Lack of interpersonal support or ineffective interpersonal support resulted in coping strategies failing to take effect. Ineffective interpersonal support made FGSs feel reluctant to seek external assistance or consider such support as a strategy. This decreased their repertoire of coping strategies. Simon stated:

'Because some of them (Lecturers) are hard to get in touch with. Because when I emailed the tutors in the past, they'll email me and say I got to speak to a different person. And then I tried to get in touch with that person, and they send me to someone else. (Pause) So I prefer to.... (Pause) Because it happened to quite a few on my courses, trying to find information and being diverted to someone else. In the end I gave up trying, I did try and ask other people on the course but as I said, they also had no joy getting an answer. It makes me wonder what I am paying my fees for'. (Simon)

Knowing they had the support and encouragement of parents was very reassuring to those interviewed. In addition to that support, students described having a network of support outside university consisting of teachers, friends and siblings. This provided FGSs with a solid base on which to move to university and develop further supportive relationships. In terms of a student's habitus or disposition, their prior experiences of being surrounded by a supportive network of individuals makes them likely to expect to develop similar supportive relationships in HE, either with other students or staff. This building of new supportive relationships is significant as Walsh, Larsen & Parry (2009: 419) found that when faced with personal issues, university students 'principally relied on the peers on their course and to a lesser degree on family and friends'. Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld (2005) highlight the importance of building new supportive relationships, arguing that the process of successfully settling into university life involves developing supportive relationships.

8.4 Transition to HE - Accommodation

Accommodation was indicated by the FGSs as an influential factor, with most of the participants staying at home or living near their family home. Staying at home meant for some of the participants spending time travelling and being geographically located a distance from The Centre and their fellow students, for others it meant being very near to The Centre. In both cases, being at home had a negative impact on their social involvement and transition because staying at home students tended to go straight home after academic sessions. This was regardless of whether they lived near or further away from The Centre. They felt unable to attend social events at The Centre either because of time concerns or due to their commitments with family members at home. This reduced their motivation to socialise with their fellow students, especially when they did not value socialising at The Centre for its own sake. A few accounts are offered here by way of example.

'Coming to University, making friends and things like that, that as an achievement (pause) Yeah, meeting new people, making new friends and going out. At the moment, I am at living at home. And so I am not really achieving much at all on the going out because I am at home and I have to mind my younger sisters. My Mum needs me to help out at home when I am not in lectures.' (Monsie).

'I don't have a social life here. Because I feel that, I am at the university to study. And because I am living at home still. My social life is my home life and my friends

from school and my part time job. So everyone in my social life is really with my school friends instead of here'. (Ellie)

Living away from home was indicated by the four FGSs who lived in Halls as being beneficial not only to their social involvement but also to their achievements in terms of personal development. Living away from home provided more opportunities to meet new people and face the challenge to be independent, and was viewed as an achievement. Their parents lived within twenty miles of campus town; but they wanted to experience living independently. Josh commented that:

'I felt like I need to get away from home, meeting new people, getting confidence in myself, you know, getting a bit of independence. And I think it opens a few doors in your head as well if you, you get what I mean, if you move away from home. (Long pause) And I think moving away from home was going to be hard. We'll get homesick a bit. I missed my family in the first few weeks. But that's an achievement as I am still here because it opens if you like your barriers and makes you stronger as a person'. (Josh).

8.5 Influential Factors - First Semester Experience Outcomes

Universally, participants had not heard of the term 'first generation' before taking part in this inquiry. They did not associate themselves with the term nor embrace the label. However, they did identify themselves as being first generation (or the first in their family) to attend university and noted the pride that they and their families felt because of this accomplishment. Although they did not associate with the term 'first generation,' most of the participants did tell fellow students about their parents' education backgrounds and offered advice to other first generation students.

The FGSs discussed the need to involve themselves in HE to fulfil their personal aims. However, a number of factors emerged as intervening conditions, which either eased or complicated their involvement in HE-related activities. These intervening conditions are located in the categories of support, academic teaching, interpersonal relationships, accommodation, personal academic background, value of experiences, organisation and time management skills, and individual habits and personality traits.

8.6 Influential Factors - Academic Teaching

Lowe & Cook (2003: 63), in their study of a first year group at Ulster University, identify that 'about one-third of the cohort appear to expect teaching styles associated with school'. This could be viewed as axiomatic. However, the advancement of cognitive ability and thinking is frequently manifested as a spiral sequence of learning followed by developmental unlearning (or modification of prior learning) to make way for the next stage of development. Development into the next phase of transition can only occur in relation to previous learning. Students seek to define new learning (and new methods of learning) by measuring them against prior learning experiences. Previous ways of working and ways of understanding are an inevitable point of reference.

Such subjective and behaviour-forming definitions are what Bourdieu refers to as the habitus, and in this can be seen the seeds of conflict between phases of education. They also create the underlying tensions of transition from school/college to university, where previous modes and models may no longer apply, or apply only to a limited extent. The problematic interaction of new learning with previous learning meets in Bourdieu's (1990) analysis regarding notions of accomplishment. The criteria (referred to by Bourdieu as the cultural arbitrary) for accomplishment may vary considerably from one habitus to another.

Academic teaching was seen in the collective account as a critical element for the participants, as it influenced their transition and involvement in HE. This was presented from two perspectives, the impact of effective teaching and the impact of ineffective teaching. Mia in her account stated that:

'Some lecturers are really, really good (long pause). But you get some that just read out the slides, death by PowerPoint, it makes you think why am I here I can get these off the Moodle and read them myself. I hate it as I have often had to sort out a lot before coming to the lecture and then (pause), it is just a waste of time and money.'

Effective teaching offered academic guidance to refer to and help assimilate subject knowledge more efficiently. Teaching was seen as effective when it was detailed, informative and stimulating. Consequently, effective teaching aided engagement and eased transition. Andrea commented that:

'Because they go into so much detail. And then they say where you need to reference information from, where you can get it, different web pages. So it's using their knowledge basically to study from what they know and what they have taught. You

know what they want and what they expect of you. That all you want to know, what do I need to do, to do the job'.

In contrast, academic teaching was ineffective when there is lack of interaction or it is presented as a dictated lecture. It provided no more information than what students felt they could get through self-study, this decreased the instrumental value of lectures. It generated negative feelings, which affected involvement in HE by failing to encourage engagement, as is illustrated by Carla and Julie:

'Yes, they were obviously not very sure of themselves, which means the information is not getting passed along properly. I mean he gives us all the information, but he is not expanding on it much. He is just literally reading it off the screen. It is difficult when you have not got enough information. The more information you have, the easier it is'. (Carla).

'If they are just going to read out the slides, you might as well just download it at home and read it yourself at home than coming in and sitting in the dictation lecture. So that has really putted me off from coming into lectures sometimes. Because I feel that, I can learn it myself at home if they are just going to read out the slides and not going to give any extra information. (Pause) they don't teach properly, then you feel that the place is rubbish and there is no need to be here because you can't really achieve anything without them teaching you properly. (Pause) You feel you are wasting your time and money (pause) I am putting myself into debt for years for something I could download and do at home'. (Julie)

8.7 Influential Factors - Habits and Traits (Personal Qualities)

The level of involvement with The Centre and use of coping strategies were greatly influenced by the FGSs' own individual habits/traits, based partly on personality and previous life experiences at secondary school, sixth form or college and the world of work. Being confident and open to others encouraged some FGSs to communicate with other students at The Centre, which further enriched their repertoire of strategies for coping with difficulties. However, those who were naturally shy and quiet at the start of the FS seemed to be impeded regarding settling in, especially with respect to the social aspects of university life at The Centre. The excerpts below, illustrate this.

'I need to try and make friends. I don't know, like getting involved a lot more. Because I am a shy person. (Long pause) it's really hard for me to talk to people because I am shy, I want people to come to me. I am not comfortable talking to people first'. (Lucy)

'You know like if we have workshops, sometimes you meet other students in the corridors. Sometime I just ask them what course are you doing. (Pause and laugh). So I just asked them what course are you doing. And most of them are doing IT or media something like that. I also asked for help, what to do and that'. (Josie)

Many of the students felt that most of their initial reactions to an event or situation were based on their personal habits/traits. When a lecturer asked Donna why she did not carry out self-reflection by writing down possible solutions when experiencing a difficult situation in a seminar, Donna stated that:

'I don't know. Because it does not come into my head to do that, like to write down what I am finding hard. Because you think about it in your head instead of writing it down. But I think maybe writing it down is maybe one of the ways forward'.

8.8 Involving Oneself in HE - Interpersonal Relationships

Participants in this inquiry reported having a wide variety of social networks, including new and old friends, siblings and parents. During difficult times they would go to various people in these networks for support. However, with few exceptions, most participants expressed that they received emotional support from friends and family at home. The participants identified interpersonal relationships as an influential factor assisting the transition process, which affects all the three levels of involvement; attending, being engaged and dealing with self-identified difficulties. Those who found something or someone worthwhile to connect with at The Centre were more likely to engage in their educational objectives.

Making friends and developing relationships with people was an important part of the FS experience. Some students had arrived at The Centre not knowing anyone, while others accompanied friends from school. Regardless, making friends was a huge part of the university experience for these students in their first semester. Many of the participants stressed the importance of making friends as part of succeeding at The Centre. This is illustrated by Carole who felt that *'The more I failed to achieve small things such as making friends, the worse I felt about actually staying on at university.'*

For Bev, being at The Centre provided her with the opportunity to meet new people to whom she could relate:

'I am a lot more social in university then I ever was at home because I am finding more people I have more interest, in common with. And you don't have to be around people that you don't want to be around and that's basically it. I have more friends that are, I can tell I'll be friends with forever, then I ever had in school with cause we don't talk anymore. (pause) I think I fit in here better than I ever did at home. I have my close group of friends and then I have just general friends. I'm not, not friends with anybody'.

Veronica was the only person from her core group of school friends to go on to university. Even though she spoke of developing relationships at The Centre, she commented that she was still more connected with her friends from school:

'My closest friends actually aren't university sort of people; they are actually more hands-on sort of people. My friend Jax, she's an apprentice. (Pause) and my boyfriend Adam, he's a hands-on sort of guy too so he does labouring and stuff. I like that. I don't really like too umm know many people that are like me, like are academic. I kind of like hands on sort of simple people more so. I come from a fishing family so I think I just, it naturally comes to me that I get along with people like that. I am more of a book clever person so I don't have much common sense so I surround myself with people that have street sense to sort of make up for my inability and dippyness (laughs)'.

The influence of interpersonal relationship can be explained by two perspectives: positive relationships and negative relationships. Although the participants did not explicitly define positive or negative relationships, they clearly identified the benefits of being in relationships which are friendly and supportive. Feeling confident and making friends helped promote a successful FS transition; friendly and supportive relationships made them feel comfortable in their new role and environment. Especially when they encountered problems at home or at The Centre, they felt reassured and encouraged by positive interpersonal relationships to seek further external assistance when they thought it necessary. This is illustrated by Nadia:

'Well, what do I sat (pause) I talked to them, (a student advisor) you know umm. And they don't get angry if I said something wrong or do anything that. They were just smiling. (Pause) As long as they understand what I try to say, that was the important

thing. (Long pause). Then I feel more comfortable and then I started to talk much more'. (Nadia)

The influence of interpersonal relationships and the importance of socialising with fellow students at The Centre was seen as key to feeling a 'real student'. This was highlighted by Anita and Andrea:

'I think that it is important to find something social, get a social life too to cope with the study'. (Anita)

'It's all about making new friends and meeting new people as well. You can't like do well in a degree if you haven't, like, if you are not getting on with the people you are learning with as well.' (Andrea)

8.9 Involving Oneself in HE - Value of Experiences

The FGSs, consciously or unconsciously, assigned values to activities they had experienced or were experiencing at The Centre. Activities were seen to be intrinsically valuable or extrinsically valuable. Involvement was conceived to be intrinsically valuable when they enjoyed the activities. A willingness to attend or be engaged was through a genuine interest or enthusiasm. Evelyn stated:

'I found the work very interesting and the subject very interesting. So it keeps my attention focused on what I want to do. I want to understand and that keeps me focused'.

When an intrinsic value in an activity could not be seen, the students chose to be involved by persuading themselves of the extrinsic value of the activity. If the activity could not be viewed as extrinsically valuable or its extrinsic value was not sufficient to maintain their motivation, being absent or being disengaged occurred. Those FGSs who motivated themselves by seeing the extrinsic value in an activity attributed their action to family pressure, and sense of responsibility. Ellie and Helena commented that:

'There is one module that is really hard. I don't really enjoy the module as well. I did do well in the first test before half term. And I got good mark. I think it was OK. But the problem I had was learning for it. Because if you don't enjoy it, you are not going to take it in. So what I did was, I had to put myself like, you know I told myself I need to like pass this test and I need to complete the module to get into what I want to do. I

want to become. a good nurse, I have to like learn this even though it may not be of use in the future. (Long pause) I leave it to the last thing and then the pressure is on and then you have to do it'. (Ellie)

I am not exactly always in that lecture. I find it boring. (Long pause) Well, because I didn't know they were really going to do that much about it. (Pause) Just for the first few weeks, it was just like going through computer skills and that. You know, I know how to work on computers and you are not teaching me anything new. So I was in the case of if the train is delayed, I am not going to make a rush to get in there on time. (Helena)

8.10 Involving Oneself in HE - Organisational and Time Management Skills

The participants' organisation and time management skills were critically affected by attending activities at The Centre, doing background reading and self-study for their modules. Ashley stated that:

'Getting used to going to uni and getting time to work part time and do the studying, it was a bit of oooh look at me (laugh)... But now I have got my head around it. I've manage to find the time and the fact that this the first semester, we are only in like for a couple of hours each day. It's really helpful as well because I know when I am in the mornings I'm coming to the uni and I'm normally home by about 2 O'clock. (Pause) So I got those two hours in which I can get home and get some studying done and whatever is needed at home for my um before I got to go to work which is just around the corner in a pub and I get to see my friends... (Pause) So... I think organising myself and fitting everything in and, you know, managing is in itself is an achievement for myself'.

Lacking organisational and time management skills can impede transition and consequently generate a negative emotional response to the HE experience. Improving organisational and time management skills eased the transition process by enabling FGSs to find time to attend activities, experience HE more fully, and state that they felt positive about their experiences. Megan stated:

'The first month was quite difficult for me because I am not a very organised person. It was like oh I have to do lots of things at my own time. It was like ok I'll do it later or something. But now I know when I have time to study, when I have time for my own

pleasures or when I have time for work. So now, it is ok. But the beginning was very difficult. Like Oh, I'm behind with some works or... because I couldn't find the time. But now it is ok, I have made myself a hand in plan'.

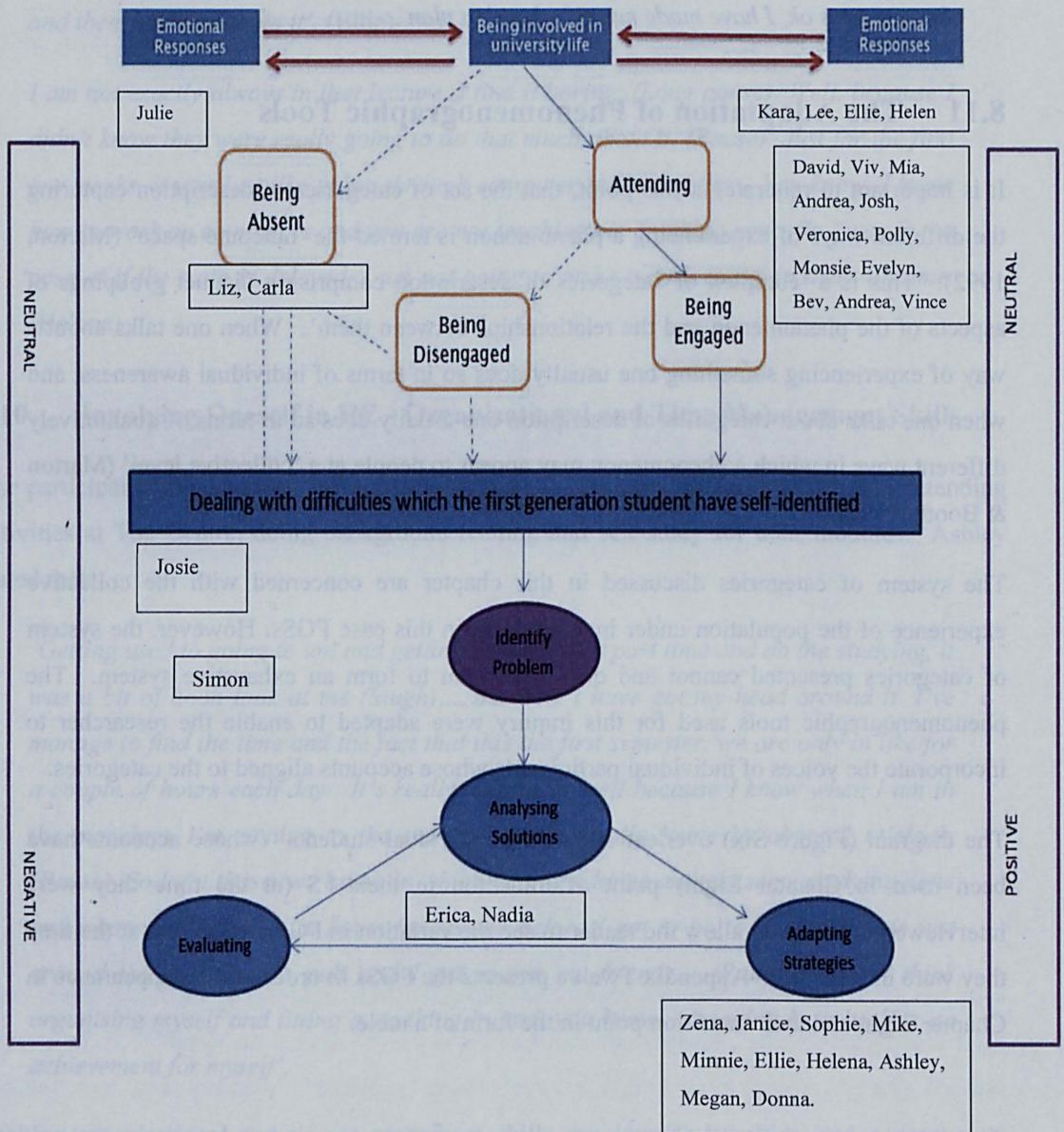
8.11 The Adaptation of Phenomenographic Tools

It is important to reiterate, at this point, that the set of categories of description capturing the different ways of experiencing a phenomenon is termed the 'outcome space' (Marton, 1992). This is a 'complex of categories of description comprising distinct groupings of aspects of the phenomenon and the relationships between them'. When one talks about a way of experiencing something one usually does so in terms of individual awareness, and when one talks about categories of description one usually does so in terms of qualitatively different ways in which a phenomenon may appear to people at a 'collective level' (Marton & Booth, 1997).

The system of categories discussed in this chapter are concerned with the collective experience of the population under investigation, in this case FGSs. However, the system of categories presented cannot and does not claim to form an exhaustive system. The phenomenographic tools used for this inquiry were adapted to enable the researcher to incorporate the voices of individual participants whose accounts aligned to the categories.

The diagram (Figure Six) overleaf shows the individual students' (whose accounts have been used in Chapter Eight) point of transition in their FS (at the time they were interviewed). This is to allow the reader to see the variation in FGSs' transition at the time they were interviewed. Appendix Twelve presents the FGSs in order of their appearance in Chapter Eight and their transition point in the form of a table.

Figure Six The Participants Plotted onto the Adapting to HE, the Process of 'Transition' Diagram



8.12 Summary

From the phenomenographic data analysis of the transcripts, there are clear indications that support the theories of Archer, Bourdieu and Weick regarding identity, pre-determined ideas, social class and constructed social values. Considering the participants' accounts as one transcript allowed the researcher to map variation in the group and describe the experiences of the participants as a collective product. Quotations from individual accounts were used that aligned to the categories (variations) in the collective product. This was to allow the reader to

gain a greater understanding of the variations and consider whether the categories were supported by the data.

Given the similarity of institutional experience among the participants at The Centre, it is both the FGSs' personal aims and the level of his/her involvement which explain the variations in their transition experiences and their being and becoming a university student. Individual FGSs' personal aims guided their involvement, which affected their inclination to participate in activities at The Centre and their level of involvement.

Engaging FGSs at the outset of the FS is important for an institution such as The Centre to plan for and develop, as it helps to carry FGSs through inevitable setbacks during their FS. A lack of engagement with their foundation degree/degree programmes in their FS of study could lead to lower confidence and lack of engagement with HE. The FGSs' previous experience of the education system, financial constraints and family obligations determined their choice both of location for studying at university level and type of degree to undertake. Universities need to understand the cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) of FGSs and create an environment that will facilitate student engagement, retention and success.

9. Conclusions, Implications and Future Work

‘To say that the members of a class initially possessing a certain economic and cultural capital are destined, with a given probability, to an educational and social trajectory leading to a given position means in fact that a fraction of the class (which cannot be determined a priori within the limits of this explanatory system) will deviate from the trajectory most common for the class as a whole and follow the (higher or lower) trajectory which was most probable for members of another class’ (Bourdieu, 1984: 111).

By entering higher education, the FGSs in this inquiry attempted to become that fraction of their class that deviated from the expected trajectory for those with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. This inquiry explored FGSs’ FS experiences, during this transitional period of their lives at The Centre. This is illustrated by Verity, who felt that choosing to study at The Centre had changed her life:

‘I just think it’s the best thing I could’ve done (pause) I’ve had like (long pause). Coming to uni was the best decision. I think I would have been a lot more of a mess, in all sorts of trouble if I was not at university.’

It is important to restate that grounded theorists are committed to ensuring that data is paramount rather than working from a pre-existing theory or hypothesis. The role of the researcher is to be open to what was happening in the field and as far as possible to not have (or to put aside) any pre-conceived ideas. It was important not to naively head into a research setting such as ‘The Centre’ (this might have meant missing some important things); this meant having ‘an open mind’ rather than ‘an empty head’ (Dey, 2007: 176). The researcher had to be transparent about research processes so that the reader could assess how far they were convinced that the researcher had managed to achieve this.

The final chapter of this thesis will include reviewing what has been undertaken providing a modified version of the ‘transcultural model’. Ways in which this inquiry may be considered original in its contribution to theoretical and practical knowledge will be offered, as will an exploration of how it might be assessed in terms of quality and rigour. Limitations are stated and possible areas for future research are proposed. As grounded theory guided the inquiry the researcher realised after considering the ‘transition model’ (Figure Five) in relation to the ‘transcultural model’ (Figure Three) and a modified version of the ‘transcultural model’ is presented and discussed (see 9.1 Figure Eight). This came in part through considering other

scholarship in the field, as presented in literature, and through further reflection on the original data through the use of phenomenographic tools.

Using the literature in this way was consistent with grounded theory, as explained by Charmaz (2006: 165):

‘The constant comparison method in grounded theory does not end with completion of your data analysis. The literature review and theoretical framework can serve as valuable sources of comparison and analysis. Through comparing other scholars' evidence and ideas with your grounded theory, you may show where and how their ideas illuminate your theoretical categories and how your theory extends, transcends or challenges dominant ideas in your field’.

The thesis argues that FGSs enrol at university with learner identities shaped by different individual, educational and social backgrounds. Once studying, FGSs move through a process of acclimatisation during their FS, which they build upon particular capacities that enable them to learn and succeed in HE. These capacities help FGSs to build robust undergraduate identities, which allow them to exercise agency in their learning. However, as they do so, they carry with them varying degrees of risk and have to negotiate the disjuncture between expectation and reality in their FS undergraduate experiences. Social, cultural and economic forces influenced the choices and decisions of the participants in this inquiry, as is the same for most students. However, the majority of students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to move from their homes to attend university and experience life away from the family and therefore experience HE for its social/cultural value as well as economic and social progression.

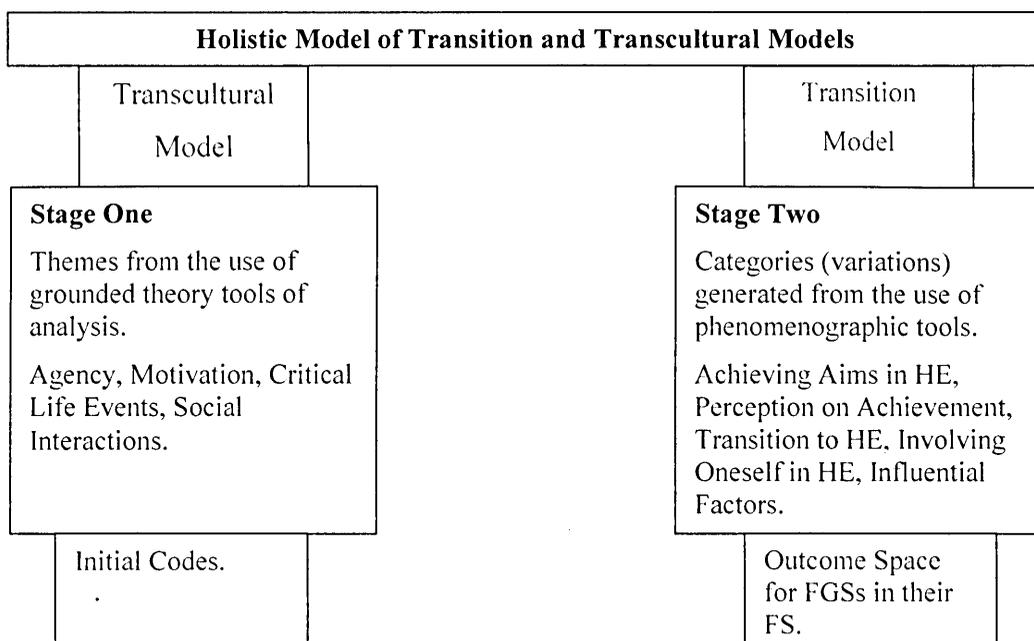
The FGSs in this inquiry who were able to act ‘transculturally’ began to experience the transformative potential of HE, to see and think in new ways. Their agency is at an academic and emotional level. Taking on what could be considered as a predominately ‘middle-class’ perspective/persona they strove to succeed and felt comfortable at the Centre. Mann (2001: 11) views a new undergraduate as being in the position of ‘a stranger in a foreign land’ who could be aided by ‘translations and explanations of strange customs and language’ (2001: 17). To extend the metaphor, explanations and translations could still leave the stranger as an outsider, albeit a better informed one. It is only by getting involved with the locals that the stranger can begin to understand, adapt and take on unfamiliar practices appropriately. The strange customs and language of HE need to be experienced and practiced with lecturers and other students so that FGSs are able to participate in and begin to understand the practices of HE. The stranger only really begins to understand the foreign land by being integrated into the community and

having the opportunity to live like the locals, to adopt the local practices and begin to think like a local; it is necessary to consider what might it mean to be a ‘local’ in the HE community.

9.1 Model Clarification

The diagram below (Figure Seven) summarises the Stage One and Stage Two data analysis outcomes of this inquiry.

Figure Seven A Comparison of The Stage One and Two Models



Grounded theory and phenomenographic tools were used to generate data, describe and consider the participants’ transition to HE and experiences of HE at The Centre as individual accounts (Stage One) and as a collective product (Stage Two). The researcher became aware that the original diagrams (Figure Two and Four) when considered in isolation did not holistically illustrate the experiences of the participants as a whole.

Figure Eight overleaf incorporates the ‘Adapting to HE, The Process of Transition’ model (Figure Five) with the ‘Transcultural’ model (Figure Three). The granular aspects (variations that formed the inclusive hierarchy) from the ‘transition’ model have been plotted on to the ‘transcultural’ model to present a holistic model.

Figure Eight The 'Transcultural' and 'Transition' Models Combined to Create a Hybrid Model

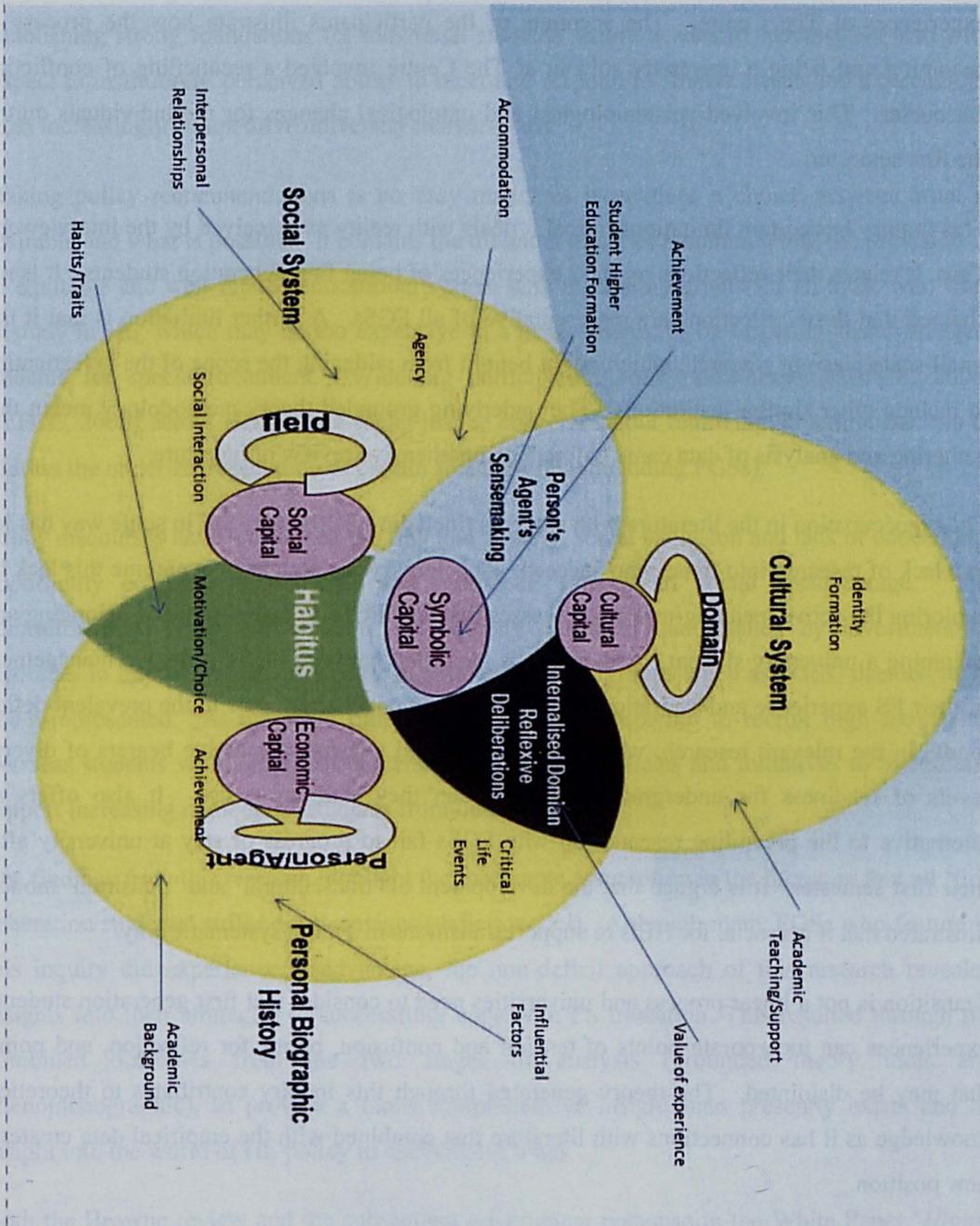


Figure Seven represents the theoretical model of the FGSs in this inquiry's experience of transition to HE in their FS at The Centre, their transition process of becoming a university student as they engage with their learning and their peers.

9.2 Reflections

This inquiry has analysed FGSs' perceptions, understandings and interpretations of their FS experiences at The Centre. The accounts of the participants illustrate how the process of becoming and being a university student at The Centre involved a reconciling of conflicting discourses. This involved epistemological and ontological changes for the individuals during the first semester.

This inquiry has certain limitations in that it deals with reality as perceived by the interviewees. Thus, it relates their reflections on their experiences of being first generation students. It is not claimed that these reflections are representative of all FGSs. A further limitation is that it is a small-scale piece of research, which might benefit from widening the scope of the investigation to include other similar institutions. The underlying grounded theory methodology meant that gathering and analysis of data came before a comprehensive review of literature.

The preoccupation in the literature with students (including FGSs) who fail in some way has led to a lack of research into those who succeed. This inquiry has sought to overcome this lack by exploring the active meaning-making processes that lead FGSs to gain a sense of belonging and becoming a university student. A dynamic is identified between FGSs' reflexive management of their FS experience and aspirations. This presents a novel alternative to the prevalent deficit model in the relevant research, which tends to treat all students as passive bearers of diverse levels of readiness for undergraduate study when they start university. It also offers an alternative to the prevailing research on why FGSs fail to progress or stay at university after their first semester. It is argued that the development of 'transcultural' and 'transition' models illustrated that it is crucial for HEIs to support transitions in a more systematic way.

Transition is not a linear process and universities need to consider that first generation students' experiences can incorporate points of tension and confusion, points for reflection, and points that may be disjointed. The theory generated through this inquiry contributes to theoretical knowledge as it has connections with literature that combined with the empirical data creates a new position.

9.3 Generating Possibilities

Research into the nature of the university student experience and transition to HE is not new; since the 1990s academics, institutions and government have become increasingly preoccupied with enhancing the quality of the student experience in the context of widening participation,

retention, student expectation and student satisfaction. Recent government policy and sector initiatives also propose to put students and their experience '*at the heart of the system*'. This highlights the significance of the first year transitional experience in terms of, not only establishing strong foundations for individual students' future academic success, but also with respect to institutions' perceived ability to meet and respond to student needs and expectations in an increasingly competitive university market-place.

Making policy recommendations is no easy matter as it involves a choice between what is desirable and what is possible. It contains the dilemma of either recommending the provision of an equitable and well-funded educational system with mandatory grants for all those who wish to study in HE, which may be too expensive in a mass system, or by targeting 'disadvantaged' students for special treatment. Widening participation policy discourses (HEFCE, 2006; HEFCE, 2008) across HE include social justice concerns about removing structural barriers to address the under-representation of certain social groups (including FGSs).

Policy discourses have recognised the way that poverty, social exclusion and lack of educational opportunity combine to reinforce and reproduce patterns of social disadvantage. The commitment to wider participation and equality has been underpinned by investment of resources to improve access and better support for student groups (such as FGSs) deemed to be under-represented. At the same time, universities are competing to recruit high fee-paying overseas students with individual universities developing policies and initiatives to recruit and support increasing numbers of students from outside the EU.

The findings from this research highlight the inaccurate assumption in the literature that all 'first generation students' suffer disadvantages (deficit model). Although many FGSs who feature in this inquiry did experience disadvantage, the non-deficit approach of this research revealed insights into their strategies to successfully cope with FS transition. This resulted through the combined outcomes from the two stages of analysis (grounded theory tools and phenomenographic), to provide a more comprehensive insight than presently exists and an insight into the world of HE policy in challenging times.

Both the Browne review and the subsequent government response in the White Paper '*Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System*' (DBIS, 2011) take fairness as one of the central goals of the proposed reforms to HE admissions. They do not, however, offer an explicit definition of 'fairness', nor do they offer an account of how expanded participation contributes to it. In relation to the concerns of this thesis, perhaps the most crucial strand of the White Paper (DBIS, 2011) investigates the importance of social justice (mobility) and WP within the

context of the proposed funding changes. In a continuation of the Labour government's emphasis on the idea of HE as a driver of economic competitiveness and social mobility, the White Paper (DBIS, 2011: 54) states:

'Higher education can be a powerful engine of social mobility, enabling young people from low-income backgrounds to earn more than their parents and providing a route into the professions for people from non-professional backgrounds'.

Despite the claims of the White Paper (DBIS, 2011) in respect of social mobility and WP, there are a number of commentators (Avis, 2011; Thompson & Bekhradnia, 2011; Universities UK, 2011; Streeting, 2012; Wilkins et al., 2012) who have provided critiques on the impact of the coalition government's HE policy upon social mobility and WP. Avis (2011: 433) highlights the paradoxical nature of the coalition government's commitment to social justice, considered in the context of proposed changes to HE funding.

'...the cuts in English Higher Education and increased fees will have a deleterious effect on the participation of disadvantaged and working class young people who are more likely to be debt adverse than their more privileged counterparts'.

Wilkins et al. (2012: 6) agree with Avis (2011) in that they '...expect that the higher education decisions of working-class students will be more influenced by financial factors than (other) higher social classes'. Wilkins et al.'s (2012) analysis points to a reversal of what the coalition government's policies are trying to achieve with regard to social mobility and WP.

With the White Paper (DBIS, 2011), the coalition government in some senses created a paradox which contests the extent to which current HE policy will promote social mobility. Universities UK (2011) argue that the policy could restrict the choices of potential students and there will be a narrowing of places in what Coughlan (2011) calls the middle ground. The middle ground refers to the institutions that will be unable to expand, unlike those institutions offering courses at an average under £7,500 per year and those who are attracting students with 'AAB' grades at A level (Coughlan, 2011). These shifts may disproportionately impact on FGs, as they are more likely to attend modern universities (Million⁺, 2012).

There are challenges of student participation for institutional decision making, where there appears to be an ambition for mass student participation in all aspects of university life (QAA, 2012). To assess the feasibility of this, it is important to consider the extent to

which FGSs are motivated to engage. Although the preference to be involved was not universal, it was substantial as being engaged and becoming a university student are important in the process of successful transition. The issue is how universities rise to the challenge posed by increasing emphasis on engagement. The first step in addressing this is to understand that student engagement is ultimately in the gift of the institution. Students have agency over the decision to participate in university life, but institutions are responsible for providing the opportunities and incentives.

9.4 Implications for Policy

At the time of writing (July 2013) the effects of the increased HE fees and related government conditions imposed on universities are just beginning to emerge. It is highly likely that the risks of lifelong debt and unemployment will affect unevenly those who elect to go to university as well as the university and course they apply for (Elliot-Major, 2010). In the face of widening participation in HE, the university that students from different socioeconomic groups apply for remains an important aspect of the equality debate. Indeed WP, as specified in the Browne Report (2010), was an intake condition for universities charging the new higher fee levels.

In terms of policy, little can be noted that suggests any improvement concerning widening participation in relation to choice for FGSs. The cohort of students that forms the basis of this research is the last to benefit from 'relatively' inexpensive fees (circa £3,000 per annum), whilst further changes to cost, with students paying up to £9,000 per annum, clearly have the possibility of significantly changing patterns of participation and choice in the future.

The concept of 'choice' could be viewed to be problematic, implying more freedom than FGSs in this inquiry actually felt in making their decisions. Those decisions were constrained by social and economic factors, in highly contingent circumstances and against a background of hierarchical positioning within the 'field' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) of HE. The drive to intensify market forces into that field (BIS, 2011) is on the premise that students pay more towards the costs of their studies.

Undergraduates become more consumer orientated, more discerning about their choices and this leads to greater competition amongst providers. This in turn, it is argued, will lead to an improved student experience. Yet the extent of choice varies as the evidence suggests that some of the FGSs are not able to choose freely. They make subject choices in relation to future earning capacity. Ball (2003) has argued that the unequal possession of particular forms of capital allow some people to navigate markets in education more effectively than others, so

there is no level playing field. This suggests that aiming to improve provision by increasing ‘consumer choice’ is likely to lead to more, not less, social inequality.

Although the homogeneous, stereotypical university student never existed (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998), the normative ‘middle-class’ construction of students emphasises the opportunity to leave home (to a protected environment, and in gradual stages), meet new friends and go to new places is a formative experience that broadens horizons. As such, other choices about university and student life, including living at home, present a potentially different orientation to HE (and one that by implication ‘misses’ those other opportunities).

What emerged from this inquiry is that many of the participants saw themselves as going to The Centre as similar to doing a job, ‘*going to work*’. Their daily rhythm involved the spatial and temporal separation of distinctive home and university worlds. The majority of participants saw going to The Centre as episodes, contained within the working week, rather than as an all-embracing experience, which immersed them in university life. As such, the experiences of the FGSs in this inquiry did not ‘fit in’ to dominant ideas about being a university student and their financial and social circumstances were distinct. Alongside insights to help develop practice, the data also revealed the day-to-day nature of FGSs’ engagement with university.

Uncertainty around HE funding in the media and policy changes by the coalition government had an impact on the participants’ choice of institution and entitlement. The participants had in the main chosen to live at or near their family home, work locally and travel to university mainly to attend lectures and tutorials; spending very little time in the university environment. The combination of family and financial responsibilities left little time to engage in social activities.

The evidence from this inquiry confirms the discrepancies between the idealised model of student life and the reality of being a ‘new student’ (Leathwood & O’Connell, 2003). At the time of their interview many of the participants lived at home, commuting to The Centre on a daily basis. Support frameworks provided by The Centre were seen by many participants as a safety net for use in emergencies. The FGSs in this inquiry were in many cases too busy to look beyond their immediate course group (particularly those on a Foundation degree) yet they had absorbed messages about university life, which suggests they were missing a more fulfilling university experience.

The Access Agreements (OFFA, 2011) for The Centre and other institutions highlighted the need to focus on ‘the student experience’ to ensure good retention and success rates amongst

their students. Universities will need to reflect the need for more individual, flexible and accessible support frameworks to achieve their stated aspirations to accommodate the reality of FGSs' undergraduate lives, yet this individual approach requires significant investment. In particular, HEIs will need to address the needs of those students whose lives do not revolve around their campus. Further research into the day-to-day experiences of FGSs is needed to ensure resources are targeted in the most efficient way.

Future participation and progression to the workplace motivated FGSs and featured strongly in their reasons for entering HE. Yet as the economic climate changed from 2008 onwards and they realised they were facing a more difficult employment market, the link between a degree, getting a good job and progressing in it began to look more tenuous. In an increasingly uncertain labour market, the progression from graduation to employment looked problematic. This suggests that promoting university study primarily as a route to better career prospects may be misleading. As more people gain degrees, so the graduate premium may diminish. At the same time, all undergraduate students are now to be asked to contribute more towards the costs of their studies. The returns from the graduate premium are not evenly spread (Purcell et al., 2008) and FGSs may face more of a struggle to repay the debts incurred.

In May 2012, both the OECD and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility reported that the UK had the lowest level of social mobility in the developed world, with entry to the professions restricted to graduates from elite universities. Ainley & Allen (2010) have identified the mismatch between the nature of market demand for graduates and the capacities of graduates entering the employment market. In particular, they identify large numbers of graduates from the post-1992 universities (The Centre is a campus of a post-1992 university) who will inevitably face the prospect of unstable and low-paid work, burdened by high levels of debt.

Ainley & Allen's (2010) analysis offers a critical evaluation of the rhetoric of the government discourse on 'key skills' and 'employability', because it challenges the instrumentalist assumption that embedding 'key skills' in the HE curriculum will lead to increased levels of upward social mobility. Non work-related motivations to study at The Centre, such as broadening horizons and critical engagement with society, featured less strongly in the participants' narratives. Currently (2012–2013) the advertising campaign for The Centre focuses attention on the acquisition of academic knowledge for improved employment prospects. As universities seek to convince students their institution is worth paying to attend, messages promoting a broader approach to the benefits of study at HE level appear to be sacrificed and the focus is placed on individual employability and workplace engagement.

Further research is needed to understand the impact of the policy of increased fees on students throughout their undergraduate careers and beyond. This policy is likely to shape decisions about participation, attitudes towards study and expectations of the outcomes from HE. Increasing the level of the contribution which students are expected to make is also likely to increase the financial risk for students, and those risks are not distributed evenly amongst the student population. It could also change the nature of the relationship between the student and the institution; further encouraging consumerist approaches (Batchelor, 2008). The emphasis in the 2011 White Paper (BIS, 2011) regarding putting students '*at the heart of the system*' is misleading, as it focuses on a range of surveys and indicators (such as teaching hours, subject 'performance', etc.), suggesting decisions can be taken in an objective, isolated way, aside from social circumstances.

The Access Agreements (OFFA, 2011) have seen universities stressing the information they will provide to future students, alongside the enhanced academic experience and employability programmes they will offer. At the same time, the nature of the risks they will, in effect, be asking students to take is changing. The present HE policy of a 'sales pitch' when recruiting students has an impact on FGSs regarding choice of institution, future earning capacity and their campus experience. This could be viewed as social inequality as there is no clear level playing field. FGSs that chose a course to enhance their future earning capacity are limited for choice. Clearly at present FGSs are not at the heart of the present HE system and the coalition government's policies.

9.5 Theoretical Contribution to Knowledge

A potential weakness and considerable strength of this inquiry was the decision to use grounded theory. The researcher was drawn to the methodology because it offered a way for FGSs' voices to be paramount and to limit any preconceptions. By choosing methodological tools, which were consistent with grounded theory, the researcher strived to ensure that the theory that was generated was thoroughly grounded in data. The difficulty with using this methodology was that there were so many interpretations of how it should be used. As McLeod (2001: 86) states, 'there are three, and possibly four or five, formally described versions of grounded theory.'

There was no absolute rulebook consensus regarding the use of grounded theory. Different researchers have argued about what did, and did not, constitute grounded theory and many had contrasting suggestions as to how research should be undertaken (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007;

Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For a new researcher this was challenging, as so many decisions had to be made, all of which had to be coherent with one another and consistent with the principles of grounded theory. There was of course a danger that the researcher would make a poor decision, which could have limited the research. To overcome this, the researcher attempted to be transparent as to why particular decisions had been made and how they were felt to be consistent with the inquiry's methodology.

The theoretical models (transcultural and transition) were developed to identify the multiple meaning of FGSs' perception of progressing to and studying at The Centre. It depicts the active role of FGSs in the transition process of their FS. This thesis argues, through the development of the 'transition' model, that Bourdieu's theory of action can be adapted, by a reanalysis of habitus to create space for human choices as well as social influences on behaviour, through sensemaking (Weick). This opened a role for the sort of reflexive deliberations advocated by Archer and to a fusion of the key contributions of both Archer and Bourdieu.

The findings of this inquiry have a different emphasis from the learning and teaching and/or retention theories currently debated in the literature. These tend to assign a passive role to students or emphasise the dominant effects of social structural forces on the undergraduate experience of students. FGSs' sense of achievement goes beyond the integration of institutional, academic and social contexts. Social reproduction between individual FGSs and The Centre only explains part of the transition process. Beginning a university course can be both exhilarating and frightening for all students. While the transitions and adjustments may differ from student to student, the fact remains that everyone experiences some level of challenge in their first semester since financial, motivational, social and emotional issues can create blocks to success. While student success depends on academic skills, resilience at university and in life depends on how well students can navigate these non-academic challenges.

This thesis has developed a non-deficit perspective of FGSs and includes the concept of student development in relation to their perception of transition and achievement. This is relevant to first year undergraduate retention studies because it differs from the current studies of first year undergraduate experiences, which locate their focus on the institutional perspective and focus of difficulties and problems in retention. Findings show that a FGS' perception of their FS achievement, as a concept, was not just about learning outcomes and satisfaction with their academic development.

The students' description of how they made their transition in the FS reveals that coping with challenges was a critical part of transition, achievement-making and becoming part of university life. Accordingly, exploring FGSs from a non-deficit perspective illustrates the necessity to perceive achievement as a student as a relevant concept and to shift research focus in experience from investigating negative experiences to exploring ways of enhancing FS learning outcomes and development (to aid transition).

9.6 Practical Contribution to Knowledge

The key principle of grounded theory is that any theory generated through the research process is thoroughly grounded in the data. This does not mean that data needs to be found which could support a theory; it means that theory has to be generated through data. Taking a constructivist stance to grounded theory meant that the existence of multiple realities could be acknowledged. If the FGSs had been interviewed on a different day, or by another researcher, then the data gathered may have differed. However, this variation would be contextualised by the conditions of the day, and would not amount to a significant change in the theoretical contribution to knowledge of the inquiry (see 9.5 for further details).

To evoke real change requires time to reflect and reconceptualise some of the findings to new challenges and relations. Yorke (2003: 477) suggests, 'Higher Education can and should be emancipatory in its nature'. However, drawing upon the thoughts of Friere (1975: 1985) and Gibson (2009), actual practical implications of the inquiry cannot be alluded to until the first step is taken and space is created for dialogue with HEIs and FGSs in which their voices become central to our understanding and development of pedagogic practices and discourses. The first step of change is reflected in the words of Nathan (2006: 156) whose ethnographic perceptions provide a timely reminder in suggesting:

'In the end, the paths taken by Higher Education may be out of all our hands, but understanding our stake in these messages, as students and teachers, and making those stakes known, is our only chance of affecting the way the story of the modern university will unfold'.

This inquiry has made a contribution to practical knowledge as its understanding of the transitional experiences of FGSs in their FS and their transition to HE could open up space for pedagogic change and the integration of practices of participants, raising the possibility of empowerment. However, such a position requires continued understanding of the subtle complexities which exist within such relations. HEIs and practitioners need to work towards

developing curricula and pedagogical practices that are intended to produce positive and worthwhile experiences for all FGSs (and all undergraduates). Transition activities in the FS should include providing information; informing expectations; developing academic skills; building social capital; and nurturing a sense of belonging.

The process of transitions is dynamic and dependent on time and context, using first semester transition to explore first generation students' experiences raises questions about the process of being a student in HE. Transitions can often incorporate a range of emotions about what is considered as appropriate and accepted behaviour.

The theory of transition developed from the interview data shows that there are messages for staff in HEIs engaged in recruitment, transition and student support services with a large FGS cohort. Developing induction programmes in the FS that offer links to existing FGSs might help with social integration and transition. Central university support services tailored to issues identified here may assist FGSs integrate more broadly into their institutions. Recognising the different forms of capital students are able to draw upon has implications for the levels of support they need and the ways in which they are able to access support.

Despite a wealth of literature on the impact of forms of capital, less priority has been given to effective engagement with staff and this inquiry has shown that this is a crucial aspect for successful transition. There is evidence that engagement will increase retention (Thomas, 2012) and encourage successful transition (Vinson et al., 2010). Living arrangements are changing with more students living near to their institution and this too has implications for institutional responses to all undergraduates, not only FGSs' experiences.

The findings of this inquiry could contribute to undergraduate experience policy design and practice, for all students not just first generation. Undergraduate experience policy design and practice needs to prioritise students' success and satisfaction to aid successful transition. This raises the question of the meaning of undergraduates' success or achievement. In the literature regarding the undergraduate experience, retention and achievement are taken as interchangeable terms to mean a student's completion of the first year of HE study, with little concern paid to the FS. For the FGSs in this inquiry the meaning of achievement did not necessarily equate to completion or high academic grades. The sense of achievement as identified by FGSs in this inquiry could be used as a valuable reference for undergraduate experience policy design and practice based on undergraduate experience.

FGSs' ability to deal with self-identified difficulties was a crucial part of achieving a successful transition and highlights the significance of building self-reflection into the FS and first year curriculum design. Existing studies on the undergraduate experience limit themselves to the dimension of influencing students' satisfaction, by improving institution provision or emphasising the students' own personality as predictive factors in their retention (and so successful transition). These studies overlook the effect of the students' actual behaviour and control ability in their HE experience, which is evident when reviewing theories of planned behaviour. The studies examined as part of this inquiry, regarding the experience of undergraduates, identified two of the behaviour predictors:

- 1) Students' intention
- 2) Perceived behaviour control

and neglected a third critical behaviour predictor:

- 3) The students' actual behaviour control ability.

This is seen as relating to FGSs' problem-solving ability, personal traits and habits. Due to the positive effect of self-reflection, it may be beneficial to include self-reflection in the undergraduate curriculum to enhance all students', not just FGSs', overall personal development. This is in line with Moon's (2009: 200) observation regarding enhancing undergraduates' academic assertiveness, which is a 'set of emotional and psychological orientations and behaviours that enables a learner to appropriately manage the challenges to the self in the course of learning and their experience in formal education'. These suggestions result from the inquiry that asked 'What is the overall experience of FGSs at The Centre during their FS?'

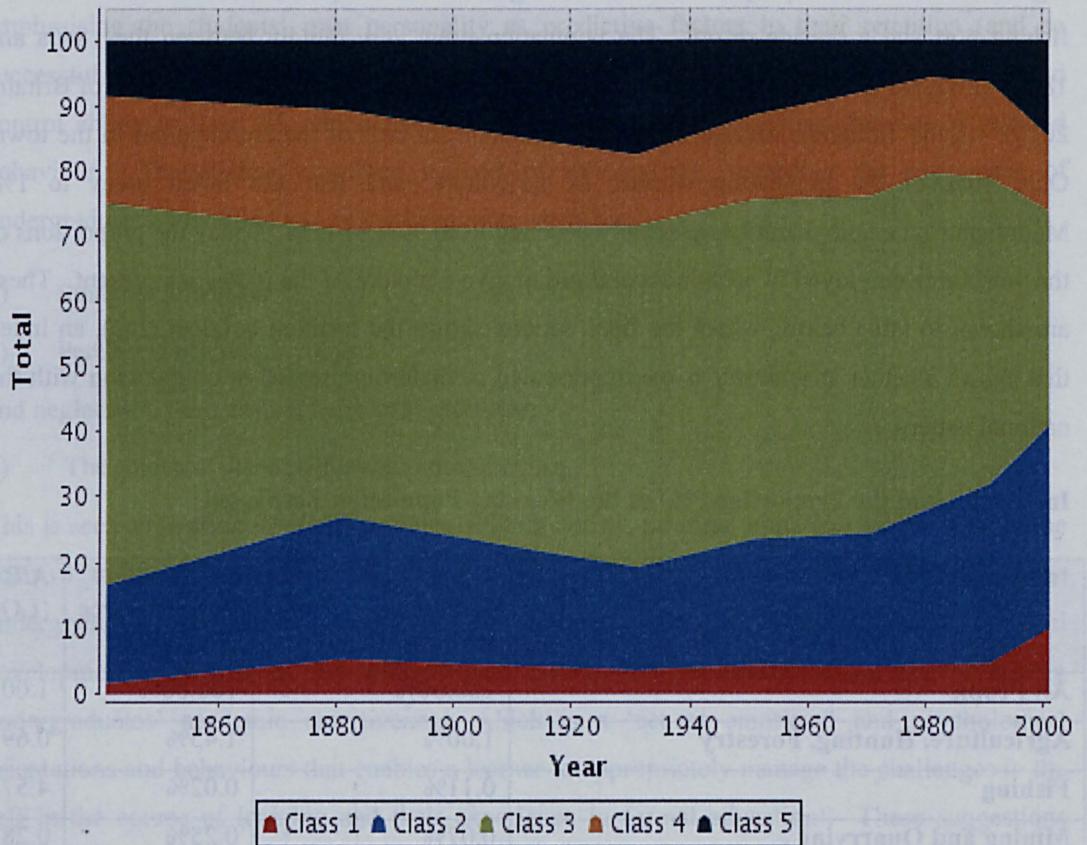
Appendix (One) Economic and Social Indicators of the Campus Town

In the 2011 Census the population of the town was 90,254 and was made up of approximately 51% females and 49% males. The average age of people was 40, while the median age was higher at 41. 89.1% of people were born in England. The campus town is an historic town, a fishing port and a seaside resort. The population grew very rapidly between the 1840s and 1860s to 60,000 and from the 1960s to the present population of over 80,000 (Vision of Britain, 2010). In the 1840s the service industries accounted for half of the employment in the town. Only 10% of the population worked in agriculture, and that has fallen today to 1%. Manufacturing employment has gradually declined from 30% to 12%. Today the proportions of the workforce employed in each industrial group give a picture of the industries present. These are shown in table below, where the final column shows the location quotient (LQ), an index that shows whether an industry is overrepresented or underrepresented in comparison with the national pattern.

Industries and the Proportion (%) of the Working Population Employed

| Industry | Proportion of workforce (campus town) | Proportion of workforce (England) | A/B (LQ) |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| All People | 100.00% | 100.00% | 1.00 |
| Agriculture, Hunting, Forestry | 1.00% | 1.45% | 0.69 |
| Fishing | 0.11% | 0.02% | 4.57 |
| Mining and Quarrying | 0.07% | 0.25% | 0.28 |
| Manufacture | 11.88% | 14.83% | 0.80 |
| Electricity, Gas & Water Supply | 0.58% | 0.71% | 0.82 |
| Construction | 8.98% | 6.76% | 1.33 |
| Wholesale & Retail trade, Repair of Motor Vehicle | 17.42% | 16.85% | 1.03 |
| Hotels and Restaurants | 4.86% | 4.73% | 1.03 |
| Transport, Storage and Communication | 6.09% | 7.09% | 0.86 |
| Financial Intermediation | 3.68% | 4.80% | 0.77 |
| Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities | 9.56% | 13.21% | 0.72 |
| Public Administration & Defence, Social Security | 7.07% | 5.66% | 1.25 |
| Education | 7.53% | 7.74% | 0.97 |
| Health & Social Work | 16.24% | 10.70% | 1.52 |
| Other | 4.92% | 5.20% | 0.95 |

Occupational Data for The Campus Town for various dates classified into the Registrar General's Social Classification



| Year | Class 1 | Class 2 | Class 3 | Class 4 | Class 5 |
|------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1841 | 74 | 693 | 2,677 | 756 | 389 |
| 1881 | 637 | 2,612 | 5,319 | 2,223 | 1,282 |
| 1931 | 631 | 2,792 | 9,222 | 1,910 | 3,120 |
| 1951 | 865 | 3,799 | 10,251 | 2,571 | 2,272 |
| 1971 | 720 | 3,561 | 8,964 | 2,835 | 1,330 |
| 1981 | 740 | 3,940 | 8,390 | 2,430 | 930 |
| 1991 | 910 | 5,330 | 9,090 | 2,860 | 1,240 |
| 2001 | 2,148 | 6,654 | 7,028 | 2,423 | 3,165 |

<http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk> (Retrieved 11/05/12)

Appendix (Two) Widening Participation (1997-2011)

- 1997 *Higher Education in the Learning Society*. The Dearing Report. The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education.
- 1997 *Learning Works*. The Kennedy Report. Further Education Funding Council.
- 1998 HEFCE Consultation.
- 1999 HEFCE Request for initial Widening Participation statements.
- 2001 Revised Widening Participation strategies and three year action plans submitted to HEFCE.
- 2002 *Widening Participation in Higher Education in England*. The National Audit Office.
- Jan 2003 *The Future for Higher Education*. Government White Paper.
- 2003 Partnerships for Progression Policy.
- 2004 *Fair admissions to Higher Education: recommendations for good practice*. The Schwarz Report.
- 2004 Higher Education Act. Led to the establishment of OFFA.
- 2004 Integrated Aimhigher.
- 2004 OFFA.
- 2004 Widening Participation strategies withdrawn.
- 2004 Lifelong Learning Networks.
- 2006 *Widening Participation in Higher Education*. Department for Education and Skills.
- 2009 *Higher Ambitions: The Future of Universities in a Knowledge Economy*. Department for Business Innovation and Skills.
- 2010 *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education*. The Browne Report.
- 2011 *Students at the Heart of the System*. Government White Paper.

Appendix (Three) Socioeconomic Classifications

The table below shows the occupational distinctions and classifications used by national statistics.

The National Statistics Socioeconomic Classification Analytic Classes

Eight classes

1. Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
 - 1.1 Large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations
 - 1.2 Higher professional occupations
2. Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations
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

(Office for National Statistics)

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutstatistics/classifications/current/soc2010/soc2010volume3nssecbasonsoc2010usermanual/index.html#7> (Retrieved 01/02/11)

Note

Government policy initiatives are based upon data produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which categorises individuals based on employment: occupation type and employment status.

It is common in academic literature to consider that groups 1–3 are ‘middle class’ and groups 4–7 are ‘working class’. Group 8 encompasses a large group who may be retired, short- or long-term unemployed.

Appendix (Four) Data Regarding The Centre (2007–2010)

Overview of Recruitment

The programmes are delivered from five facilities and seven schools, in 2010–11 there were 28 awards (Foundation Degree, Undergraduate and Masters) running. In 2011–12 this increased with the introduction of a joint science programme by a further nine awards. A WP initiative and Strategic Development Funding from HEFCE awarded an additional 100 places to The Centre in the period 2010–11. The target recruitment number was 395, an increase on 2009.

However, the success of the remainder of the university in reaching and exceeding their 2010/11 recruitment targets meant that a decision was made by the university to close clearing early in the cycle across the campuses. The result being that The Centre only enrolled 310 students in September, 78% of their target. The Centre is by its very nature a campus that is more likely to recruit a greater number of students through clearing. Taking all three years (2007–2010) into account the majority of foundation degree and degree subjects at The Centre did not recruit to target. The table below shows recruitment of students against target at The Centre for 2007–2010.

| Entry Year | Targets | Numbers Recruited |
|------------|---------|-------------------|
| 2007 | N/A | 120 |
| 2008 | 157 | 177 |
| 2009 | 300 | 286 |
| 2010 | 395 | 310 |

Student Recruitment Profiles

As the number of students at The Centre has grown, the age profile has moved gradually to reflect more closely that of the other university sites. The Applied Social Science degree over the period attracted a higher proportion of mature students and the Media Production degree younger students. The table below compares the age of students on entry at The Centre and the other university sites.

| Year | | 2007/08 | | 2008/09 | | 2009/10 | |
|----------|---------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| | | The Centre | Other sites | The Centre | Other sites | The Centre | Other sites |
| Under 18 | No % | 0 0.0% | 69 0.8% | 0 0.0% | 56 0.6% | 0 0.0% | 46 0.6% |
| 18–20 | No % | 78 57.8% | 3887 45.1% | 87 60.8% | 4196 47.7% | 146 52.5% | 4128 49.5% |
| 21–24 | No % | 17 12.6% | 1290 15.0% | 19 13.3% | 1424 16.2% | 46 16.5% | 1258 15.1% |
| 25–29 | No % | 17 12.6% | 953 11.1% | 11 7.7% | 878 10.0% | 23 8.3 % | 718 8.6% |

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------|------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| 30 and over | No % | 23 17.0% | 2360 27.4% | 26 18.2% | 2204 25.0% | 63 22.7% | 2152 25.8% |
| Not known | No % | 0 0.0% | 51 0.6% | 0 0.0% | 46 0.5% | 0 0.0% | 42 0.5% |
| Total | | 135 | 8610 | 143 | 8804 | 278 | 8344 |

The Disability Profile

The proportion of students declaring a disability remained constantly above the other university sites levels. In 2009–10 the level of declared disability was double that of the other university sites' percentages. There were no exceptions to this; all areas of study at The Centre were above average levels of declared disability. This level of declared disability is not surprising given the WP emphasis of The Centre. The table below compares the disability profile of students at The Centre and the other university sites.

| Year | | 2007/08 | | 2008/09 | | 2009/10 | |
|------------------------|-------|-------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| | | The Centre | Other sites | The Centre | Other sites | The Centre | Other sites |
| Disability Declared | No. % | 21 15.8% | 683 7.9% | 0 0.0% | 56 0.6% | 0 0.0% | 46 0.6% |
| No Disability | No. % | 11 83.5% | 7485 86.9% | 119 83.2% | 7760 88.1% | 225 80.9% | 7338 87.9% |
| Not Known/Not Declared | No. % | 1 0.8% | 442 5.1% | 0 0.0% | 300 3.4% | 2 0.7% | 211 2.5% |
| Total | | 133 | 8610 | 143 | 8804 | 278 | 8344 |

The Ethnic Profile

The number of students from an ethnic minority background is above the level of the other university sites as a whole, but as the number of students at The Centre increased the percentage reflected the other university sites more closely. The majority of non-White students at The Centre were mature students (over 21) on foundation degree programmes. The table below compares the ethnic profile of students at The Centre and the other university sites.

| Year | | 2007/08 | | 2008/09 | | 2009/10 | |
|---------------------|-------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
| | | The Centre | Other sites | The Centre | Other sites | The Centre | Other sites |
| White | No. % | 86 15.8% | 6212 7.9% | 106 0.0% | 6776 0.6% | 215 0.0% | 6302 0.6% |
| Minority Ethnic | No. % | 29 21.5% | 1093 12.7% | 30 21.0% | 1274 14.5% | 42 15.1% | 1121 13.4% |
| Information Refused | No. % | 20 14.8% | 1185 13.8% | 7 4.9% | 455 5.2% | 21 7.6% | 707 8.5% |
| Not Known | No. % | 0 0.0% | 120 1.4% | 0 0.0% | 299 3.4% | 0 0.0% | 314 2.6% |
| Total | | 133 | 8610 | 143 | 8804 | 278 | 8344 |

The Gender Profile

The gender profile at The Centre has gradually moved towards reflecting that of the other university sites. In 2009/10 the ratio was 43:57 males to females. Most awards at The Centre are broadly 50:50 male, female with the exception of the joint honours award, where 70% of the cohort are female, and computing, which is predominately male. The table below compares the gender profile of students at The Centre and the other university sites.

| Year | | 2007/08 | | 2008/09 | | 2009/10 | |
|--------------|----------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|
| | | The Centre | Other sites | The Centre | Other sites | The Centre | Other sites |
| Female | No. % | 65 48.1% | 5487 63.7% | 73 51.0% | 5370 61.0% | 158 56.8% | 5064 60.7% |
| Male | No. % | 70 51.9% | 3123 36.3% | 70 49.0% | 3434 39.0% | 120 43.2% | 3280 39.3% |
| Total | | 133 | 8610 | 143 | 8804 | 278 | 8344 |

The Progression Profile – Year 1 and 2

The number of students progressing at The Centre increased significantly in 2009–10. The proportion of students progressing unconditionally at the end of year 1 was 54%, with the proportion of those with a deferred decision was down 5%. 11% of students did not complete their year of study. The progression rates of the year 2 student cohort increased from 46% in 2008–09 to 88%. Three students failed and withdrew from their programmes, which equated to 6% of the cohort. The table below shows the progression profile for year 1 and 2 students at The Centre.

| Year | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 |
|--|------------|------------|-------------|
| Progressed. | 57 (42.9%) | 79 (57.6%) | 133 (54.1%) |
| Fail – repeat. | 3 (2.3%) | 4 (2.9%) | 33 (13.4%) |
| Fail – withdrawn. | 5 (3.8%) | 8 (5.8%) | 20 (8.1%) |
| Decision deferred to subsequent examination board. | 38 (28.6%) | 31 (22.6%) | 12 (4.9%) |
| Did not complete a year of study. | 30 (22.6%) | 13 (9.5%) | 28 (11.4%) |
| Total | 133 (100%) | 137 (100%) | 226 (100%) |

Progression: Year 2 (Stage 4 - Honours Degree students only)

| Year | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 |
|--|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Progressed. | 9 (3.8%) | 17 (45.9%) | 54 (8.1%) |
| Fail – repeat. | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (2.7%) | 4 (6%) |
| Fail – withdrawn. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 3 (4.5%) |
| Decision deferred to subsequent examination board. | 5 (31.3%) | 19 (51.4%) | 1 (1.5%) |
| Did not complete the year of study. | 2 (12.5%) | 0 (0.0%) | 2 (3%) |
| Total | 16 (100%) | 37 (100%) | 67 (100%) |

Appendix (Five) Participant Information Sheet

My name is Julia Hope and I am a PhD researcher at the University of Chichester. I would like to ask you about your educational experiences. I have one question to ask you: **‘How did you come to be a student at [REDACTED]?’**

No names or identifying details will be included in the research. If you do not wish to continue participating then you can stop at any time without explaining why. No content will be included in the research that you have not agreed to. The process will involve two meetings.

STAGES OF THE RESEARCH

- 1 Meet to outline the interview process? (you can ask me any questions you may have)
- 2 Meet to be interviewed, this will be digitally recorded.
- 3 I will email/post/hand deliver you a copy of the transcript and you can add to your response, remove parts or change it.

Remember, your participation is voluntary. I ask that if you decide not to continue for any reason that you let me know of your decision.

j.hope@[REDACTED] 0795 [REDACTED]

What happens if I change my mind?

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit. If you do agree to participate you will still be able to withdraw at any time, before, during or after the interview and any data collected from you will be destroyed and not be used in the inquiry.

Whom can you contact if you have a comment about the project or have been caused distress through the interview process?

Please feel free to contact Andy Dixon, Head of the Research and Employer Engagement Office
e-mail a.dixon@[REDACTED] Phone 01243 [REDACTED]

Appendix (Six) Consent Form

Name of participant: _____

Contact details: email: _____

I confirm that I have read or been informed of and understand the participant information sheet for the above inquiry.

I understand what my role will be in this research, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I will not be identified, and the tape recording of the interview would be destroyed twelve months after the thesis is completed.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, and without prejudice.

I agree to take part in the research, and understand that I can ask questions .

I agree to the processing personal information, which I have supplied. I agree to the processing of such information for any purposes connected with the research outlined to me.

I agree to the interview being recorded, and that the recordings will be kept secure and destroyed at the end of the inquiry.

I am aware that all data will be kept under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Name of participant (print)

Date

Signature

Researcher (print)

Date

Signature

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR YOUR RECORDS

If you wish at any time to withdraw from the research, please let me know in person, by email and/or telephone.

Appendix (Seven) Pen Portraits of Participants⁴

Andrea is 18 and lives less than 5 miles from The Centre with her parents. She is the eldest of four. Her sisters are still in primary and secondary school. She is presently studying a BA and completed A levels at a sixth form college.

Anita is 19 and lives within 10 miles of The Centre with her mother. She is an only child, with little contact with her father who lives in London with '*his new family*'. She is presently studying a BSc and completed A levels at an FE college.

Anne is 19 and lives within 10 miles of The Centre with her older brother. Her parents have moved to Spain to run a bar. She is presently studying a BSc and completed A levels in a school sixth form.

Becky is 19 and lives within 5 miles of The Centre. She lives with her parents at home and is the middle child. She has an older unemployed brother and a sister at school in Year 9. She is presently studying a BSc and completed A levels at sixth form college.

Carla is 20 and lives with friends within 5 miles of The Centre. Her parents live within 10 miles of The Centre. She dropped out of a university the previous academic year. She is presently studying a BSc and completed A levels at a local FE college.

Carrie is 19 and studying a FD. She completed a BTEC National at a local sixth form college, she lives in Halls. Carrie's mother wanted her to live in Halls and become more independent. Her mother lives within 10 miles of The Centre.

Davina is 19 and the youngest of three girls. She lives at home with her parents less than 10 miles from The Centre. She is presently studying a FD and completed A levels at a local FE.

Diane is 20 and worked in retail after completing a BTEC at a local FE college. She lives alone less than 10 miles from The Centre and her parents live in the same town. She has an older brother who is in the army. She is presently studying a FD.

⁴ **Note** To maintain the anonymity of the case study site (The Centre), only a selection of pen portraits are provided. It was made clear to the participants that pseudonyms would be substituted for all names that would appear in the text.

Appendix (Nine) Key Demographic Data

The level of undergraduate study of the participants

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Foundation Degree | Degree BSc/BA |
| 23 | 22 |

The gender of the participants

| | |
|-------------|---------------|
| Male | Female |
| 15 | 35 |

The age of participants at the start of their course (start of the first semester)

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|
| 18 | 19 | 20 | Not stated |
| 14 | 28 | 8 | 0 |

The stated ethnic group of the participants

| | | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| White British | White Other | Afro/Caribbean | Not stated |
| 42 | 1 | 3 | 4 |

The declared learning difficulty of the participants

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Asperger | Dyslexia |
| 1 | 2 |

The distance of the campus from the participant's family home

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Under 5 miles | Under 10 miles | 11-50 miles | More than 50 miles |
| 30 | 15 | 1 x 20 miles | 4 |

The distance of the campus from the participant's term-time home

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Under 5 miles | Under 10 miles | 11-50 miles | More than 50 miles |
| 39 | 10 | 1 x 20 miles | |

The participant's family type

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Type of family | No. of participants |
| Single parent family | 26 |
| Nuclear family | 15 |
| In foster care | 7 |
| With relatives | 2 |

The participant's term-time residence

| | |
|---|----------------------------|
| Type of residents | No. of participants |
| Family home | 35 |
| Hall of residence | 6 |
| Privately rented accommodation (on my own/with partner) | 7 |
| Privately rented accommodation (with friends) | 2 |

Appendix (Ten) Initial Coding Frame

| Master code | Themes | Sub code | Tag/label | Source |
|-------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|--|
| MC 1 BIO | | | | Biographic Information |
| | Agency Critical Life Events | Biography/Self | | |
| | | BIOIDOM | | Influence/Domestic |
| | | BIOIFIN | | Influence/Financial |
| | | BIOOTH | | Biography/Others |
| | | BIOTHIP | | Influence/Parents |
| | | BIOTHS | | Influence/Siblings |
| | | BIOTHC | | Influence/Community |
| MC 2 EXP | | | | Prior Educational/Occupational experience |
| | Agency Critical Life Events | Experience/Prior | | |
| | | EXPE | | Education/Persons |
| | | EXPEIF | | Influence/Familial |
| | | EXPET | | Influence/Teachers |
| | | EXPEIP | | Influence/Peers |
| | | EXPO | | Occupation/Person |
| | | EXPEI | | Education/Incidents |
| | | EXPOI | | Occupation/Incidents |
| | | EXPES | | Education/Structure |
| MC 3 FCUR | | | | Experience of the Formal Curriculum |
| | Achievement | Formal Curriculum | | |
| | | FCURC | | Curriculum/Content |
| | | FCURCIE | | Content/Experience |
| | Critical Life Events | FCURCIC | | Content/Concepts |
| | | FCURD | | Curriculum/Delivery |
| | | FCURDIS | | Delivery/Strategies |
| | | FCURDA | | Delivery/Assessment |
| | | FCURE | | Curriculum/Learning |
| | | FCUREIR | | Environmental/Resources |
| | | FCUREIP | | Environmental/Physical |
| | | FCURS | | Curriculum/Learning |
| | | FCURSS | | Support/Specialist |
| | | FCURSA | | Support/Academic |
| | | FCURSAD | | Support/Admin |
| | | | FCURSIP | |
| MC4 ICUR | | | | Experience of the Informal Curriculum |

| | | | | |
|----------------------|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| | Achievement Critical Life Events | Informal Curriculum | | |
| | | ICURS | | IC/Social Aspects |
| | | ICURR | | IC/Relationships |
| | | ICRUW | | IC/Work |
| MC 5 MOT | | | | Motivation for Entering Higher Education |
| | Motivation Higher | Motivation/Persons | | |
| | | MOTPIF | | Influence/Family |
| | | MOTPIP | | Influence/Peers |
| | | MOTT | | Influence/Teachers |
| | | MOT/C | | Influence/Community |
| | | MOTE | | Motivation/Events |
| | | MOTT | | Influence/Travel |
| | | MOTEO | | Influence/Occupation Trajectory |
| | | MOTI | | Motivation/Internal |
| | | MOTIP | | Influence/Personal Development |
| | MOTIC | | Influence/Career Development | |
| MC 6 CHOP | | | | Higher Education Choices |
| | Agency Critical Life Events | Choice/Persons | | |
| | | CHOPIF | | Influence/Family |
| | | CHOPIP | | Influence/Peers |
| | | CHOPIT | | Influence/Teachers |
| | | CHOIR | | Choice/Rationale |
| | | CHORIL | | Influence/Location |
| | | CHORILS | | Influence/Learner Support |
| | | CHORIS | | Influence/Subject |
| | | CHOPP | | Choice/Process |
| | | CHOPI | | Process/Information |
| MC 7 MEA | | | | Meaning of Higher Education |
| | | HE/Significance | | |
| | Social Critical Life Events | MEAO | | Meaning/Occupation Trajectory |
| | | MEAI | | Meaning/Identity |
| | | MEAIIP | | Impact/Personal Development |
| | | MEAIIV | | Impact/Values, Beliefs |
| | | MEAIIR | | Impact/Relationships |

Appendix (Eleven) The First Generation Student's transition point at the time they were interviewed

| First Generation Student | Transition Point |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Zena | Adapting strategies – Positive |
| Erica | Evaluating – Positive |
| Kara | Attending – Neutral |
| David | Being Engaged – Positive |
| Liz | Being Disengaged – Neutral |
| Tom | Attending/Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Janice | Adapting Strategies – Positive |
| Lee | Attending – Neutral |
| Viv | Being Engaged – Positive |
| Sophie | Adapting Strategies – Positive |
| Mike | Adapting Strategies – Positive |
| Minnie | Adapting Strategies – Positive |
| Simon | Evaluating/Adapting Strategies – Negative |
| Mia | Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Andrea | Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Carla | Being Disengaged – Neutral |
| Julie | Being Absent – Neutral |
| Bev | Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Veronica | Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Nadia | Evaluating – Positive |
| Andrea | Being Engaged – Positive |
| Monsie | Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Ellie | Attending – Neutral |
| Josh | Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Helen | Attending – Neutral |
| Polly | Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Vince | Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Evelyn | Being Engaged – Neutral |
| Ellie | Adapting Strategies – Positive |
| Helena | Adapting Strategies – Neutral |
| Ashley | Adapting Strategies – Positive |
| Megan | Adapting Strategies – Positive |
| Josie | Identifying Problems – Neutral |
| Donna | Adapting Strategies – Positive |

Appendix (Twelve) Interview Schedule

Below are the prompts and probes used after asking the initial research question ‘How did you come to be a student at [redacted] site?’ and the themes that started to emerge.

| Interview Probes | Aim of the Probe | Emerging Themes |
|---|--|---|
| Prior experiences at secondary and tertiary education. The formal and informal curriculum. | To situate participants' self-images in relation to personal aspirations and the role of family. | Information about their individual backgrounds and experiences. |
| Social class identity. Occupations of family members. Familial/personal relationships/family background. | To situate participants' class and socioeconomic status. | Information about their perspective regarding their social class and their SES. |
| Influences of family, peers and school regarding going to university. Social network (hobbies/friends/family/part-time work). | To examine the role of the participant's family, peers and school on their choices. | Role of family, peers and compulsory education. |
| Decisions and choices prior to studying at The Centre. Personal goals, financial, domestic situation. | To explore choice of degree and going to university. The significance of HE to the individual. | Attending university at The Centre. |
| Perceptions of university in terms of lecturers, learning, social interactions etc. | To explore the participants' perceptions of university life at The Centre in their first semester. | Being and becoming a university student. |
| Changes in self-image and perceptions of being a student. | To explore the participants' development and experiences during their first semester. | Reflections on the being a student at The Centre. |

Appendix (Fourteen) Ethical Review Form (Approved January 2010)

1

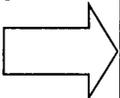
ETHICAL REVIEW APPLICATION

Students – submit this form in hard copy to your supervisor BEFORE commencing research.

Supervisors – if this form needs Ethics Committee scrutiny (i.e. if you judge it to be ‘Category B or C’), please submit this form in hard copy to the Senior Administrator (Research) in the Academic Standards Unit.

This form should be used for all undergraduate, postgraduate research and any other research conducted under the name of the University of Chichester. **IT MUST BE COMPLETED AND APPROVED** by your supervisor before you start.

Supervisors and (where appropriate) the Ethics Committee will make a decision on the basis of the information you have supplied. In order for the Committee to consider your application quickly it would be very helpful if you could also attach the rationale and outline procedures which you are intending to use. This will help the Committee to reach its decision without the need to request further information. The Committee also finds it helpful to have an outline of requests to participants, questionnaires and information regarding the final destination of the results.

| | | | |
|---|---|--|----------|
| Applicant: Julia Hope | Supervisor's Judgement  | Proceed | A |
| | | Proceed with caution | B |
| | | Needs Committee Scrutiny (NB: Student/staff member will be invited to attend the Ethics Committee.) | C |
| Name of Supervisor: | Dr. Barbara Thompson/Professor Chris Gaine | | |
| Name of University staff member with responsibility for ethical issues: | Dr. Barbara Thompson | | |
| Programme and Module: | MPhil/PhD | | |
| 1. Title of study: | An investigation into the HE experience of first generation students aged 18-21, from the bottom four socioeconomic groups. | | |

| | | | | |
|---|--|-----|----|-----|
| <p>10. 2a. Brief description of methods:</p> <p>The study will involve the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The bulk of the research will constitute the collection, through individual interviews, of qualitative data from first generation to HE students who are currently studying as undergraduates at the case study HEI. The quantitative data will include information about the institution in general and particular pertaining to its student population which will be taken from the most recent QAA audit. The university's widening participation policies will be examined and presented alongside the participant's experience to see if there is a correlation between the intention and the outcomes. Widening participation data held by the case study HEI will be analysed to explore patterns of where and what the students study. Attrition and retention patterns data will be collected from the HEI, as will the completion rates of learners on specific programmes.</p> <p>The study will develop empirical research through the use of a flexible research design (Robson, 2003; Bryman, 2008). The overall research approach will be case study and will include semi-structured interviews students, and non-participatory observation of academic/support staff, the environment in which they work and in which students learn. For qualitative data analysis software packages (e.g. NVivo) may be used for quantitative data to assist coding, and derivation of themes, from the interview data. SPSS may be used for statistical analysis (regression, anova, correlation etc.). All information will be kept in a lockable filing cabinet or on the researcher's password-protected PC. Only the researcher and supervisor(s) will have access to the raw data.</p> <p>2b. Brief description of purpose of study/rationale:</p> <p>Looking at the socioeconomic aspect of widening participation. The focus being on students from the lower four socioeconomic classes. The study will investigate the possible influence of socioeconomic background on the undergraduate student experience within case study HEI, in order to generate new knowledge about the experiences this cohort of learners.</p> <p>The research will seek to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify any patterns of geographical distance travelled of first generation to HE students. Evaluate the provision and effectiveness of student support for these students. Provide a theoretical framework around attrition and retention patterns. Generate policy recommendations related to recruitment, retention and achievement in relation to provision and support. | Supervisor's /Ethics Committee comment: | | | |
| <p>3. Location of study and details of any special facilities to be used (see note 1, below):</p> <p>Sussex – HEI</p> | | | | |
| <p>4. Are the respondents/subjects people you normally work with? (e.g. as a social work, counselling or education professional, volunteer, or trainee; see note 5.)</p> | | | No | Yes |
| <p>5. Basis for selection and rejection of subjects/respondents in the study:</p> <p>The respondents will be an opportunity sample recruited through fellow students, lecturers, and other officers at the case study HEI.</p> <p>First generation to HE students in Sussex HEI – selected</p> <p>Those who wish to opt out of the research cohort – rejected</p> | | | | |
| <p>6a. Is the process of the study and/or its results likely to produce distress or anxiety in the subjects/respondents? (See note 2.)</p> <p>Unlikely – steps will be made to minimise the possibility. It is not the intention to ask participants</p> | No | Yes | | |

| | | |
|--|----|-----|
| <p>questions that they will find upsetting. However, in discussing their personal circumstances, it is possible that some sensitive issues may arise. No one will be required to discuss anything that makes them feel uncomfortable. Participants will have full control over the subjects discussed in the individual interviews and any disclosures will be handled with sensitivity. If issues arise which cause distress, the researcher will discuss with the participant the availability of the case study HEI's counselling service.</p> <p>Participants will meet with the researcher who will explain the nature of the research and they will be given written information about the purpose and nature of the research (attached). If they chose to go ahead with the research they will be asked to sign a consent form on the understanding that they may withdraw at any time. Extensive and detailed assurance will be given that all interview and observation material will remain anonymous. To reduce risks to an absolute minimum it will be made very clear to participants that they can withdraw their consent to take part in the study at any time, even after an interview or focus group has commenced, participants will be informed that they have the right to read the transcripts of their own words and agree or challenge their validity. All participants will be coded to ensure anonymity. Participants will be informed of the complaints procedure in writing at the time they are invited to take part in the study. I will also invite participants to give me feedback as to how they felt when being interviewed or taking part in the focus group as part of my professional development. Negative feedback will be taken seriously and acted upon. Data will be stored both electronically and through a field note diary. The electronically stored data is password-protected and the field notes will not use names or traceable references to individuals.</p> <p>If you answered Yes to question 4 as well as question 6a:</p> <p>6b. Is the process of the study and/or its results likely to produce distress or anxiety in the subjects/respondents beyond what they would normally experience in your work with them? (See note 5.)</p> | No | Yes |
| <p>7a. If the answer to 6a (or 6b where applicable) is yes – please elaborate if you think this may not be clear from previous answers:</p> | | |
| <p>N/A</p> | | |
| <p>7b. What steps will you take to deal with any distress or anxiety produced? N/A</p> | | |
| <p>8. Can the study be described as being part of some role you already have, therefore not requiring any special consideration or scrutiny? (This should be confirmed by subsequent answers, and see note 5.)</p> | No | Yes |
| <p>9a. Does your proposal raise other ethical issues apart from the potential for distress, anxiety, or harm? (See note 2.)</p> | No | Yes |
| <p>9b. Irrespective of whether any distress is caused to subjects/respondents, might the research damage the reputation of the University, since it will be undertaken under its auspices?</p> | No | Yes |
| <p>10. If your answer to 9a. was 'yes', on what grounds would you defend the proposal?</p> | | |
| <p>11. Is it necessary to obtain the consent of the subjects/respondents of the study? (See note 4.)</p> <p>Informed consent will be obtained through signature before the research begins, at which point it will be re-iterated that withdrawal at any time is the right of the participant</p> <p>Date consent obtained: Informed consent Interview guide Consent form</p> <p>Copy attached?</p> | No | Yes |
| <p>Not started</p> | | |
| <p>Will be written</p> | | |
| <p>Written or oral? (Please specify)</p> | No | Yes |
| <p>12. Will any payment, gifts, rewards or inducements be offered to subjects/respondents to take part in the study?</p> <p>Please give brief details:</p> | No | Yes |
| <p>13. Will they have the right/facility to withdraw from the study?</p> <p>Participants will be informed of this and can withdraw at any time</p> | No | Yes |

| | | |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| 14. In formal/legal terms, is there anyone whose permission has to be sought in order to conduct your study? (See note 4.) Please give details: Date consent obtained: Written or oral? (Please specify) Copy attached? | No | Yes |
| | | |
| | No | Yes |
| 15. Do you think you need to seek the permission of any other individuals or groups? (e.g. parents, carers.) Please give details: Consent from the case study institutions regarding semi-structured interviews and widening participation data Date of consent Written or oral? (Please specify) Copy attached | No | Yes |
| | Not started yet | Not started yet |
| | Not started yet | Not started yet |
| | No | Yes |
| 16. Will your results be available in the public arena? (e.g. dissertation in the library) For postgraduate research; what are your intentions for publication of the study? Please list any journals or texts in which the study will be published if relevant/ known: I anticipate that my PhD thesis will form the basis of future publications. | No | Yes |
| | | |
| 17. Is it necessary to guarantee and ensure confidentiality for the respondents? | No | Yes |
| 18. Is it necessary to guarantee and ensure anonymity for the respondents? | No | Yes |
| 19. Will the respondents have any right of comment or veto on the material you produce about them? Please elaborate if you wish: They can withdraw from the study at any time and veto any information or opinions they may have disclosed. Participants will be given a transcript of their own contribution and will be asked for amendments and comments. If they wish, participants will be given a summary of the findings. | No | Yes |
| | | |
| 20. Is there any additional comment or information you consider relevant, or any additional information that you require from the Committee? No | | |
| For supervisors: In your view, does the proposed study potentially contravene any aspect of established codes of practice in your discipline? (For instance, the codes of practice of the British Sociological Association, British Psychological Association, and British Education Research Association are available on the internet.) Have checked BERA 2007 – www.bera.ac.uk | No | Yes |
| Please give details if 'yes' and you wish the Ethics Committee to resolve the issue: | | |

Signature of applicant: Date:

Signature of supervisor: Date:

Signature of named staff member with responsibility for ethical issues:.....

Date of application:

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(Note: all web addresses checked and accurate on 22nd March 2014).

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